Title:	Women in conflict: On the moral knowledge of daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. By: Linn, R., Breslerman, S., Journal of Moral Education, 03057240, Sep96, Vol. 25, Issue 3
Database:	Academic Search Ultimate

WOMEN IN CONFLICT: ON THE MORAL KNOWLEDGE OF DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW AND MOTHERS-IN-LAW

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ABSTRACT Little is known about the family setting and the role of family education in a setting where "intimacy and justice are intertwined" (Okin, 1989). Most intriguing is the unique moral and complex relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law: what is the nature of these two women's failure to maintain harmony between themselves even though the literature suggests that they are predominantly care-orientated? The following paper questions whether there is a problematic relationship between Israeli mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law. It further attempts to examine whether there is an association between selected situational variables (work outside the home, years of marriage), personality variables (moral orientation, depressive mood and general life satisfaction) and the quality of the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. It seems that being cast in the role of the mother-in-law most probably overrides any other situational or personality variable. It created an ongoing asymmetry between the psychological experience of the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law, which is being discussed.

Introduction

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"I am tied up in the kitchen. Here's five dollars for you--please
fetch my mother-in-law from the station."
"OK, but suppose she is not there?'
"Then you will get another five dollars."
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The problems with in-laws do not only exist in jokes about the family or women. In the index of marriage and family reference, the in-laws are placed under "marriage problems". Of the two mothers-in-law, the daughter's mother is a legitimate subject for jokes, most often by the sons-in-law. As for the son's

mother, she is a mysterious figure with whom the relationship is doomed to be problematic even beyond any humour (Duvall, 1954; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Adler et al., 1989; Cotterill, 1994).

No less of a mystery is the removal of the mother-in-law from psychological inquiry in general, and feminist research in particular. Most researchers tend to focus on the adaptation of the young couple to the in-laws (Troll et al., 1979). This limited focus seems to create great concern among family educators who question whether we can educate for family life without knowledge about all the "living units" in the family (Thomas & Arcus, 1992, p. 5). Even those feminist researchers who focused on women's problematic role in the family (Johnson, 1988) or delineated the problems associated with the conceptualisation of the domestic moral sphere (Okin, 1989; Faludi, 1991; Code, 1991; Haste & Baddley, 1991) failed to address the unique position of the mother-in-law in western family and culture, and her relationship to her daughter-in-law (Goetting, 1990).

This paper questions whether the existence of the problematic relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is a myth or a psychological fact.

Theoretical Framework

The significance of the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, and its role in the private and public spheres, is documented for the first time in the Biblical reading of Ruth (a childless daughter-in-law) and Naomi (who lost her husband and son). Ruth gives up her personal desires of motherhood in order to preserve the family harmony (giving up her biological son to the mother-in-law who, as the judicial mother, will raise him in a more acceptable environment and keep the family dynasty) (Brenner, 1988).

The broadest documentation regarding the problematic relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is found in anthropological research (Adler et al., 1989). In some African families, for example, the daughter-in-law is incorporated into the family only after she has been instructed by the mother-in-law as to how to be a woman (Shanas & Streib, 1965). Swarajyalakshmi & Ramamurti (1973) report a high correlation between socio-economic status and problematic relationships between some Indian mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In China, the problematic relationship between the two women in some families is solved by adopting the daughter-in-law from an early age. In this way the daughter-in-law views her mother-in-law as her real mother and accepts her authority (Wolf, 1968). Needless to say, cross-cultural studies on mothers-in-law and stepmothers report on negative attitudes compared with mothers and grandmothers (Adler et al., 1989).

In Jewish tradition the mother-in-law is presented as the bad fairy, whereas the daughter-in-law's own mother is the good fairy (very much like the American folk stories). Many jokes are targeted toward the Jewish (giant Freudian) mother as responsible for all the problems in the family (Swirsky & Safir, 1991). She is known to protect her son from the external world where no one is good enough to be his wife or her daughter-in-law, a theme that is exemplified in the scripts of Woody Allen and Philip Roth (Ziv, 1981).

The most comprehensive study in western culture of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is found in the work of Duvall (1954). In a nightly national radio broadcast in the United States, listeners (both male and female) were asked to send the radio station a postcard upon which they would cite the most problematic person in the family. About 5020 postcards arrived at the radio station. The mother-in-law was listed in 51% of cases as the most problematic person, while the daughter-in-law was listed in only 2.8% of cases. Demographic analysis suggested that 75% of the respondents were women, who were married less than 10 years. Nine out of 10 women complained about their mother-in-law. In terms of religious orientation, the Jewish group was the highest in listing the mother-in-law as the most problematic (77%), as opposed to the Baptists (25%) and Roman Catholic (12%). In the second stage of Duvall's study, 1337 subjects were asked to fill in questionnaires that included specific questions such as, "What makes this person a problematic one?" In the third stage, 60 subjects were interviewed regarding the topic of harmony in the family. Duvall found that the most problematic place in the family was filled by the mother-in-law (49.5%). The second most problematic place in the family was also filled by a woman: the husband's sister (20.3%).

One of the most surprising findings of the study was the asymmetry of the complaints: more complaints were directed against the mother-in-law (75%) and many fewer (3.2%) toward the daughter-in-law. The severity of the problems increased when both women were living in close proximity within the first years of marriage. Duvall (1954) noted the following attributes of the mother-in-law identified by the respondents:

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1. Talks too much.
2. Knows all the answers.
3. Intervenes too much.
4. Always finds faults in others.
5. Is an evil doer.
6. Is hated and an object of violence.
7. Comes to visit too often and stays too long.
8. Is better when far away.
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A look at this list suggests that at least half of the attributes deal with the question of boundaries or separation (3, 4, 7, 8). From the complaints that were raised about mothers-in-law, Duvall constructed the mother-in-law syndrome. Three main attributes were ascribed to the mother-in-law by 50% of the subjects:

(a) Meddlesome (meddles, interferes, dominates, intrudes on our privacy, 28%).

(b) Possessive (is possessive, demanding, over-protective, etc., 14.1%).

(c) Nagging (nags, criticises, complains, finds faults, 10.9%).

Other attributes included indifference (7.2%), immaturity (6.8%), uncongeniality (6.2%), thoughtlessness (5.6%), pampering (5.3%), intruding (4.2%) and self-righteousness (3%). Duvall argued that the complaints of the mothers-in-law about their daughters-in-law were less frequent and revolved around their indifference (22.1%), thoughtlessness (16.3%), incompetence (12.8%) and their desire to preserve a distant relationship. Good relationships were found among a quarter of the subjects. Duvall argued that the existing stereotypes and jokes about mothers-in-law that exist in western culture, and to which the young couple are exposed, create certain types of expectations of mothers-in-law. The bride expects that the relationship will be problematic and this in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Moreover, due to the style of courtship in the western world, which is often done in the house of the daughter-in-law, the future parents-in-law are not able to get to know the prospective daughter-in-law well and she is regarded as a stranger. According to Schlien (1962), the mother-in-law feels that the daughter-in-law is taking her place in the love life of her son (the new husband) and he remains the only connection in the intimate relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Other sources of conflict between the women revolved around the mother-in-law's criticism regarding the way the daughter-in-law brings up the children (Fischer 1983; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987; Goetting, 1990).

At the same time, Duvall (1954) documented an asymmetry in the desire for care: mothers-in-law were ready to take care of the children more often than the daughters-in-law were ready to ask. Daughters-in-law were less likely to experience conflict regarding child-rearing with their own mothers (Fischer, 1983). These studies point toward interesting situational and personality variables that warrant further study.

Years of Marriage

In her attempt to explain the origin and the increasing complexity of this relationship Duvall argued that the potential problematic relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law can be detected before the marriage. It is possible that, during the period of dating, the mother-in-law is more dominant than the father-in-law in the life of the young couple, or perceived as more intrusive than the father-in-law. Overlapping boundaries may compensate for the lost role of mothering to which women, mainly, have been accustomed for so long prior to the marriage of the son.

Duvall suggested that, because each married couple belongs simultaneously to three families, the couple should first construct their new family and only then seek intimacy in the extended family without feeling any threat to the boundaries of the nuclear family. The central role played by clear boundaries has been already documented by Minuchin (1974) as well as by Ryder & Bartle (1991); the greater the autonomy of the young couple, the better the relationship would be, concludes Duvall (1977). Steinglass (1981) documented that the existence of unclear boundaries affects the functioning in the family. Lack of opportunities to cause problems, such as distance in location, may enhance the harmony in the family (Duvall, 1954). It is possible that the improvement in attitude is related to the changes in other domains of their experience along the life span which brings about better understanding of the other. In most marital conflicts, the couple continue to blame the husband's parents more often than the wife's parents. In most conflicts it was the mother-in-law who wanted loose boundaries between the two family systems, whereas the daughter-in-law wanted rigid ones. Yet, with the years, the boundaries become

clearer (Duvall, 1954). We have not come across any study using demographic variables such as marital status, number of children, distance in location within a specific setting or years of marriage as boundary variables. Years of marriage thus is regarded as the most relevant situational variable, and its potential association with the satisfaction from the relationships will be examined.

2. Depressive Mood

Haley (1976) argued that the problems in the relationship are rooted in boundary of power imbalance created by the new undefined hierarchy in the new extended family: the mother-in-law sees herself as filling a position in an hierarchical system while the daughter-in-law wishes to view it as an egalitarian one (Goldner, 1988). Other researchers claim that the source of the tension is related to the empty nest syndrome experienced by the mothers-in-law (Troll et al., 1979; Schulz, 1982; Combrinck-Graham, 1985). In spite of the fact that women are reported as more depressed than men along their life cycle (5-15% compared with 2-12), data regarding women and depression are not conclusive (Johnson, 1988; Gergen, 1990; Umberson, 1992). It has been suggested that not only old women but rather young ones with children are susceptible to depression (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Thus, it is interesting to examine the state of mood both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are holding and the role played in the construction of satisfaction between them.

3. Employment

There is growing documentation that middle-aged women might experience a "positive" empty nest, whereas young married women and mothers might be vulnerable to depression (Lubin, 1980). A growing body of literature suggests that middle-aged women may experience not only a relief from being tied to domesticity and on improved married life (Friedman, 1987; Gergen, 1990), but also a relative financial autonomy (Izraeli, 1979), greater involvement in the workplace (Forcey, 1987; Marcus & Doron, 1988; Izraeli, 1991). This growing sense of autonomy outside the family setting (Pedersen et al., 1994) might be associated with greater life satisfaction (Voydanoff, 1988). It is clearly possible that women who work outside the home (Izraeli, 1991) and those more satisfied in their life in general would also experience a more satisfying relationship with their daughters-in-law.

4. Cognitive Moral Orientation

If problematic relationships within the family exist almost exclusively between the women, then it poses a serious theoretical challenge to the application of Gilligan's (1982) prominent theory of "moral connection" to the realm of the family. Gilligan (1982) suggested that "women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 22), characterised by the ethic of care and responsibility. Gilligan argued that people's description of moral conflicts represent their moral orientations, one of justice (focus on standards, rules or principles for self, other and society) and one of care (focus on harmonious relationships, the avoidance of causing hurt to other, responsibility for self, other and society). She further argued that people tend to focus their attention either on considerations of justice or on considerations of care so that one orientation is predominant and the other minimally represented. In addition, it has been demonstrated that in descriptions of real life moral conflict "care focus" dilemmas are more likely to be presented by females

and "justice focus" dilemmas by males (Johnston, 1988; Gilligan et al., 1990). These (gender-related) modes of moral judgement might be related to modes of self-definition: the mother-in-law/ daughter-in-law may define herself as "connected" (where relationships are experienced as response to others in their own terms, mediated throughout the activity of care and grounded in interdependence) or "separate" (where relationships are experienced in terms of reciprocity, mediated through rules and grounded in roles). Most intriguing is the moral orientation which dominates the resolution of moral dilemmas within the family setting where "intimacy and justice are intertwined" (Okin, 1989). This unique moral complexity seems to bring us to the most important questions regarding mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships: does women's failure to maintain harmony in the family through co-operation imply that they are not predominantly care-orientated? Or that their "connected" image of themselves has no central role in their way of constructing reality? Or that care orientation is not the most preferred moral orientation for resolving these types of family conflicts (Contratto, 1994)?

Even if we argue that boundaries or power imbalance, as originally written, mark the core conflict of these two groups of women, it is not clear what weight these issues are given in the care orientation. If women tend spontaneously to produce the care orientation (Johnston, 1988) or to show a mixture of care and justice orientations (Wingfield & Haste, 1987), then why can they not prevent disrupting relationships in the family? Is it possible that harmonious relationships in the family can be constructed from a "separate" position (Walzer, 1988)? Could they be improved when the focus laid on rights, rules and power balance (Pederson et al., 1994; Davis, 1994)? If the ability to maintain clear boundaries improves over the years, does it reflect a change in orientations (from care to justice)? These questions make the moral orientation of the women involved in these (conflicting) relationships a crucial factor and its association with life satisfaction needs to be examined.

The Israeli setting makes a unique laboratory for the study of the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. On one hand it is a western democracy, open to modernisation and the idea of individualism and detachment. On the other hand, the ideas of interpersonal care and responsibility are highly celebrated in this culture. There is a great emphasis on the Jewish tradition and the centrality of the family (Linn, 1990; Lieblich, 1991). The small geographical distances that enable family closeness may threaten the boundaries of many families (Safir, 1991). The lifelong affiliation of men to the army and the constant security threat create a unique culture of care in support of men (by the women around them) inside and outside the family (Linn & Gilligan, 1990; Swirsky & Safir, 1991). Yet, even recent books focusing on the Israeli family written by feminist sociologists (such as Shamgar-Hendelman & Bar Yosef, 1991) do not address the topic of mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationships as worth studying. It is possible that feminist researchers have not been attracted to this topic as it may pose a serious challenge to their theories regarding "women's ways of knowing" (Belenky et al., 1986; Billig, 1987), their dominant moral orientation (Gilligan, 1982), the pattern of self-development (Gergen, 1990; Jordan et al., 1991), women's self-definition (Peck, 1986) and their general progress in Western society (Faludi, 1991).

The purpose of the present study is to examine the possible connection between situational (occupation, years of marriage) and personality (cognitive style, depressive mood, and personal well-being) variables, and the quality of the relationships between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law.

Four hypotheses were examined:

1. The longer the marriage of the daughter-in-law, the more satisfactory is the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law.

2. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law with high scores on a depressive mood test will be less satisfied with their relationships with each other than will mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law with low scores on this test.

3. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who are occupied away from home will be more satisfied with their relationships with each other than will mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who are not occupied away from home.

4. Justice-orientated mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law will be more satisfied with their relationships with each other than care-orientated mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

Methodology
Subjects

The sample of the study consisted of 154 Israeli (secular Jewish) women of middle and high socio-economic class. Seventy-three of them were mothers-in-law and 81 were daughters-in-law. With the exception of five, they were not matched pairs (i.e. the mothers-in-laws were not affiliated to the daughters-in-law).

Sixty-two (85%) of the mothers-in-law were of European origin. Fifty (68%) mothers-in-law had more than one child. The age of the mothers-in-law ranged between 45-85 years with an average and mode of 61 years. Fifty-six (76%) of the mothers-in-law were married and 14 (19%) were widows. The rest were divorced or were living with a friend. Their average education was 12 years of study. One-third were homemakers at the time of the study. Sixty-six (92%) of the mothers-in-law were living in the same city as their daughters-in-law (of them, 24 (33%) on the same street).

Fifty-eight (78%) of the daughters-in-law were of European origin. The age of the daughters-in-law ranged between 18-52 years (mode = 26, average = 37). Seventy-five (93%) of the daughters-in-law were married (45% for more than 12 years). Sixty-four (78%) had children (from one to four children). Sixty-seven (83%) of the daughters-in-law were living in the same city as their mothers-in-law (of them, 35% on the same street). Sixty-eight (84%) of the daughters-in-law were working outside the home.

Procedure

The study consisted of two stages. In the first stage, 73 mothers-in-law and 81 daughters-in-law were asked to complete a questionnaire that consisted of demographic variables. Some of the demographic variables were considered as boundary variables: marital status, distance in location, number of sons, origin and occupation. The questionnaire also included questions regarding the nature of their

relationship (how would you describe your relationship? how did it change over the years of marriage? could you write down three positive and three negative attributes of your mother/daughter-in-law? what makes the relationship problematic? how would you rank the quality of your relationship with your mother/daughter in law from 0-1007).

In the second stage, 19 mothers-in-law and 15 daughters-in-law were randomly chosen for a semi-clinical, open-ended interview. The women were asked to elaborate on their relationship with their mother/daughter-in-law, and were tested for their depressive mood (Depression Adjective Checklist, Lubin, 1980), for their life satisfaction (Linn et al., 1992), and for their moral orientation (Wingfield & Haste, 1987; Johnston, 1988). To assess the target phenomenon adequately it was necessary to obtain information about the life circumstances in which the relationship took place, the personal significance of the relationship and reasons for it being' personally significant, and the ways in which the person reacted to it (Vossel, 1990). For this purpose the questionnaire contained open-ended questions. The same open-ended questions were presented to the subject in the second stage prior to the tests.

Coding

The demographic variables were obtained from the questionnaire and the first stage of the study. The responses on the open-ended interviews were analysed in terms of common themes (Collaizi, 1978; Mishler, 1986). Lubin's (1980) depressive adjective test contains 34 moods: 22 depressive and 12 non-depressive. The test score consisted of the sum of all the negative adjectives minus the positive statements. Torgoff & Torgoff's (1977) Life Satisfaction scores were given by the subjects who were asked to rate their level of satisfaction (on a scale from 0-100) for the past, present and future on graphical paper. The women's self-definition and moral cognitive style were coded according to Wingfield & Haste (1987) and Lyons (1987).

Results and Discussion

Similar to Duvall's (1954) study, daughters-in-law were more enthusiastic about participating in the study (99%) than mothers-in-law (50%). These figures serve as a strong indication that the study population of the mothers-in-law was a self-selective one, although the criteria of selection are not known. It is hard to know whether those Israeli mothers-in-law who agreed to participate did indeed have a good relationship with their daughters-in-law, or whether they were merely eager to present themselves as having a good relationship, and so were unlike the existing stereotype: "I am not a typical mother-in-law". Unlike Duvall's study, however, most Israeli mothers in-law who agreed to take part in the study were quick to indicate that they had a good relationship with their daughter-in-law: "Our relationship is good, I am a special case and there is no need to add me to the sample".

The asymmetry in the relationship between the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law is presented in Table I.

Mothers-in-law tended to grade the quality of their relationships in a positive way (88), and could not identify many bad attributes in their daughters-in-law (an average of 1.18 attributes out of three). The

satisfaction of the mothers-in-law with the relationship was found to be associated with the number of sons they had (x = 11.4, P=0.007) and the number of daughters-in-law (x = 11.5, P = 0.003). The relationships were reported as better when the mothers-in-law had more than one son, either due to their exposure to a variety of son-mother separations, or to exposures to various types of daughters-in-law. Daughters-in-law who were of non-European origin tended to report good relationships with their mothers-in-law more frequently than daughters-in-law of European origin (x = 6.00, P = 0.01). The simplest explanation of these findings is that women of non-European origin indeed have better relationships with their mothers-in-law. It is possible, however, that due to their Sepharadic tradition these daughters-in-law showed more respect to any parent figure, including the mothers-in-law, or idealised the family relationships when asked to report on them. There was no association between the place of living and the satisfaction with the relationship.

The reasons given by the mothers-in-law for the problematic relationship revolved around the unsuccessful attempt to communicate with their daughters-in-law:

"My daughter-in-law is sensitive to any word that is said to her." "She doesn't want to learn from my experience when it comes to child raising." "She is more attached to her own parents who visit them more." "The only problem is that she does not come to visit us enough." "She is cold. You cannot get close to her." "My daughter-in-law envied the good relationship I have with my son."

Most of the daughters-in-law (75%) were not satisfied with the relationship with their mothers-in-law. They gave the relationship a lower grade than the mothers-in-law gave (66), and the amount of bad attributes ascribed to their mothers-in-law was double (2.4 attributes out of three). The mothers-in-law were reluctant to point out bad attributes ("she is perfect, she does not have other bad qualities"). The daughters-in-law were having difficulties in limiting their portrayal of their mothers-in-law to three attributes. They tended to describe the situation in a general way such as: "She is a witch"/"I don't have enough space to describe her bad characteristics." There was a significant association between the quality of the relationship and the frequency of visits (x = 10.7, P=0.03). The higher the frequency of the mothers-in-law's visits, the higher the mother-in-law's satisfaction with the relationship. A significant link was found between calling the mother-in-law "mother" and satisfaction with the relationships (x = 6.2, P = 0.4). Mothers-in-law who were called "mother" were more satisfied with the relationships with their daughters-in-law. Similarly, daughters-in-law who called their mother-in-law "mother", were more satisfied with the relationships.

Ninety-four per cent of the daughters-in-law who had anticipated problematic relationships before the marriage were not satisfied with their relationship with their mother-in-law (x = 4.507, P= 0.005). The reasons given by the daughters-in-law for bad relationships were mainly boundary crossing: "The problem started with her desire to be involved in our decisions".

There was no indication in our studies that those mothers-in-law who were also daughters-in-law were any better than those who held one role only. Many daughters-in-law who happened to be also mothers-

in-law could only admit: "I swear to god that I will not behave to my daughter-in-law as my mother-in-law treated me. But if you will ask my daughter-in-law she would find numerous things that make her angry."

Years of Marriage

When asked to assess the changes in the relationship over the years, 32 mothers-in-law (out of 73) preferred to skip this question in the questionnaire (whereas only five daughters-in-law preferred to do so). Table II presents the changes in satisfaction with the relationship over the years of marriage.

Table II shows that 45% of the daughters-in-law viewed the relationship as improving over the years, 39% viewed it as stable, and only 16% of the daughters-in-law reported a deterioration in their relationship. Mothers-in-law, however, could not document any stability in the relationship over the years. They split between reporting an improvement or deterioration in their relationship. Most interesting was the nature of this report: whereas the mothers-in-law viewed the improvement in the relationships as a function of attachment ("She has discovered that I'm not so bad"), the daughters-in-law viewed the improvement as a function of detachment ("we see each other less, so we can nag less and the relationship is better").

Daughters-in-law saw a deterioration in the relationship when they tried to preserve their newly created boundaries:

"It became worse when I started defining my own space, and I indicated to her that I would not tolerate interference." "The relationship was perfect until the children were born. Then she came with the advice which I didn't need or want."

Daughters-in-law viewed an improvement in the relationship as a result of learning how to survive the relationship without communication:

"I learned not to respond." "I have stopped being insulted by her, and since I am no longer hurt the relationship is good."

"There is no problem since there is no relationship." "Who said that the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law should have a close relationship? I have married her son, not her!"

Depressive Mood

There was no association between depressive mood and the satisfaction of the daughters-in-law with the relationship. Negative associations between depressive moods and satisfaction with the relationship were found among the mothers-in-law (R = 0.455, P = 0.33). Those who had high levels of depressed moods were not satisfied with their relationship with their daughters-in-law.

Interestingly, however, when asked what score of satisfaction they would be able to give their life when they reached 80 years of age, there was a difference between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law populations. The higher the mother-in-law scored herself when 80, the better was her relationship with her daughter-in-law (R= 0.486, P= 0.002). Mothers-in-law who had a good relationship with their daughters-in-law rated themselves as having a high estimation of future satisfaction. When the relationship was not good, the expectation of the mothers-in-law for the future was grim: "I have no daughters--who will take care of me when I am old? I doubt that my daughters-in-law will do it."

In most cases where the daughter-in-law lacked a mother, or had a bad relationship with her, the relationship with her mother-in-law was better (as reported from both sides). Another interesting finding was the frequent reference to the bride's mother as an obstacle in the construction of harmony. Mothers were envied by the mothers-in-law: "I wish she was as nice to me as she is to her own mother." Some daughters-in-law explained: "A mother-in-law is not a mother and cannot be a mother!"

Employment
In both groups (mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law) there was no association between employment outside the home and satisfaction with the relationship. Nor was the profession of the mothers-in-law rated among the good attributes. Given the Israeli context, where many women who work outside the home still perceive their motherhood as a central attribute of their personality, sometimes more important than their self-actualisation in work (Lieblich, 1987), this rating is not surprising.

Cognitive Moral Orientation
Seventy-six per cent of the women in the sample tended to solve the moral dilemma situation in terms of care and responsibility (Gilligan et al., 1990). Mothers-in-law, although older in age than the daughters-in-law, showed no transition in orientation due to either age or experience. Table III shows the association between the women's moral orientation and satisfaction from the relationship.

Table III suggests that 75% of the mothers-in-law who were justice-orientated (orientated toward keeping boundaries) did not have a good relationship with their daughters-in-law. Most of the mothers-in-law with care orientation (73%) had a good relationship with their daughters-in-law, or at least it was important for them to present the relationship as such. The daughters-in-law were consistent in their bad relationship regardless of the moral orientation.

Discussion
The present study questioned whether there is a problematic relationship between Israeli mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law. It further attempts to examine whether there is an association between selected situational variables (work outside the home, years of marriage), personality variables (moral orientation, depressive mood, and general life satisfaction) and the quality of the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

It seems that being cast in the role of the mother-in-law will most probably override any other situational or personality variable. It created an ongoing asymmetry between the psychological experience of the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law. This asymmetry is presented in Table IV.

A look at Table IV delineates the chronic contradictory world in which the mother-in-law is doomed to live. At the same time that society and the family remove her from being an actively important figure, regardless of her marital status, she is yearning for close and warm relationships with the world and particularly with the new and young woman in her son's life. This trend is reflected in the two distinct moral languages of justice and care (Gilligan, 1982) spoken by the two women. The mothers-in-law in our study were guided by the language of attachment: they tended to ascribe the improvement in the relationships with their daughters-in-law to their good intentions and good personality. The daughters-in-law, however, seemed to assume the language of moral detachment: they viewed their ability to create stable physical or emotional boundaries with their mothers-in-law as an improvement in the relationships. Unlike Gilligan's theory, we tend to see a changing form of self-definition among the women, particularly among the mothers-in-law. Whereas both groups of women tended to describe themselves outside the dilemma situation as connected (and as expected by Gilligan, 1982), this mode of self-definition seems to change in a real-life dilemma situation, at least for the daughters-in-law. When asked to define their self in a real-life dilemma situation, the daughters-in-law geared toward the definition of the self as separate and were more likely to employ justice orientation in the course of their conflict resolution.

These findings seem to call attention to Gilligan's (1982) theory and methodology regarding women's self-definition and its association to moral orientation. Is the definition of self (as "connected" or "separate") recorded by Gilligan the inner self?. In our study, at least, we are not confident that individual's self-definition is context-free. There seem to be two modes of self-presentation: (a) the ideal self-definition--given by both groups of women as connected and (b) the situational self-definition--as associated with age and family role. When asked to define themselves within the existing relationships, daughters-in-law were threatened by the mothers-in-law's "connected" self-definition. The daughters-in-law, in turn, preferred to assume a "separate" definition of self. They tended to resolve their dilemmas by adopting justice moral orientation. This mode of self-definition and moral orientation seemed to trigger the mothers-in-law: they argued that their daughters-in-law were having hostile selves that manifested indifference and reservation.

The adherence to "separate" modes of self-definition and justice orientation accordingly seem to mirror Duvall's findings that the most frequent complaints about the mothers-in-law were targeted toward their exaggerated intervention, whereas the most common complaints about the daughters-in-laws were regarding their indifference and reservations. Duvall (1954), however, did not analyse the developmental changes in the self-definitions along the life cycle and roles.

Having relied on Gilligan's suggestion of the possible connection between self-definition and moral orientation, the findings of changes in self and orientation in this study seem to suggest that we have

measured the women's ideal self rather than their inner self. It might be further questionable whether the different voices of care, which were attributed by Gilligan to a "connected" mode of self-definition and apparently more to women than men, were necessarily the most constructive moral orientation in solving moral dilemmas among the women within the family. It will be interesting to study further Gilligan's (1982) idea of a shift in moral orientation along the life cycle.

Following these findings one should ask: how does it happen that the strong mother is substituted not only by a weak wife (Johnson, 1988) but also by a monstrous mother-in-law?

Limited by these data, part of the negative moral atmosphere surrounded the transition of the strong mother into a position as a legitimate target of jokes and criticism might be paradoxically ascribed to the other important woman figure in the drama: the mother of the bride. It seems that the construction of one female position in the family entails the construction of another one. Thus, we may suggest that the position of the daughter-in-law's mother is defined against the mother-in-law as well, and reflects an asymmetry in need: whereas she is located in the same position in the life cycle, she is not as underprivileged as the mother-in-law. Furthermore, she does not sympathise with her, even if she, as the mother of the bride, might also be a hated mother-in-law. This suggestion calls for further inquiry.

Our data suggest that the Israeli subjects were well aware and influenced by the negative expectations regarding this role--at least in a sense of what the mother-in-law is not: she is not like the daughter-in-law's mother (and she cannot become one); she is not presented as the respected mother of the son, but rather as the one who interferes between the son and his wife; she is not young, fertile and fruitful to society; and she is not the kind of mother-in-law she had probably promised herself to be as a young mother. Surprisingly, for her and for the daughter-in-law, she is haunted by the shadow of her prejudice profile: "I am not a mother-in-law to my daughter-in-law--I am her friend". She is the mother of an unknown figure in this drama--a son, who is excluded from the developing disharmony in the family (Forcey, 1987). He reappears only in the folk literature, as the victim of the uncontrolled love of two women (Nov. 1970).

Why do these women fail to construct what we may term "moral communication"--to broadcast their care or justice concerns without threatening the moral integrity of the other woman? Why is it that the mother-in-law is the only member in the family who is expected to assume a "separate" position of her self for the sake of harmony? At times it seems that the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law create a unique moral culture about which we know very little. If culture based on gender is a problematic agenda (Haste & Baddeley, 1991; Unger & Crawford, 1992), the subcultures of powerful women who are trapped in the "weak" positions assigned to women in the family is even more so. Anthropological studies suggest that each culture constructs rituals that aim to set boundaries of space, language experience and knowledge in order to minimise the potential hazard awaiting the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Feminist researchers, and in particular those who deal with the psychology of moral connection (Gilligan et al., 1990; Brown & Gilligan, 1993), are lagging behind in that they do not even recognise this phenomenon as a topic for inquiry. Most urgent of all is the field of family education. If

family education is not just the concern with relationships per se, but with good and responsible ones, then it should be studied in the light of the concepts of trust, respect, caring, etc. Thus, if family education revolves around topics such as "human development, interpersonal relationships, family interaction, ethnic communications, decision making and problem solving" (Thomas & Arcus, 1992, p. 5), the study of mothers-in law and daughters-in-law cannot be dismissed any longer from the study of women's development and their various modes of silence; even in the studies of feminist moral researchers (Gilligan, 1994). Their different "voices" need to be placed among the most serious questions regarding moral development and education of the family and the society.

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         TABLE I. Significant characteristics of mothers-in-law (MIL)
                 and daughters-in-law (DIL)


Legend for Chart:


A - MIL (n = 73)
B - DIL (n = 81)
C - P


                                        A       B          C


1. Satisfaction with the relationship     75%     25%      0.063
2. Rating the quality of the relationship  88%     67%     0.0004
3 Average of bad attributes                1.18%   2.4%    0.0000


         TABLE II. Changes in the relationship over the years among
                 mothers-in-law (MIL) and daughters-in-law (DIL)[a]


                         MIL (n = 41)                  DIL (n = 75)


Type of change[b]
Better                        40 (49)                     34 (45)
Worse                         21 (51)                     12 (16)
No change                     0                           29 (39)
```
a The numbers in parenthesis indicate percentage. b x = 36.24, P = 0.0083.

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         TABLE III. Numbers of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law
                 according to moral orientation and satisfaction
                 from the relationship[*]


Legend for Chart:


A - Relationship
```

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B - Care(good)
C - Care(bad)
D - Justice(good)
E - Justice(bad)
F - P
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	A	B	C	D
		E	F	
MIL (n = 19)	11 (73)	4 (27)	1 (25)	
		3 (75)	x = 3.11; 0.07	
DIL (n = 15)	2 (20)	8 (80)	1 (20)	
		4 (80)	NS; 0.75	

* The numbers in parentheses indicate percentage with the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law and care and justice orientation who rated satisfaction and high or low.

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          TABLE IV. A comparison in role expectations between the
                     mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law

Legend for Chart:

A - The daughter-in-law--mean age = 37 years
B - The mother-in-law--mean age = 61 years
```

A	B
Wife	Wife or widow
Mother of children who still need her	Mother of children who do not need her
Still valuable to society (fertile)	Not as valuable to society (not fertile)
Sexually attractive	Not sexually attractive
Gains--children, friends, status	Losses--spouse, friends, status
Interested in closed boundaries	Interested in open boundaries

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Plum print