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The Push-and-Pull of Frenemies: When and Why Ambivalent Relationships Lead to Helping and Harming

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We integrated theories of social exchange and emotional ambivalence to explain how ambivalent relationships influence interpersonally directed helping and harming behaviors. Using multiple methodologies, including a study of student teams, an experiment, and a quasifield study of retail employees, we compared ambivalent relationships with positive and negative relationships. Our three studies provide convergent evidence that ambivalent relationships with coworkers are positively related to both helping *and* harming behaviors. These dueling effects were mediated by the experience of ambivalent emotions. We also demonstrate that ambivalent emotions, and their downstream behavioral effects were amplified when individuals in ambivalent relationships had strong affiliative interpersonal goals. Overall, our findings have implications for theory on the relational antecedents of helping and harming, social exchange theory, and the effects of ambivalence in organizations.

Keywords: relationships, ambivalence, citizenship behaviors, emotions, social exchange

Interpersonal relationships are a fulcrum around which helping and harming behavior pivot (Bowler & Brass, 2006; Lyons & Scott, 2012). At work, the extent to which an individual helps or harms a coworker depends not only on the individual's general tendencies to help and harm others but also perhaps primarily, on their relationship with that coworker (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). Supporting this claim, existing scholarship demonstrates that positive relationships increase helping, interpersonally directed behavior that goes beyond one's immediate role requirements, like doing someone a favor or providing social support (e.g., Bowler & Brass, 2006). In contrast, negative relationships increase harming, interpersonally directed behaviors that go against the legitimate interests of another individual and include behaviors like spreading rumors or complaining (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007).

Although prior scholarship has started to shed light on these relational antecedents of helping and harming, extant work has not taken into consideration that individuals' relationships cannot always be categorized into neat dichotomies of positive versus negative (Rook, 1984); high quality versus low-quality (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003); or supportive versus antagonistic (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Instead, relationships are often complex. Ask employees, and you are likely to hear mixed evaluations: They love but also feel frustrated by their peers (Ingram & Zou, 2008), customers (Pratt & Doucet, 2000), supervisors and subordinates (Duffy et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2019), protégés or mentors (Eby et al., 2010; Oglensky, 2008), and many others with whom they work (see, Methot et al., 2017 for a review). We know little, however, about how these ambivalent relationships—in which individuals hold simultaneous positive *and* negative sentiments about a relationship partner or the relationship itself (Fingerman et al., 2006)—influence interpersonal behaviors like helping and harming.

Understanding ambivalent relationships may also provide a new window into recognizing the relational variables that lead individuals to choose to both help *and* harm another coworker. Interpersonal helping and harming are largely independent constructs and not opposite poles of the same continuum (Dalal, 2005; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007), leaving open the possibility that these behaviors may co-occur. However, there is little understanding of when or why they occur together. Drawing on prior research suggesting that helping is more strongly related to positive relationships and harming is more strongly related to negative relationships, we suggest that ambivalent relationships, that are simultaneously positive and negative, may elicit *both* helping and harming.

We integrate theories of social exchange and emotional ambivalence to explain why ambivalent relationships between individuals and a coworker might increase both helping *and* harming within the relationship. Norms of reciprocity guide social exchange (Gouldner, 1960): Positive norms of reciprocity motivate individuals to respond positively to positive treatment whereas negative norms of reciprocity motivate individuals to respond to negative treatment with negative treatment. Simply, enacting this norm means that people will be nicer to those they feel positively about and hurt those they feel negatively about. Drawing on this tenet of social exchange, we propose that simultaneous positivity and negativity in ambivalent relationships elicits both positive and negative norms of reciprocity, and thus motivates individuals to respond by engaging in both helping and harming behavior, respectively.

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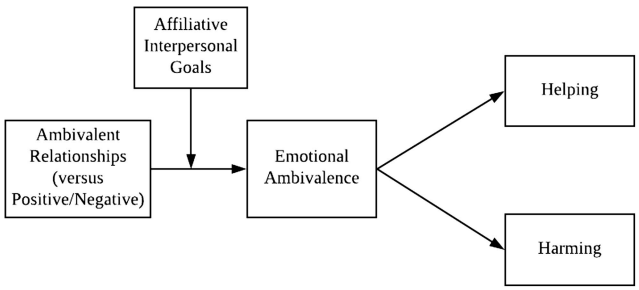
We then argue that emotions underlie these links between ambivalent relationships and helping and harming behaviors. Relationships are considered to be a chain of interactions (Hinde, 1979) and each of these interactions is colored by and generate emotions (Ferris et al., 2009; Lyons & Scott, 2012). The positive and negative sentiments about an ambivalent relationship partner likely elicit both positive and negative emotions simultaneously, that is, ambivalent emotions (Methot et al., 2017). Building on the ambivalence-induced response amplification research (Ashforth et al., 2014), we suggest that individuals will respond to the aversive state of tension and conflict elicited by ambivalent emotions by amplifying extremely favorable and unfavorable behavior. Because ambivalent emotions will be both accessible and salient in these relationships, they will elicit both helping and harming. Thus, we aim to advance prior scholarship that has established that emotions influence the likelihood that individuals choose to engage in either helping *or* harming (Spector & Fox, 2002), by deriving predictions about how ambivalent emotions are a psychological mechanism by which ambivalent relationships increase both.

We recognize, however, that ambivalent relationships will not be equally likely to create ambivalent feelings for all individuals. We draw from an interpersonal motivational perspective to argue that relational or interpersonal goals, defined as goals to "attain, maintain, or avoid a specific end state for the relationship such as to attain and maintain closeness or avoid rejection" (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003, p. 149) shape the degree to which individuals respond emotionally to their ambivalent relationships. Individuals can have strong or weak affiliative goals related to the establishment and sustenance of social bonds (Elliot et al., 2006). Those with stronger affiliative goals are more likely to be attentive to their interaction partners because they are monitoring for social threat in both positive and negative interactions (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). In turn, when interacting with an ambivalent relationship partner, they will experience more intense emotional ambivalence; stronger emotions, in turn, increase the motivation to cope with this aversive state by helping and harming.

To summarize, the present research (see Figure 1 for our model) contributes not only to our understanding of ambivalent relationships but also significantly adds to, and builds on, previous studies that examine relational correlates of interpersonal helping and harming. Specifically, we make unique contributions by: (a) uncovering an original relational antecedent—ambivalent relationships—that is likely to have significant explanatory power on *both* helping *and* harming, whereas traditional relationship predictors have only been partially explanatory (e.g., positive relationships predict helping *but* negative relationships predict harming); (b) providing a fresh perspective on social exchange theory by proposing that the simultaneous positive and negative components of ambivalent relationships elicit *both* positive and negative norms of reciprocity, and thus motivate individuals to respond positively (helping) and negativity (harming) toward their coworker; (c) integrate an affective perspective that recognizes the functionality of ambivalent emotions in relational interactions; and (d) exploring how affiliative interpersonal goals in the relationship affect affective and behavioral outcomes.

Figure 1
Proposed Model of Ambivalent Relationships



Theory and Hypotheses

Conceptualizing Ambivalent Relationships

At their most parsimonious, relationships are defined as a sequence of mutual interactions between two people in which the behavior of one member takes into account the behavior of the other (Ferris et al., 2009; Hinde, 1979). A stable assessment of relationship "quality" then develops as people evaluate the valence of these repeated interactions; in essence, they aggregate their evaluations across those interactions and, through a "process of sedimentation settle into distinctive longstanding affective orientations toward them" (Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 370).

Based on the notion that positive and negative substrates of social relationships are best represented as separate, statistically independent dimensions as opposed to a single bipolar continuum ranging from "negative" to "positive" (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994), relationship quality can be characterized by both positivity and negativity. Relationships can be characterized as primarily positive (high-moderate positivity/low-none negativity), negative (high-moderate negativity/low-none positivity), indifferent (low-none positivity/low-none negativity), or ambivalent (high-moderate negativity/high-moderate positivity; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Methot et al., 2017).

The large majority of prior relationship research has been conducted on positive and negative relationships. Positive relationships involve interactions that are positively valenced, and are characterized by closeness, liking and support, and pleasant emotions and cognitions (Casciaro, 2014; Newsom et al., 2003). Positive relationships are intimate, flexible, and resilient (Eby & Allen, 2012), are enriching, and can hold up in the face of strain (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). By contrast, negative relationships include interactions that are primarily negative in valence, and are characterized by conflict, dislike, irritation, annoyance, and aversive emotions and cognitions (Birditt & Fingerman, 2003). In these relationships, individuals experience an enduring and recurring set of negative feelings and intentions toward each other (Labianca & Brass, 2006).

We focus here on less-well-understood ambivalent relationships, which we define as those in which individuals hold simultaneous positive *and* negative sentiments (e.g., feelings and cognitions) about a relationship partner or the relationship itself (Finch et al., 1989; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2019; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998; Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991). Recurring experiences of positive and negative interactions with a coworker can settle into enduring ambivalent sentiments toward that coworker. Like positive or negative relationships, ambivalent relationships can fall on a continuum. There are two important components of this

conceptualization of the "ambivalent relationship continuum": First, the positive and negative components must be similar in magnitude, and second, these components must have some level of intensity (Fingerman et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 1995). As such, *stronger* relational ambivalence occurs when positive and negative reactions toward another person are similar in the amount of opposing views that they elicit and when reactions are more intense[1] (e.g., both "7" on a 7-point Likert scale). Weaker relational ambivalence is signified by less intense ratings (e.g., positive = "2" and negative = "2" on a 7-point scale) and/or have more discrepant levels of positive and negative reactions (e.g., positive = "7" and negative = "4"). Critically, this conceptualization of ambivalence does not include relationships that are high on one assessment (e.g., a "7" on positivity) and relatively low on the other (e.g., a "2" on negativity) as this imbalance of relational quality would not create the necessary state of contradiction that is essential to an ambivalent relationship. For instance, marital relationships are often viewed as harmonious even when they involve some negativity, with positivity: negativity ratios of about 5:1 considered positive, while negative ones, or those closer to dissolution have ratios less than 1:1 (Gottman, 2014).

Although prior scholarship has established that ambivalent relationship are prevalent within undergraduates' social and professional networks, representing almost half of their network members (Uchino et al., 2012), and may even equal the number of supportive members (Uchino et al., 2004), the prevalence and impact of ambivalent relationships among coworkers are strikingly less well understood. Past research points to three major reasons for why workplaces are ripe for the creation and maintenance of ambivalent coworker relationships (Ashforth et al., 2014; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). One reason is that organizational contexts are beset with complex and dualistic norms and expectations involving trade-offs (Fong & Tiedens, 2002), dilemmas (Wiesenfeld et al., 2000), paradoxes (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), mixed motives (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Ingram & Roberts, 2000), and a murky set of normative guidelines for interpersonal interactions (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). For instance, coworkers must balance personal connection versus professional expectations, co-operation to meet goals and competition over resources, and contrasting needs for collective identification with an individual desire for distinctiveness (Duffy et al., 2002; Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2015; Lee et al., 2019). Second, ambivalence also arises from increased familiarity and similarity. As coworkers work closely and spend more time together, they will likely encounter their coworkers' multiple strengths, but also their many deficiencies; this familiarity then breeds ambivalence (Brooks & Highhouse, 2006). Feelings of similarity that often arise at work (Schneider, 1987) and have benefits like closeness, social network equivalence, and satisfaction also elicit increased social comparison and feelings of competition (Zou & Ingram, 2013); these oppositional feelings then underlie the mixed experience of relational ambivalence. Finally, organizational structural factors may also contribute to the development of ambivalent relationships at work. At work, like in families, employees are often not given the choice of whom to work with, and these structural pressures to interact, along with a lack of easy exit options, can also create and sustain ambivalence toward coworkers (Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009; Thompson & Holmes, 1996). Thus, workplaces do not just set the stage for both positive and negative interactions between coworkers; instead, through a "process of sedimentation" (Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 370), the very relational fabric of workplaces is often infused with ambivalence. Strikingly poorly understood is whether and how ambivalent coworker relationships influence interpersonal behaviors at work?

Ambivalent Relationships and Helping and Harming Behaviors

As the dominant model used to explain individual helping and harming as well as the effects of relationships in organizations (Cropanzano et al., 2017), social exchange theory provides a theoretical lens to help us understand the relationship between ambivalent coworker relationships and helping and harming. According to social exchange theory, once a social exchange relationship is realized, it alters the behaviors people enact toward each other (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2010). Specifically, because the norm of reciprocity guides social exchange (Gouldner, 1960), individuals are likely to match the valence of their interactions (and relationships) with similarly valenced behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lyons & Scott, 2012). As such, prior research has found that positive relationships that are high in liking, trust and social support are more strongly associated with interpersonal helping (Bowler & Brass, 2006; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007), as these relationships create a feeling of indebtedness and a corresponding obligation to reciprocate. Because they are volitional, helping offers a means of fulfilling interpersonal obligations and reinforcing exchange relationships (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002). In contrast, relative to positive relationships, negative relationships that are high in disliking and distrust have stronger effects on harming behaviors.

Although helping and harming behaviors are negatively related in most studies, the general consensus is that interpersonal helping and harming are largely distinct, independent constructs (Dalal, 2005; Spector et al., 2010), and that they can even co-occur in some situations. For example, Venkataramani and Dalal (2007) found in a sample of 62 members of a college sorority house that there was a weak positive relationship between citizenship and counterproductivity. Based on the aforementioned findings that positive relationships elicit positive norms of reciprocity and thus, helping behaviors, while negative relationships elicit negative norms of reciprocity and thus harming behaviors, we predict that ambivalent relationships—that are characterized by simultaneous positivity and negativity toward another person—simultaneously trigger both positive and negative norms of reciprocity. As the ongoing nature of relationships influences both current and future behaviors, individuals will be motivated to respond to these contradictory norms by meeting both, that is, engaging in both helping and harming behaviors toward their coworkers. Thus, we predict the following:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Individuals are likely to engage in both helping and harming behaviors toward targets of relational ambivalence.

[1] Higher positive [negative] relationships are signified by more extreme ratings and more discrepant levels of positivity and negativity (e.g., positive [negative] = "7" and negative [positive] = "1"). Moderately positive [negative] relationships are signified by more moderate ratings and more discrepant levels of positivity and negativity (e.g., positive [negative] = "4" and negative [positive] = "1"). Indifferent relationships are signified by low ratings on both positivity and negativity (positive = "1" and negative ="1").

The Mediating Role of Emotional Ambivalence

Past scholarship has highlighted that emotions drive key outcomes of ambivalent relationships. This work demonstrates that ambivalent relationships trigger negative emotions which lead to stress (Herr et al., 2019), detrimental health outcomes (Holt-Lunstad & Clark, 2014), and reduced task performance (Lee et al., 2019), but they can also produce feelings of emotional ambivalence, that is, the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotional states (Methot et al., 2017; Rothman et al., 2017). Ambivalent emotions can arise in a single interaction, develop over a series of interactions, or can be evoked simply by remembering the ambivalent relationship partner (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Methot et al., 2017). We predict that ambivalent emotions are then the driving force for subsequent harming *and* helping behaviors within ambivalent relationships. Specifically, we propose that because coworkers are often mutually interdependent, individuals are compelled to pay attention to their coworkers with whom they have ambivalent relationships, which makes it hard for a person to deny their ambivalent feelings. The salience of ambivalent feelings will then drive action. Thus, the first stage consists of the ambivalent feelings that people experience when their ambivalent relationships are salient. The second stage involves the amplified behaviors—both helping and harming—that occur subsequently to reduce their emotional ambivalence.

Research on relational and attitudinal ambivalence demonstrates that ambivalence elicits aversive feelings of tension and conflict thus motivating individuals, either consciously or nonconsciously, to reduce or eliminate this state (Van Harreveld et al., 2009). Indeed, the more intense ambivalence becomes, the more an individual is driven to reduce the dissonance that accompanies it (Ashforth et al., 2014). Although responses to experienced ambivalence take many forms—ranging from avoidance that involves denying both positive and negative orientations, to integration, the holistic incorporation of both positive and negative feelings at the same time (Ashforth et al., 2014)—we build on seminal research in psychology suggesting that response amplification is the most likely response in ambivalent relationships (Bell & Esses, 1997; Katz et al., 1986). Indeed, response amplification, wherein individuals amplify either their positive or negative orientation and thus engage in either extremely favorable or unfavorable behavior toward the target of one's ambivalence, is one of the most established responses to resolving ambivalence (Ashforth et al., 2014) as it functions to reduce emotional ambivalence (Bell & Esses, 2002).

In interpersonal exchanges, response amplification manifests as two types of amplified approach behaviors: "moving against" or harming (negative), "moving toward" or getting closer (positive), or a fluctuation from one end to the other (Pratt & Doucet, 2000; Rothman et al., 2017). A key determinant of whether amplification will occur in the positive, negative, or in both directions is accessibility. If the positive dimension is more accessible, then individuals are likely to respond in a more favorable manner, whereas if the negative dimension is more accessible, then individuals are likely to respond in a more unfavorable manner (Bell & Esses, 1997). Accessibility in work contexts depends largely on outcome interdependence. For instance, ambivalence toward a stigmatized (e.g., physically handicapped) individual with whom a participant is working interdependently can lead to both amplified positive evaluations when the handicapped individual is high performing and amplified negative evaluations when the handicapped individual is poor performing (Gibbons et al., 1980). Critically, because both positive and negative sentiments about the relationship are accessible in ambivalent relationships, amplification can occur in both positive and negative directions, yielding amplified favorable and unfavorable behaviors in response to an ambivalent target (Bell & Esses, 2002; Katz & Glass, 1979).

Building on this prior research, we propose that because coworkers are often mutually interdependent, individuals are compelled to pay attention to them, which makes it hard to deny their ambivalent feelings (Bell & Esses, 2002). Both positive and negative sentiments then become accessible and salient. The salience of their ambivalent feelings will elicit amplified action, leading to both amplified positive and negative helping *and* harming behaviors to cope. Thus, we propose as follows:

> *Hypothesis 2*: Feelings of emotional ambivalence will mediate the positive associations between relational ambivalence and helping behavior and harming behavior.

The Amplifying Effect of Affiliative Interpersonal Goals

Although we argue that ambivalent relationships are likely to generate ambivalent emotions, in general, the degrees to which these contradictory emotions are elicited depend on personal factors, such as the individual's motivations that direct attention and filter experience. In this research, we focus on relational motives, and in particular, on the extent to which individuals care about the future quality of their relationships (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012), which can alter people's interactions, emotions, and their behavior (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003).

Interpersonal goals, defined as "goals to attain, maintain, or avoid a specific end state for the relationship" (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003, p. 149) can be elicited by the mere psychological presence of relationship partners (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003) and can vary even within single-valenced relationships (Chartrand et al., 2007). For instance, those individuals who have higher levels of affiliative goals will be motivated to get even closer to their close relationship partner (Elliot et al., 2006) increasing warmness, while individuals with weaker affiliative goals may be less motivated to do so. Correspondingly, we suggest that individuals in ambivalent relationships may have varying levels of affiliative goals as well: Individuals with affiliative goals will be motivated to develop greater closeness in their ambivalent relationships whereas individuals with lower affiliative goals will be less motivated to develop closeness in their ambivalent relationships.

To achieve greater closeness, individuals with increased affiliative goals have been shown to monitor and attend more to their potentially threatened social relationship. Indeed, Masi and colleagues (Masi et al., 2011) demonstrate that individuals with increased affiliative goals have an increased sensitivity to and surveillance for social threats (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Masi et al., 2011) and a heightened sensitivity and recollection of negative *social* information (Duck et al., 1994; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Thus, individuals who are motivated to attain closeness with their ambivalent relationship partner will be increasingly sensitive to the negative aspects of this relationship and will accordingly pay closer attention to it. Response amplification research suggests that such increased attention and a preoccupation with relationships will

increase the emotional impact of these relationships, increasing the salience of the ambivalent feelings that the subjects have, and, consequently, causing them to act on those feelings (Gibbons et al., 1980; Simpson, 1990). With increased attention to the ambivalent relationship partner, it is more difficult to deny one's ambivalent feelings. In addition, because individuals with stronger affiliative goals, such as lonely individuals, often have poorer emotional regulation (Hawkley et al., 2009), they may also respond to their ambivalent relationships by feeling both positive and negative emotions more intensely. Individuals with low approach/affiliation goals for closeness with coworkers will be less emotionally impacted by their ambivalent relationships at work because they are less likely to monitor and attend to these relationships.

Thus, we propose that ambivalent relationship will not be equally likely to create ambivalent feelings for all individuals; ambivalent relationships will increase ambivalent emotions for individuals who hold strong affiliative interpersonal goals, but not for those with weaker affiliative interpersonal goals. Thus, we predict as follows:

> *Hypothesis 3*: Affiliative Interpersonal Goals will moderate the positive relationship between ambivalent relationships and emotional ambivalence. When individuals have high approach goals, there will be a stronger positive relationship between ambivalent relationship and ambivalent emotions. When individuals have low approach goals, there will be a weaker relationship between ambivalent relationship and ambivalent emotions.

Overview of Research

In three multimethod studies, we investigate and compare the effects of positive, negative, as well as ambivalent relationships on helping and harming and the psychological mechanisms by which these effects occur. Coworker relationships are embedded in different ways and to empirically account for this embeddedness, and determine if we can uncover individual level effects of these relationships, we study relationships in three separate social environments. First, in a 6-week long study of dyadic relationships within student teams, we show that relational ambivalence felt toward a person at the start of a team project is linked to both helping and harming behaviors directed toward that same target at the end of the 6-week long project, even controlling for the effects of the dyad and the team. Study 2, a laboratory study of 142 students, manipulates nascent relationships, comparing competitive friends, a previously studied form of ambivalent relationships, to positive and negative relationships. We demonstrate the role of ambivalent emotions in mediating the positive effect of ambivalent relationships on helping and harming behaviors, controlling for the effects of the dyad. Third, we test our full model in a longitudinal quasifield study of 161 full-time employees.

Across all three studies, we utilize the definition of relational ambivalence as simultaneous positive *and* negative sentiments (e.g., feelings and cognitions) about a relationship partner or the relationship itself and we measure and manipulate this variable both continuously (Study 1) and categorically, as well as continuously (Study 2 and Study 3). We do this because both operationalizations provide different benefits. The continuous measure (Thompson et al., 1995) allows us to account for the strength of the ambivalence, whereas the categorical manipulation allows us to compare and contrast ambivalent relationships directly with both positive and negative relationships.

As individuals may not always be conscious of their ambivalence, we capture relational ambivalence in our studies using an indirect measure of ambivalence. Using separate assessments of coexisting relationship positivity and negativity, we combine these separate ratings using the substantiated Similarity Intensity Model (SIM; Thompson et al., 1995): $(P + N)/2 - |P - N|$, whereby P = positivity (i.e., mean of positive relationship items) and N = negativity (i.e., mean of negative relationship items). This formula, most commonly used in research on ambivalence (Fong & Tiedens, 2002; Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Thompson et al., 1995), takes into account that "ambivalence equals similarity of components plus intensity of components" (Thompson et al., 1995, p. 369). According to this formula then, relational ambivalence is higher if positive and negative sentiments about the relationship are on the higher end of each scale. Critically, the formula can be differentiated from a product term (of positivity and negative), which would quantify intensity, and an interaction term of mean-centered positivity and negativity, which would quantify inconsistency. Based on the calculations of this formula then, calculated values above "1" are considered ambivalent (albeit a low level of ambivalence). Numerical values below "1" (including negative values) characterize monovalence. We then combine this continuous approach, which allows us to account for the degree of ambivalence felt in the relationship with a categorical approach (e.g., Uchino et al., 2001) which has also been used in the ambivalence literature. Importantly, research on emotional ambivalence and relationship ambivalence have argued that individuals should be considered emotionally ambivalent (Larsen et al., 2001) or as having ambivalent relationships (Uchino et al., 2001) if they rate their emotions or relationships as greater than 0 on both positivity and negativity. Thus, we utilize both operationalizations and show consistent findings across measures and manipulations.

Study 1: Method

Sample and Procedure

We collected relationship data from teams of undergraduate students enrolled in similar semester-long introductory organizational behavior courses at two separate universities in the United States (Institutional Review Board [IRB] Protocol #20–2128 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Each student was assigned to a team of three to six members to complete a team project within 6 weeks; data were collected at two points in time by means of a round-robin design in which each team member was provided with a team roster and then rated, and was rated by, every other member. At Time 1, after the student teams had worked together intensely for about 2.5 weeks, the demographics and relationship appraisals were collected. We collected the dependent variables of assessments of interpersonal helping and harming at Time 2, at the end of the project, approximately 1 month later. Critically, because we use these temporally lagged surveys with two time periods, our measures are separated across time, thus minimizing common method bias between the study variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and providing robust evidence for the direction of causality.

We distributed online surveys to 216 students who were distributed into 44 teams (124 students were from University 1 and 92 were from University 2). At Time 1, we had 197 total participants (91.2% response rate; 95% from University 1 and 86% from University 2) who completed the surveys; at Time 2, we had 205 total participants (95% overall response rate; 96% from University 1 and 92% from University 2). As we were interested in the influence of individuals' assessments of their relationship on their interpersonally directed behaviors within these relationships, we conducted our analyses at the individual level of analysis (Gooty et al., 2012), while controlling for variance at the level of the dyad, but also the team. Although we had 692 individually rated relationship assessments in the teams across 43 teams (at both Times 1 and 2), our multilevel analyses only used individual ratings from the subset of 422 dyads across these 43 teams that had completed data across both time points. The mean age of the respondents was 20.13 years ($SD = 1.08$ years; 54% male).

Measures

All measures are on a scale of 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *A great deal*.

Independent Variables: Relationship Assessments of Positivity, Negativity, and Ambivalence

At Time 1, after they had been working together for about 2 weeks and had completed the first stage of the project, we used the aforementioned round-robin design to measure two different relationships assessments. Each participant answered two specific questions about each individual on their team. First, they were asked about the extent to which they liked, that is felt positively toward each focal team member, and second, they answered a question about the extent to which they disliked, that is, felt negatively about each focal team member. To assess relational ambivalence, that is, the extent to which they were had coexisting experiences of positivity and negativity toward each of their team members, we used the similarity-intensity formula (Thompson et al., 1995) to calculate ambivalence.

Dependent Variables: Helping and Harming

Using the same round-robin data collection technique, we collected data on the extent to which individuals helped and harmed each other on their teams at Time 2. Instead of asking participants to self-report the extent to which they helped versus harmed each team member, we asked each individual participant to report the extent to which they received help and harm from each of their team members in the 4 weeks preceding this survey. We asked individuals about the extent to which they had *received* help and harm, not provided it, as people are likely to overreport the extent to which they help others, and underreport the extent to which they harm others. Furthermore, separating the ratings by time but also by rater enabled us to further factor out common method bias.

Study 1: Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among all the variables in our study. Importantly, although our theory focuses explicitly on the individual-level effect of relational ambivalence assessments on individually directed helping and harming behaviors, our data are inherently nested at multiple levels—dyad and team. To account for the nested structure of our data while maintaining our focus on the individual level of analysis, we estimated a multilevel model in which we grand mean centered our predictors and allowed intercepts to vary across dyads and teams (e.g., Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). The constants for helping and harming behaviors can therefore be interpreted as the mean level of these behaviors when individuals experience an average level of ambivalence, liking, and disliking toward a focal other. We first tested our model in M*plus* 8, and then replicated our results using STATA's generalized structural equation modeling program.

As shown in Table 2, and supporting Hypothesis 1, the extent to which individuals felt ambivalently about (that is, liked *and* disliked) a relational other at Time 1 was positively associated with the extent to which they engaged in interpersonal helping (.25, $SE = .09$, $t = 2.85$, $p = .004$) and harming behaviors (.10, $SE = .03$, $t = 3.02$, $p = .003$) at Time 2. Table 2 also shows that people in positive relationships were likely to help their team members, but not harm them, while those who were in negative relationships were described as helping less, but these negative relationships had no effect on helping behavior within the relationship dyad.

Overall, Study 1 demonstrates that real-life ambivalent relationships positively influence both interpersonal helping and harming behaviors over a longitudinal period and in real groups. Furthermore, by using both the temporally lagged design and round-robin data, we are able to draw appropriate causal inferences and rule out common-method bias. However, Study 1 leaves open the question of why these effects occur. Study 2 attempts to replicate our findings in a laboratory experiment in which we manipulated ambivalence (vs. positivity and negativity) in relationships in an attempt to

Table 1
Study 1: Mean Values, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations Among Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
Predictor variables							
1 Dyadic levels of ambivalence (Time 1)	−1.12	1.34	1				
2 Dyadic levels of positivity (Time 1)	6.02	1.24	−.72**	1			
3 Dyadic levels of negativity (Time 1)	1.34	.84	.80**	−.55**	1		
Dependent variables							
4 Helping behavior (Time 2)	2.90	1.69	.07+	.16**	.06	1	
5 Harming behavior (Time 2)	1.25	.80	.58**	.37**	.67**	.20**	1

Note. $^{+}p < .10$. $^{**}p < .01$. $N = 692$.

Table 2
Multilevel Models Identifying the Relationship Between Relational Ambivalence at Time 1 and Helping and Harming Behaviors at Time 2 in Study 1 (Controlling for Team-Level and Dyadic-Level Variance)

	Helping (Time 2)			Harming (Time 2)		
(Measured at Time 1)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 4
Levels of relational ambivalence			.25** (.09)			.10** (.03)
Levels of relational positivity	.28** (.06)		.38** (.07)	−.001 (.02)		.04 (.03)
Levels of relational negativity	.14 (.09)		−.08 (.11)	.60**(.03)		.52** (.04)
Pseudo R^2	.04*		.06**	.45**		.47**

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

more squarely establish causality, assess behavioral measures of helping and harming, and most importantly, extend the findings from Study 1 by examining our proposed mechanism: emotional ambivalence.

Study 2: Method

Participants and Experimental Design

One hundred and sixty-six students from a large southeastern university in the United States participated in an experiment in exchange for course credit. Of note, 14 participants were excluded as technical issues prevented them from completing the study and another 10 were excluded because they did not follow the instructions related to the manipulation, leaving us with a total of 142 participants (65% male; $M_{age} = 20.74$, $SD = 1.59$ years). Participants were randomly assigned to an ambivalent ($n = 54$), positive ($n = 50$), or negative relationship ($n = 38$) condition in a between-subjects design. This study received ethical approval from the IRB at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Protocol #13–3001).

Experimental Procedure

For each session, we recruited an even number of participants to the laboratory. Once seated in cubicles equipped with personal computers, participants were provided with access to an instant messaging program to communicate and work on a set of tasks with another student who was also present in the laboratory. The study consisted of three main steps, described below.

Step 1: Relationship Induction Task

Participants were randomly assigned to a partner, another student who was also in the laboratory. They were told that they would be able to communicate with their work partners using an instant messaging program.

To foster a positive, negative, or ambivalent relationship, participants then engaged in different versions of the Relationship Closeness Induction Task (RCIT), a validated manipulation for inducing relationships in an experimental setting (Sedikides et al., 1999). This task is based on the notion that reciprocal and escalating self-disclosure is a vital feature in the development of close relationships and encourages this intense self-disclosure by requiring dyadic partners to engage in a conversation with each other using three lists of questions, each of which enhances deeper levels of disclosure. We used—and amended—the RCIT to manipulate our three relationship conditions and did so by altering the lists of questions provided to dyads within each condition.

All dyads participated in three rounds of interaction using the instant messaging program, and were provided with a specific list of questions for each round. Participants in all three conditions saw the same set of questions for the first round; this list included "get to know you" questions such as "Where are you from?" and "What is your chosen major?" After 2 min, the instant messaging program automatically advanced forward and instructed participants to open the second set of questions and continue their conversations. The second list of questions varied based on condition: For the *positive* and *ambivalent* conditions, it contained more personal questions designed to enhance closeness and liking, such as "What are your hobbies and interests?" and "What is one accomplishment that you are proud of," however, the questions in the *negative* relationship condition were designed to make partners experience more negativity and discomfort, including "Tell you partner five things you are good at" and "What is your Grade Point Average (GPA); whose GPA is higher?" After 4 min on this set of questions, participants then proceeded to spend the last 4 min on the third, and last set of questions. Exactly as per the RCIT paradigm, participants in the positive relationship condition were asked questions that continued to encourage liking, such as "Tell your partner two things you have liked about them." As ambivalent relationships are likely to be elicited when individuals experience conflict we added questions in this condition to have them focus on not only their personal accomplishments (positive) but also their accomplishments in comparison to others (negative). For instance, after answering a question that enhances positivity: "What is one recent accomplishment that you are proud of?" from List 2, participants were then asked to compare and evaluate each other's achievements, a process that accordingly introduced negative sentiments into the previously positive interactions. For participants in the negative condition, who were already engaging in tense conversations, this last list included questions like "Tell your partner two things you did not like about them based on this conversation." Overall, participants in the positive condition spent 8 min in positively valenced conversations, those in the negative relationship condition had an 8-min long negatively valenced interaction, while those in the ambivalent relationship condition spent 4 min engaging in positive interactions, followed by another 4 min engaging in more negative interactions.

We read through each of these conversations to ensure that participants had followed instructions associated with the manipulations. Date from one session in the lab (14 participants) were

discarded due to internet connectivity issues that caused the instant messenger program to freeze during the conversation phase of the interaction. Moreover, 10 participants in the negative relationship were excluded because they actively avoided engaging in the questions that were required of them during the relationship manipulation phase of the experiment; a read through of the conversations revealed that these individuals may have felt too uncomfortable about the questions they were required to ask of each other in the conversation. We excluded these participants from the final sample as they did not attend to the treatment (Sigall & Mills, 1998).

Step 2: Editing Task

Participants were then informed that they would be working on a two-part task with their partner. The first part of the task involved writing (and editing) a blog entry about the business school to which the participants belonged. All participants were informed that their partner had been randomly chosen to write the blog entry and that they would be responsible for the second part of the task: editing and proofreading their partner's essay. Although they waited for their partners to ostensibly write the blog entry, participants completed a short survey in which we embedded questions about the extent to which they liked, disliked, and felt ambivalently toward their partners, along with their feelings of emotional ambivalence. After approximately 5 min, participants received the essay from their partner and were directed to edit it; each participant, however, received the same essay, one based on a draft paragraph used by Staw and Boettger (1990) that had 10 errors embedded in it.

Step 3: Feedback and Reward Allocation

At the end of the editing component, participants were provided with the opportunity to send both their partner and the experimenter written feedback. At the end, they were also asked to divide a $4 bonus between the two of them.

Measure

Unless stated otherwise, items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much so*.

Relationship Type: Manipulation Check

After the chat interactions, we assessed the degree to which participants assessed their newly formed relationship to be positive ("positive," "close," "supportive," $\alpha = .73$) and negative ("negative," "tense," "difficult," $\alpha = .88$). We then used Griffins formula to measure the similarity and intensity of these positive and negative sentiments to calculate overall relational ambivalence. As we state above, calculated values above "1" signal ambivalence, while numbers below 1, including negative values, indicate positive or negative monovalence.

Mediator: Emotional Ambivalence

After the interaction was over, and before participants started working on the editing task, we assessed participants' feelings of emotional ambivalence, or the extent to which they were currently feeling ambivalent, torn, and conflicted; together this comprised our measure of emotional ambivalence ($\alpha = .73$; Rothman, 2011).

Dependent Measures: Helping Behaviors

We used two behavioral measures to assess the degree to which participants engaged in co-operating and helping their partner. First, two independent coders Intraclass Coefficient; (ICC = .91) counted the number of additional statements and ideas that the participants added to the blog entry. As participants were asked to only edit the document, any additions inserted by them were considered going "above and beyond," and thus a measure of interpersonal citizenship behaviors. Furthermore, we also assessed co-operation by examining the extent to which participants divided the $4 bonus between themselves and their partner. Because co-operation requires individuals to reduce a purely egocentric focus on one's own interests to recognize another's contributions, participants who allocated their partners more money were seen as engaging in more citizenship (Epley et al., 2006). Those who were more egocentric and less cooperative would take more credit and thus more of the money. These two behavioral measures of citizenship were correlated at $r = .29$, $p < .001$.

Dependent Measure: Harming Behaviors

We assessed both covert and overt harming behaviors directed toward the team member. Covert harming behaviors or those that remained hidden to the team member were measured by the level of negativity in their written feedback to the experimenter. This written feedback was coded by two independent coders (ICC = .84) on a scale of 1 = *Very Negative* to 7 = *Very Positive*. To assess overt harming behaviors, the same coders assessed the feedback (ICC = .76) that participants directly sent their team members.

Study 2: Results and Discussion

Mean values and standard deviations across the three conditions are shown in Table 3. To address the fact that the study design involved individuals nested within dyads and account for the nonindependence of observations that arose because of interactions in those dyads, we tested our hypotheses in a path model in which we clustered standard errors by dyad to account for nonindependence (Angrist & Pischke, 2008). In this path model, we created two dummy-coded variables using indicator coding: the first had positive relationships coded as a 1, and the ambivalent and negative conditions coded as a 0. In the second dummy variable, negative relationships were coded as 1, while the ambivalent and positive relationship conditions were coded as 0. Signs of the coefficients for comparisons with the ambivalent relationships are expected to be negative.

Manipulation Check

Using the dummy-coded variables as our independent variables and controlling for dyad-level variance, we found participants in the ambivalent relationship condition rated their relationships as more ambivalent ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 1.56$) than those in the positive relationships ($M = .49$, $SD = 1.14$, $b = 1.02$, $SE = .27$, $t = 3.79$, $p < .001$) and negative relationships ($M = .86$, $SD = 1.34$, $b = .65$, $SE = .29$, $t = 2.24$, $p < .001$). We also confirmed that the relationships differed solely in terms of their ambivalence: Individuals in ambivalent relationships rated their relationship as just as positive

Table 3
Study 2: Mean Values and Standard Deviations by Condition

Variable	Ambivalent relationship		Positive relationship		Negative relationship	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Levels of relational ambivalence	1.50_A	1.56	$.49_B$	1.14	$.86_B$	1.34
2. Ambivalent emotions	3.15_A	1.30	2.27_B	1.06	2.29_B	.97
3. Helping: additions to essay	2.32_A	2.72	1.38_B	1.69	$.78_C$	.94
4. Helping: value claimed (out of $4)	1.65_A	.87	2.29_B	.88	2.47_C	1.20
5. Covert harming: feedback to experimenter	2.77_A	1.35	4.07_B	1.33	3.34_A	1.03
6. Overt harming: feedback to team member	5.24_A	1.30	5.39_A	1.33	4.44_B	1.39

Note. Columns that do not share a subscript differ at $p < .05$ or less. $N = 142$.

($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.00$) as those in positive relationships ($M = 4.94$, $SD = .85$), $b = .28$, $SE = .25$, $t = 1.11$, $p = .27$), but with simultaneously more negativity ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.27$) as compared to those in positive relationships ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .82$), $b = -.60$, $SE = .24$, $t = -2.55$, $p < .05$. Similarly, individuals in the ambivalent relationship condition viewed their relationship as being just as negative as did those in the negative relationship condition ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .82$), $b = .25$, $SE = .26$, $t = .98$, $p = .33$, but significantly more positive than those in negative relationships ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.45$), $b = -1.84$, $SE = .27$, $t = -6.77$, $p < .001$.

Hypotheses Tests

We tested our hypotheses using these same two dummy-coded variables as our independent variables,[2] self-reported measures of emotional ambivalence as our mediator, and coded measures of helping and harming as our dependent variables (please see Table 4 for our analyses).

In support of Hypothesis 1a, participants in the ambivalent relationship condition acted more co-operatively by claiming fewer rewards ($b = .64$, $SE = .19$, $t = 3.36$, $p = .001$; as lower claims signaled more co-operation, the coefficient is positive) and made more additions to their partner's essay ($b = -.93$, $SE = .40$, $t = -2.32$, $p = .02$) even compared to those in positive relationships. Similarly, compared to those in negative relationships, participants in ambivalent relationships also claimed fewer rewards ($b = .83$, $SE = .21$, $t = 4.00$, $p < .001$) and made more additions to their partner's essay, ($b = -1.53, SE = .46, t = -3.35, p < .001$). We also replicated work that shows that people in positive relationships help more than negative relationship (rewards: $b = -.83$, $SE = .21$, $t = -4.00$, $p < .001$; additions: $b = 1.54$, $SE = .46$, $t = 3.35$, $p = .001$).

In support of Hypothesis 1b, in which we looked at the relationship between relational ambivalence and harming, we explored whether participants delivered harmful feedback either overtly (directly to team member) or covertly (only to experimenter). Lower scores on these coded measures therefore represent higher levels of harming. We found that individuals in ambivalent relationships engaged in more covert harming compared to positive relationships ($b = 1.32, SE = .43, t = 3.00, p = .004$) but at the same level as in negative relationships ($b = .59$, $SE = .38$, $t = 1.55$, $p = .29$). Individuals in ambivalent relationships, however, engaged in less overt harming as compared to those in negative relationships, $b = -.79$, $SE = .36$, $t = -2.20$, $p = .03$. Again, replicating the past research, people in negative relationships engaged in more overt ($b = .79$, $SE = .36$, $t = 2.20$, $p = .03$) and covert ($b = .86$, $SE = .39$, $t = -2.22$, $p = .03$) harming than those in positive relationships

In Hypothesis 2, we predicted that ambivalent emotions would mediate the relationship between ambivalent relationships and helping and harming behaviors. We started by establishing that individuals in the ambivalent relationship condition were more likely to experience ambivalent emotions ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.30$) compared to those in the positive relationship condition ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.06$), $b = -.93$, $SE = .25, t = -3.68, p < .001$, and the negative relationship condition ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .97$), $b = -.81$, $SE = .26$, $t = 3.11$, $p = .002$. To test our mediation analyses, we used path analytic procedures (Preacher et al., 2007) and conducted bootstrapping analysis using 10,000 samples to assess the significance of indirect effects (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Hypothesis 2a predicted that ambivalent emotions mediate the relationship between engaging with an ambivalent relationship partner and citizenship behaviors, assessed in terms of (a) helping, or words added to blog entry and (b) co-operation, as assessed by money allocated to partner. We found full support for this hypothesis as the confidence intervals for the indirect effect of engaging with an ambivalent relationship (vs. positive) partner on helping (−.46, 95% CI [−.98, −.12] and co-operation (.14, 95% CI [.02, .31]), did not include zero. Furthermore, this same pattern of significant indirect effects was seen for the differences in helping (−.53, 95% CI [−1.06, −.16]) and co-operation (.16, 95% CI [.03, .35]) for ambivalent versus negative relationships. We found support for Hypothesis 2b as well, as the confidence intervals for the indirect effects due to an ambivalent relationship partner versus a positive partner (.32, 95% CI [−.03, −.63] and a negative partner (.36, 95% CI [.04, .75]) on covert harming did not include zero.

Overall, this study establishes the role of ambivalent emotions as the mechanism underlying the links between ambivalent relationships and helping and harming. However, this study relies on

[2] We also corroborated that the continuous measure of ambivalence operated in a similar way as this categorical measure. As the continuous measure has scores that range from "monovalent" to "ambivalent," it does not enable us to assess the differences between ambivalent relationships and monovalent positive versus negative relationships. However, we confirmed that the continuous measure of ambivalence also had similar effects on helping (additions: $\beta = .19$, $p < .05$; claimed rewards: $\beta = -.22$, $p < .01$) and harming behavior ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .06$) as well as showed evidence of mediation through ambivalence.

Table 4
Study 2: Mediation Analyses

		Helping		Harming	
	Ambivalent emotions	Additions to essay	Value claimed	Covert harming	Overt harming
Predictor variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
D1 (Ambivalent vs. Positive)	−93**(.25)	−.41 (.38)	.48* (.19)	.65 (.52)	.30 (.35)
D2 (Ambivalent vs. Negative)	−.81** (.26	−1.13** (.39)	.69** (.21)	.11 (.37)	−.80* (.36)
Emotional ambivalence		.57** (.17)	−.17** (.07)	−.39* (.16)	.05 (.10)
Pseudo R^2	.08**	.13**	.17**	.23**	.05

Note. $N = 142$. Unstandardized coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

nascent relationships as well as a specific type of ambivalent relationship ("competitive friends"). To understand how ambivalent relationships can operate in real-life settings and the interpersonal goals that might shape the effects of these relationships, we next utilize an online sample of full-time retail employees.

Study 3: A Test of the Moderated Mediation Model

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk); as MTurk allows researchers to screen participants on a series of criteria, we restricted our sample to U.S.-based participants who worked full-time in the retail industry. In addition, we limited this study to the retail sector, as past research shows that working in retail is conducive to social interactions (Pettinger, 2005); furthermore, restricting the sample to participants from a single industry and similar job type helped us ensure that job type did not influence the formation, or outcomes of these different relationships. To ensure that participants had a full social ledger of relationships, we only surveyed participants who reported having at least one of each type of work relationship: positive, negative, ambivalent, and indifferent. This study received ethical approval from the IRB at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Protocol #13–2273).

Participants completed two surveys, approximately 5 weeks apart. Of note, 199 participants took the first survey, for $1, and 161 of these took the second survey for $2 (81% retention rate). Our final sample comprised 161 full-time retail employees (55.3% female, 84.5% White, 10.6% African American, 4.9% of other race; $M_{age} = 36.91$ years, $SD = 9.38$ years). To qualify for the study, participants were first asked if they had at least one positive, one negative, and one ambivalent relationships at work. If they passed this first set of criteria, participants were asked, via random assignment, to vividly describe *one* of these relationships, that is, either a positive, negative, or ambivalent relationship currently held at work. Our instructions stated as follows:

> Describe your (positive)(negative)(ambivalent, that is, both positive and negative) relationship as vividly as possible. Write as detailed a description of your relationship (e.g., what are your interactions like, how do you act around your relational partner?). If you can, write your description so that someone reading it might understand what it is like to be in that relationship. Try to relive some of your experiences with your relational partner as you write, pretending you are actually there and remembering how you felt.

In our final sample, 58 participants described an ambivalent relationship, 51 described a positive relationship, and 52 described a negative relationship. In the first survey, participants completed a series of questions to capture their experiences, emotions, and motivations in these relationships. In the second survey, participants were asked to assess their helping and harming behaviors toward those specific relationship partners over the prior 5 weeks.

Measure

Independent Variables: Relationship Assessments, Emotional Ambivalence, and Approach Goals

At the start of the study, participants were required to enter their relationship other's first name. We then populated this name into the questions about the participants' positive, negative, or ambivalent relational other. We did so because research shows that being primed with the name of a relational other automatically triggers feelings and goals associated with them (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003); thus, by including the relational partner's name in each question, the participant was able to keep their relational other at the forefront of their minds during the course of the study. We used the same measures as in Study 2 to measure positive ($\alpha = .96$) and negative ($\alpha = .95$) relational assessments, and then used these assessments to calculate ambivalent (or both positive and negative) relational measures and ambivalent emotions ($\alpha = .93$). Finally, we assessed approach goals using a three-item measure of affiliative interpersonal goals ($\alpha = .90$; Elliot et al., 2006) (example item: "I want to get closer to [name]").

Dependent Variables: Helping and Harming Behaviors

We assessed helping and harming behaviors in the second study, 5 weeks after the initial survey. With the stem, "in the last month to what extent have you engaged in the following behaviors toward [name of relational partner]?," we assessed, first, an eight-item scale of helping behaviors ($\alpha = .92$; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002) and, second a 10-item scale of harming behaviors, drawn from Ho's (2012) scale of person- and task-focused interpersonal counterproductive work behaviors. We separated the harming scale into two related scales: a three-item measure of open, or overt harming behaviors, that included items such as "I started an argument with [name]" and "I acted rudely to [name]" ($\alpha = .62$) and a seven-item measure of covert, or hidden harming behaviors,

including "I started a rumor about [name]" and "I withheld resources from [name]" ($\alpha = .86$).

Study 3: Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics and correlations between the Study 3 variables are shown in Table 5. Results of regression analyses are shown in Table 6.

Relationship Assessments

We started by confirming that participants described each of their relationships accurately. Using one-way analyses of variance and pairwise contrasts to compare levels of ambivalence across the three relationship types, we corroborated that participants' assessments of the ambivalence experienced in their relationships were higher for those describing ambivalent relationships ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.36$) than those describing positive relationships ($M = -1.03$, $SD = .1.10$, $t(157) = 9.99$, $p < .001$) and negative relationships ($M = -.24$, $SD = 1.99$, $t(157) = 7.35$, $p < .001$). Participants who described positive relationships described them as being more positive ($M = 5.84$, $SD = .95$) than participants who described ambivalent relationships ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.35$, $t(158) = 12.70$, $p < .001$); similarly, those who described negative relationships ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.52$) described them as being more negative than those who described ambivalent relationships ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.57$, $t(157) = 7.12$, $p < .001$).

Hypotheses Tests

Given that our independent variable, similar to Study 2, had three conditions, we specified a multicategorical predictor and used indicator coding to compare the ambivalent relationship condition (which served as the reference group) with both other groups (D1 reflected the ambivalent vs. positive relationship comparison, and D2 reflected the ambivalent vs. negative comparison; they were entered into the analyses at the same time). As ambivalent relationships were coded zero, the coefficients were thus expected to be negative.

Before testing Hypothesis 3, the moderated mediation model, we ran tests to corroborate our findings for Hypotheses 1 and 2. As shown in Table 6, in support of Hypotheses 1a and 1b, people in ambivalent relationships helped their relational partners more than those in negative relationship, *contrast estimate* $= -.88$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI[−1.36, −.40], but less than those in positive relationships, *contrast estimate* $= 1.07$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.59, 1.56]. In line with prior work, people in positive relationships helped their relational partners more than people in negative relationship, *contrast estimate* $= 1.95$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.45, 2.45]. Also, people in ambivalent relationships were more likely to covertly harm those they felt ambivalently about versus those they felt positively about *contrast estimate* $= -.89$, $SE = .17$, $p = .02$, 95% CI[−1.22, −.56]. Levels of covert harming were the same in both ambivalent and negative relationships, *contrast estimate* $= -.21$, $SE = .17$, $p = .20$, 95% CI[−.54, .12]. Overt harming was lower in negative relationships, than in ambivalent ones, $B = .54$, $SE = .21$, $t = 2.51$, $p = -.01$, 95% CI[.11, .96]. Compared to people in negative relationships, those in positive relationships were less likely to engage in covert and overt harming.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, we used Hayes's PROCESS (Model 4 and 7) bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations for a multicategorical independent variable by using indicator coding (Hayes & Montoya, 2017). We found support for Hypothesis 2 as the indirect effect of engaging with an ambivalent (vs. positive) partner on helping, −.68 (.22), 95% CI [−1.16, −.29], and covert harming, −.46 (.16), 95% CI [−.81, −.15], through feelings of emotional ambivalence, did not include zero. This same pattern of significant indirect effects was seen for the differences in helping, −.48 (.16), 95% CI [−.83, −.19], and harming, −.33 (.12), 95% CI [−.59, −.11], for ambivalent versus negative relationships.

We then tested Hypothesis 3, that looked at the moderating effect of participants' approach goals (centered at the mean) on our hypothesized psychological mechanism of emotional ambivalence and dependent variables of helping and harming (see Table 7 for indirect effects). Specifically, we looked for evidence of moderated mediation exists if the estimates of the indirect effects through the mediator variable vary significantly across levels of the moderator variable as indicated by a significant interaction (Preacher et al., 2007). As shown in Table 6, we found a Significant D1 × Affiliative Goal Interaction, $b = -1.03$, $SE = .15$, $t = -6.93$, $p < .001$; 95% CI = [−1.32, −.74], and a Significant D2 × Affiliative Goal Interaction, $b = -.62$, $SE = .18$, $t = -3.55$, $p < .001$; 95% CI = [−.96, −.27]. A deeper exploration of these results showed that the overall index of moderated mediation for the relationships between

Table 5
Study 3: Mean Values, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations Among Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Predictor variables									
1 D1 [Ambivalent (0) vs. Positive (1)]	.32	.47	1						
2 D2 [Ambivalent (0) vs. Negative (1)]	.32	.47	−.47**	1					
Moderator variable									
3 Approach goals	3.20	1.78	−.55**	−.57**	1				
Mediator variable									
4 Emotional ambivalence	2.82	1.76	.52**	−.18*	.03	1			
Dependent variables									
5 Helping behaviors	3.76	1.50	.46**	−.43**	.52**	.01	1		
6 Covert harming behaviors	1.62	.94	−.39**	.10	−.06	.40**	.13	1	
7 Overt harming behavior	1.75	1.00	−.36**	.29**	−.12	.06	−.10	.40**	1

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. $N = 74$.

Table 6
Study 3: Moderation and Mediation Analyses

Variable	Emotional ambivalence		Helping behaviors		Harming behaviors	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	4.42 (.16)	1.51 (.41)	3.71 (.17)	2.68 (.39)	1.97 (.11)	1.27 (.26)
D1 [Ambivalent(0) vs. Positive (1)]	−2.94** (.24)		1.07** (.25)	1.76** (.34)	−.89** (.17)	−.43 (.23)
D2 [Ambivalent (0) vs. Negative (1)]	−2.06** (.24)	.37 (.49)	−.88** (.25)	−.40 (.29)	.21 (.17)	.11 (.20)
Moderator: Approach goals		.90** (.12)				
Interaction 1: D1 × Approach Goals		−1.03** (.15)				
Interaction 2: D1 × Approach Goals		−.62** (.18)				
Mediator: Emotional ambivalence				.23** (.08)		.16** (.05)
R^2	.51	.65	.27	.31	.16	.21

Note. $N = 161$. Unstandardized coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.
** $p < .01$.

ambivalent (vs. positive) relationships on helping and harming via emotional ambivalence was only significant for individuals who had high (+1 *SD*) levels of approach goals, Helping: −1.06 (.32) 95% CI [−1.67, −.45]; Covert Harming: = −.72 (.25) 95% CI [−1.21, −.22], but not those who did not desire to approach or affiliate with their relational partner, Helping: effect = −.20 (.15) 95% CI [−.54, 03]; Harming: effect = −.14 (.10) 95% CI [−.36, 03]. We saw similar findings for the index of moderated mediation for ambivalent (vs. negative) relationships for individuals who had high (+1 *SD*) levels of approach goals, Helping: effect = −.63 (.20) 95% CI [−1.02, −.24]; Covert Harming: effect −.43 (.16) 95% CI [−.75, −.11], but not those who did not desire to approach or affiliate with their relational partner, Helping: effect = −.12 (.11) 95% CI [−.36, 05]; Harming: −.08 (.07) 95% CI [−.25, 04]; also, see Figure 2. Just like in Study 2, our findings are supported when we use a continuous measure of ambivalence.

Overall, our results demonstrate support for our predicted moderated mediation model. Specifically, ambivalent relationships increase helping and harming through the mechanism of emotional ambivalence; however, these effects are only found for individuals who care about enhancing the closeness of that relationship. For individuals who operate without these affiliation goals, the benefits, as well as the detriments, of ambivalent relationships are not realized.

General Discussion

Across three studies, we find convergent evidence that ambivalent relationships predict higher levels of both helping and harming. In Study 1, in a 6-week long study of dyadic relationships within student teams, we show that ambivalent relationships toward the beginning of a team project are linked to more helping and harming behaviors at the end of the 6-week long project. Study 2, a laboratory study of 142 students, manipulates competitive friends, a form of ambivalent relationship, and demonstrates the role of ambivalent emotions in mediating the positive effect of ambivalent relationships (compared to positive and negative relationships) on helping and harming behaviors. Finally, we test our full model in a quasifield study of 161 full-time employees and demonstrate that affiliative interpersonal goals strengthen the positive relationship between ambivalent relationships and emotional ambivalence, thus indirectly leading to increased helping and harming.

Theoretical Contributions

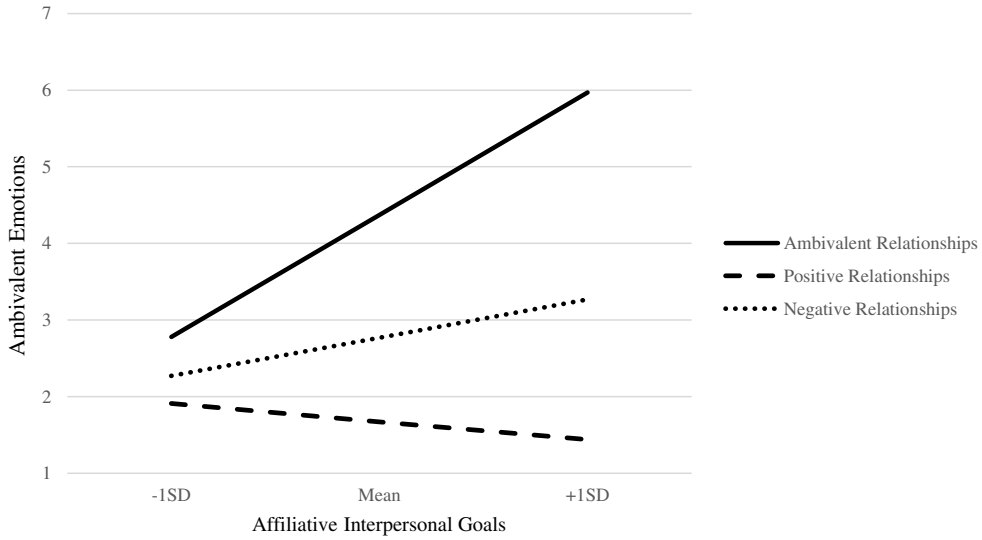
Our findings offer several meaningful theoretical contributions to existing understandings of relational antecedents of helping and harming behavior in organizations. First, our research provides a new window into understanding the relational variables that lead individuals to choose to both help *and* harm another coworker. The available evidence suggests that interpersonal helping and harming are largely independent constructs and not opposite poles of the same construct (Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007), leaving open the possibility that helping and harming may co-occur. However, the past scholarship has largely focused on how positive and negative relationships might predict one of these outcomes but not the other. Our theory and findings depart from this trend by

Table 7
Study 3: Relative Conditional Effects of Independent Variables on Interpersonal Helping and Harming

Variable	Indirect effect		
	Helping	Covert harming	Overt harming
D1 [Ambivalent (0) vs. Positive (1)]			
−1 *SD* affiliative goals	−.20 (.15) 95% CI [−.54, 03]	−.14 (.10) 95% CI [−.36, 03]	.05 (.07) 95% CI [−.06, .21]
+1 *SD* affiliative goals	−1.06 (.32) 95% CI [−1.67, −.45]	−.72 (.25) 95% CI [−1.21, −.22]	.28 (.27) 95% CI [−.25, .80]
D2 [Ambivalent(0) vs. Negative (1)]			
−1 *SD* affiliative goals	−.12 (.11) 95% CI [−.36, 05]	−.08 (.07) 95% CI [−.25, 04]	.03 (.04) 95% CI [−.04, 13]
+1 *SD* affiliative Goals	−.63 (.20) 95% CI [−1.02, −.24]	−.43 (.16) 95% CI [−.75, −.11]	.17 (.16) 95% CI [−.14, .50]

Figure 2

Interaction Between Relationship Type (1 = Ambivalent, 2 = Positive, and 3 = Negative) and Affiliative Goals on Experienced Emotional Ambivalence, Study 3



suggesting that not only are negative relationships important for understanding adverse interpersonal behavior, and positive relationships important for understanding salutary interpersonal behavior, but also ambivalent relationships are important for understanding both. We showed that ambivalent relationships, that are simultaneously positive and negative, elicit *both* helping and harming of another coworker. Our results provide empirical support for a theoretical perspectives proposing that it is time to expand our conceptualization of dyadic relationships at work to include ambivalent relationships (Lee et al., 2019; Methot et al., 2017); these findings suggest that instead of focusing only on monovalent relationships, it is important to consider bivalent relationships when predicting helping and harming interpersonal behavior.

Second, our findings enter a larger theoretical conversation on social exchange theory, the predominant theory utilized in relationship scholarship (Cropanzano et al., 2017). A long history of psychological research on social exchange relationships has demonstrated that the norms of reciprocity motivate individuals to respond in kind to negative and positive treatment, respectively (Gouldner, 1960), and this process has been examined in organizations as it relates to helping and harming within individual relationships between employees (Bowler & Brass, 2006; Lyons & Scott, 2012; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007). These recent perspectives on social exchange theory also highlight that the theory needs to expand to accommodate situations of duality, where there are both positive and negative social exchanges. By proposing that simultaneous positive and negative components of ambivalent relationships elicit *both* positive and negative norms of reciprocity, and thus motivate individuals to respond positively (by helping) and negatively (by harming) toward their coworker, we thus begin to contribute to a conversation that these norms function in conjunction to influence contradictory interpersonal behaviors. In addition, by showing that individuals can have coexisting and contrasting responses to simultaneous and contrasting exchange norms, we start to build support for a new model of social exchange (Cropanzano et al., 2017) that suggests that exchange responses do not only vary along a hedonic (that is, positive–negative) dimension but also rather that these responses coexist because they also involve different levels of activity and vary along a passive–active dimension.

Third, although coexisting norms of reciprocity may prove to be a powerful theoretical explanation for the co-occurrence of helping and harming behavior, it has been argued that the emphasis on rationality in social exchange theory ignores affective explanations that may prove to be just as, if not more, powerful (Lyons & Scott, 2012). Our work builds on prior scholarship that has begun to integrate social exchange and affective perspectives (Lyons & Scott, 2012; Spector & Fox, 2002). This work suggests that affective states influence the likelihood that individuals will choose to engage in either helping or harming. Our research draws on response amplification theory to take a step beyond this conclusion and demonstrate that ambivalent affective states caused by ambivalent relationships can increase *both* amplified positive (helping) and amplified negative (harming) behaviors toward their ambivalent relationship partners, and that this may be a form of coping with them. These results challenge the validity of dichotomizing all relationships and all emotions as either positive or negative, and point to the value of recognizing the functionality of these emotions in relational interactions.

In acknowledging the role of these ambivalent emotions, our research also addresses a debate about the effects of ambivalence in organizations. Researchers frequently assume that ambivalence is detrimental to individuals, rarely testing the reverse association (see Rothman et al., 2017 for a review). However, recent scholarship predominantly in the management sciences has started to question this assumption and to unpack the more positive effects of ambivalence at the individual (e.g., Guarana & Hernandez, 2016; Rees et al., 2013) and dyadic levels of analysis (e.g., Rothman & Northcraft, 2015). However, although scholars have presented conceptual arguments and qualitative evidence of ambivalent relationships (e.g., Pratt & Doucet, 2000), little empirical research has

tested their causal effects on organizational outcomes (cf., Ingram & Roberts, 2000) and especially the mechanisms that explain these effects (Lee et al., 2019 study is a notable exception). Our research presents a balanced perspective on this debate by highlighting the mixed effects of ambivalent relationships on helping and harming. Our findings suggest that on the one hand, ambivalent relationships may encourage employees to engage in affiliative forms of interpersonal behavior such as overt helping. However, ambivalent relationships may also encourage employees to engage in antiaffiliative forms of interpersonal behavior such as covert forms of harm that are unobservable by targets (Spector & Fox, 2002) such as when a coworker bad-mouths an employee behind their back (Lyons & Scott, 2012). We therefore address calls to rebalance the conversation on ambivalence and to unpack the positive as well as negative implications of this complex state.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our combined set of studies which utilize both experimental, network, and survey methodologies, as well as self-report, other-report, and behavioral measures, enable us to establish both internal and external validity and enhance our confidence in our theoretical predictions. Although our studies, together, largely support our proposed model, each study had individual limitations that should be addressed. First, although Study 1 enabled us to study the main effects of relationships on helping and harming, the methodology did not enable us to delve into the mediating and moderating mechanisms, as too many network measures would have led to survey fatigue. Although the experiment in Study 2 had many strengths, as a controlled and randomized experiment that enabled us to develop both strong causal inferences and to explore behavioral as well as self-reported outcomes, it was limited in its ability to elicit and capture "real-life" experiences of ambivalent and monovalent relationships. Indeed, although the results indicate that the relationship induction task was effective in generating positive, negative, and ambivalent relationships, it is likely that these nascent relationships were more ephemeral and less intense than those experienced in organizations. Although a limitation, this concern also provides a more stringent test of our hypotheses: If manipulated relationships made a significant difference on work outcomes, then actual relationships in organizations may prove to be even more influential. Finally, Study 3 was an examination of real-life relationships and therefore addressed some of the issues from Study 2. Our survey was single-source, and comprised entirely of self-report measures of the mechanisms and dependent variables (even though they were assessed at separate points in time). Although our use of random assignment, as well as the fact that we replicated results across field and laboratory designs does allow us to garner confidence in our results, we acknowledge the limitations of self-report data.

Broadly, our focus on the intrapsychic experience of relational ambivalence does not allow us to explore the differences between relationships in which ambivalence is not shared (or asymmetric), versus shared (or symmetric). For instance, in family relationships, when a parent or offspring feels mixed emotions, their children often also experience ambivalence and its downstream consequences (Fingerman et al., 2006). Future work could also explore additional moderators that help to differentiate when ambivalent relationships lead to positive outcomes and when they lead to negative outcomes. For instance, individual differences, the relationship itself, or the organizational context may all be relevant moderators. For instance, considering the proposed attention-grabbing effects of ambivalent relationships, there may be an important role of rumination, an individual cognitive difference in how people psychologically react to dealing with the mixed, conflicting sentiments in an ambivalent relationship. Other personality differences like neuroticism (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) or individuals' attachment styles, that is, their trait-level patterns of relational expectations resulting from experiences with attachment figures in early childhood (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 2000) may shape individuals' reactions to ambivalent relationships at work. For instance, individuals governed by an anxious attachment style who are sensitive to ambivalence (Mikulincer et al., 2010) may react in more negative ways to ambivalent relationships, thus leading to more negative outcomes. Although, we explore one relational moderator, affiliative interpersonal goals, this moderator does not help to distinguish the negative and positive effects of ambivalent relationships, as it has implications for both helping and harming behaviors through its impact on emotional ambivalence. The relational context of communality (personal relationships) or exchange (work relationships) could also influence how individuals react to their ambivalent relationships. Although there is evidence that ambivalence in communal relationships, such as parental ambivalence and ambivalent friendships, ruled by norms of intimacy and warmth, has detrimental physiological outcomes on cellular aging (Uchino et al., 2012), individuals may be less likely to enact negative harming behaviors in these types of ambivalent relationships, as compared to in exchange relationships, where norms of reciprocity take hold. Finally, organizational context could also influence outcomes: Organizations that operate in uncertain environments or have mixed competitive and co-operative norms may foster ambivalent relationships and thus provoke increased helping *and* harming (Rothman et al., 2017).

Practical Implications and Conclusion

Our findings suggest several implications for managerial practice. First, even though ambivalent relationships are comprised of high levels of negativity along with positivity, they are much more beneficial compared to negative relationships. Negative relationships are almost entirely deleterious, hurting individual attitudes, reputations, interactions, and performance (Ellwardt et al., 2012; Venkataramani et al., 2013). Our findings suggest that rather than focusing on minimizing negative interactions, managers should encourage, and provide opportunities for informal, trust-building, positive interactions. Even though it is impractical to entirely transform one's worst relationships into one's best ones, by infusing some positivity into these relationships, they can become ambivalent, and deliver some benefits at work.

In addition, and perhaps surprisingly our research suggests that instead of focusing on common ambivalence-reduction strategies, individuals may wish to retain feelings of ambivalence, begin to appreciate their varied social ledger, and thus reap the benefits of this complex, but all-too-common state instead. People generally have a sense that ambivalence is uncomfortable and may assume that it carries personal costs. In this research, we have shown why and when having ambivalent relationships at work is beneficial by focusing on their effects for helping and harming, and identifying the psychological dynamics underlying these benefits. Thus, it seems clear that

organizations would do well to develop strategies to bring employees' awareness to their ambivalence rather than to stifle it.

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