2015

Perceptions of Empty Nest Mothers From Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds With Boomerang Kids

Banning Kent Lary
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Banning Lary

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Susana Verdinelli, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Stephen Lifrak, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Tracy Mallett, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

Perceptions of Empty Nest Mothers From Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds

With Boomerang Kids

by

Banning Kent Lary

BA, University of Texas at Austin, 1970

MS, Walden University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2015

Abstract

In the United States, a growing number of young people are failing to launch into self-sufficiency, a characteristic of adulthood recognized by most cultural groups. These "boomerang children" return home and interrupt the life course development of their "empty nest" mothers who must suspend plans for self-development. How mothers from different socioeconomic backgrounds cope with this countertransitional phenomenon while preparing their children for successful relaunch is not well known. Elder's life course paradigm provided the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study. Perceptions were collected from an ethnically diverse group of 23 empty nest mothers with 30 boomerang children and seven boomerang grandchildren from five U.S. states, recruited using criterion-based convenience sample. Data were collected through recorded telephone interviews that were transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Saldana's codes-categories-emergent themes model. The findings revealed that boomerang children caused emotional and financial distress, a reassessment of parenting skills, and that boomerang grandchildren reinvigorated the mother's prime identity as a caregiver. These findings were consistent regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. This study contributes to the empirical literature by depicting the boomerang phenomenon as a shift in cultural expectations which represents a new phase in the life course development paradigm. Findings from this study can also guide the work of future researchers, assist mental health counselors who deal with these issues, and inform school guidance counselors who design career trajectories for students.

Perceptions of Empty Nest Mothers From Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds With Boomerang Kids

by

Banning Kent Lary

BA, University of Texas at Austin, 1970

MS, Walden University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2015

Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my wife, Valerie, and my three daughters, Venus, Alexandra and Kristin, and to my four granddaughters, Olivia, Jules, Emily and Kaya, the source of inspiration for this work.

This study is also dedicated to my loving mother, who raised four boys and has always been a bastion of stability, morality, and high ideals.

This study is also dedicated to my father, Dr. Banning Gray Lary, surgeon and medical pioneer, who passed away before I was able to complete this work. My father was a constant example of positive mental attitude, hard work, discipline, high ethics and perseverance. He provided a constant reminder that learning is a lifelong process and service to one's fellow man is our most noble purpose.

This study is also dedicated to my brothers, Scott, Todd, and Brett, who have led exemplary lives and provided me with a source of strength, balance and loyalty.

I am grateful for the love and influence of my family and strive to uphold the high standards which guide our every thought, word and action.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the many fine instructors I have had the pleasure to learn from and be challenged by at Walden University. This six-year journey of engaging in online learning has been one of the most interesting, rewarding and useful things I have ever done. Without the quality of people, the ease of the web-based classroom and the superior organization of research materials in the library, I never would have completed this course of study. In particular, I want to acknowledge my Committee Chair, Dr. Susana Verdinelli, whose expert guidance, thorough and timely replies to my many questions and drafts, has shepherded my efforts and kept me on course these many months. It was Dr. Verdinelli who opened my eyes to the efficacy of qualitative research, my chosen methodology for this research.

I also want to acknowledge Dr. Stephen Lifrak, my Committee Member, with whom I had learned from in several courses before we met in person at residency. Dr. Lifrak's knowledge and experience have provided inspiration and encouragement throughout the process. I would also like to acknowledge the people who work in the Walden Library; their tireless work at improving access to materials has resulted in a system that is easy to use and very thorough. And, a special thanks to everyone working at Walden, from Monique Brown, my registrar, who first raised my interest, to those who answer the online chats, to the guidance counselors and financial service people, to the behind-the-scenes support personnel who provide a first-rate experience to the student who wants to learn and succeed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The life course perspective describes psychological development in terms of life changing events. A mother enters the *empty nest* phase when her last child leaves home to attain self-sufficiency in the world. When the child fails at this selfsufficiency due to the loss of job, a relationship break-up, or economic reasons and returns to live in the parental home, they are referred to using the term *boomerang child*. This study was designed to explore the perceptions of a group of empty nest mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds who had boomerang children. The study was designed extract the meaning, structure and essence of their shared lived experience of the phenomenon, per the guidelines of Moustakas (1994).

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how living with a boomerang child impacts mothers in the United States. It collected information from an ethnically diverse sample of mothers in this transitional life phase. Knowledge gained from this exploration affords new insights into what works, and what does not work in this coresidency dyad, so as to inform others so engaged. This research employed a qualitative methodology to study the phenomenon under examination. Participants in this study consisted of 23 empty nest mothers from five state with 30 boomerang children and seven boomerang grandchildren.

This chapter begins with background research and an overview of the content. A statement of the research problem follows, indicating its timeliness, relevance and

significance. The purpose and intention of this research, including the research questions, preface the next sections which present the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework for the study, and the qualitative tradition to be employed. Key terms are defined, and the study's assumptions, delimitations and limitations are described. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's potential for creating positive social change and implications for education and social policy.

Background of the Study

When the last child in a household leaves home to make their own way in the world, their mother enters what is known as the empty nest phase of female human development. Women in this phase experience varying degrees of intensity of similar life challenges (Adelmann et al, 1989; Arpanantikul, 2004; Axelson, 1960; Baruch, & Barnett, 1986; diScalea, 2012). These challenges include marital issues, career or employment, physical body and appearance, spiritual orientation, end of life issues, midlife crisis, value changes, ego-resiliency, identity, and sustaining happiness or subjective well-being. The end of childrearing is characterized by both positive and negative constructs that challenge the empty nest mothers' psychological and emotional balance.

Parental attachment issues sometimes cause separation anxiety. This anxiety begins with the anticipation of the last child leaving home, and affect the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of the entire family (Hill, Fonagy, Safier, & Sargent, 2003; Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, & Widaman, 2001). With no child in the home

to nurture and care for, many empty nest mothers experience a loss of purpose, which can lead to confusion, depression and loss of identity (Adelmann, Antonnucci, Crohan, & Coleman, 1989; Mitchell, & Lovegreen, 2009). To fill this void and regenerate her ego-identity, a woman often has to reinvent herself through examining external control influences, coming to grips with the exigencies of midlife, clarifying future goals, and exerting effort toward their fulfillment (Howell & Beth, 2002). The consequences of emptynesting are not entirely negative. Unresolved marital relationship issues usually come to the forefront once the last child leaves home, allowing the parents to reconnect with one another as husband and wife (Clay, 2003). Once an empty nest mother works her way through the negative constructs, she often begins to experience a sense of relief, a satisfaction for a job well done, a newfound sense of personal freedom, resulting in an increase in the quality of her life experience (Clay, 2003).

The traditional life stage development of empty nest mothers has been impacted by the recent phenomenon of *boomerang children*: young adult men and women who leave home to make it on their own in the world, but fail and ultimately return home. The primary reasons for this failure, or retrograde life course development, include a loss of job, a relationship break-up, or financial difficulties, so that living at home with a parent becomes their best or only option. During the period from the 1980 to 2015, the number of young adults living under their parents' roofs has doubled (Parker, 2012), causing disruption in the normal life course transition of their empty nest mothers. Instead of grappling with exigent personal issues, mothers must regress with her boomerang child,

putting her plans for rediscovery and advancement on hold (Sage & Johnson, 2012). She must reexamine her work as a preparatory agent whose charge failed to launch, regroup and reevaluate her child rearing acumen, and spend time taking care of the unfinished business of child rearing and promoting self-sufficiency. This study is concerned only with perceptions of female mothers as traditionally mothers have been the primary caregivers to their children.

The societal expectations of most cultures worldwide, in both developed and undevellped countries, equate adulthood with achieving economic self-sufficiency (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008). When a boomerang child returns home, many parents internally feel a sense of guilt, shame, resentment and anger, reflected from the local culture and/or societal group to which the family belongs (Settersten, & Ray, 2010). The resulting dependency requires that adult roles be renegotiated between parent(s) and child, where broken bonds must be reformed in a new way (Seagull, 2013). This renegotiation includes practical exigencies such as living space, curfew hours, household chores, and sharing expenses (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008). For example, marital intimacy and satisfaction can be adversely impacted (Dennerstein, Dudley, & Guthrie, 2002) and in some cases boomerang kids bring children of their own back into the parental home, or *boomerang grandchildren*. The acceptance and workability of this multigenerational dynamic is often a function of cultural heritage (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reezek, 2010). On the positive side, admitting boomerang children back into the home

can ease the mother's transition into middle age, allow her time to take care of unfinished business, or provide comfort and relationship stability (Sage & Johnson, 2012).

Researchers have studied empty nest mothers to identify their common life experiences. Older studies focused on the negative attributes of the empty nest phase (Deykin, Klerman, & Soloman, 1966). More recent studies have looked at variations in intensity, underlying causes of negative and positive attributes, and life satisfaction before and after the advent of the empty nest (Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008; Ryff, & Seltzer, 1996; Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). Other studies have reported on how empty nest mothers experience positive aspects of freedom, liberation, renewed life purpose and identity reformation (Friedan, 2010; Glenn, 1975; Tallmer, 1986). All of these studies and others have reached similar conclusions about the life course exigencies of empty nest mothers. These conclusions form a stable foundation against which to analyze data derived from this study.

Boomerang children have been studied only recently as this growing phenomenon has become noticed by social science researchers. Mitchell (2008) delved into the causes of the boomerang phenomenon and concluded that it was primarily caused by relationship breakups, loss of jobs, and financial difficulties. Other researchers have focused on compiling statistics that delineate adult children living at home, and in documenting the cultural and socioeconomic profiles of families involved (Parker, 2012; Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). The experience of empty nest mothers has generally been addressed through quantitative analyses of self-reporting surveys. The literature

review for this study did not identify any definitive, in-depth qualitative studies that explored the specific challenges these mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds face when living with their boomerang children. This study was designed to investigate how these mothers perceived their life experiences, with a specific focus on how mothers from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds coped with the changes that boomerangers imposed on their life course development.

Problem Statement

Research indicates boomerang children living at home creates both positive and negative experiences for their mothers which affect their life experience (Parker, 2012). In 2010, nearly 22% of young adults ages 25-34 were residing in the parental home, up from 11% in 1980 This countertransitional life course development of both the boomerang kids and their mothers has created a problem recognized by sociologists, economists, psychologists, and other social scientists. This study was designed in part to address a research gap consisting of a lack of previous qualitative phenomenological studies that specifically examined mother / boomerang child dyads from diverse ethnic backgrounds with respect to understanding common shared experiences from the mothers' points of view.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of empty nest mothers living in the same household with their boomerang children. This mutual choice has been shown to significantly affect the life course

development of both the child and the participant mothers who had to renegotiate adult roles, work out practical details of coresidency, find ways to get along and solve problems. The understanding derived from this research is intended to help other women faced with these challenges manage their lives, and to guide policy makers in schools and social services to provide career counseling to students that will direct them toward occupations that will result in self-sufficiency.

Research Questions

The research questions and subquestions for this study were:

- RQ_1: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living in the empty nest?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their daily life activities?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their marital relationship?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their personal need fulfillment?
- RQ_2: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?
    - SQ: What were previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children expectations about coresidency before their children returned home?

- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children cope with the boomerang child countertransition?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children renegotiate coresidency exigencies?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the influence of boomerang children on their personal need fulfillment?

Theoretical / Conceptual Foundation

This study was grounded in the context of the shared family life experience in the parental home, specifically around the empty nest creatd when the last child left home to make it on their own, then one or more children having to return home due to the inability to succeed in the world. According to the life course perspective, human development is the result of a confluence of biological, social, ecological, and psychology forces acting on the organism along an age-norm continuum from the cradle to the grave (Elder, 1995, 1998, 2000). A key event in this perspective is when the last child in a family leaves home and becomes self-sufficient. This creates a life course event commonly referred to as the *empty nest stage* for the parental female. While two-male parental households do exist in the United States, this study is concerned only with perceptions of female mothers, as traditionally mothers have been the primary caregivers to their children.

When a child fails to successfully launch into the world, a countertransitional phase of the life course paradigm emerges. For adults, achieving economic self-

sufficiency is a life stage event recognized by most cultural groups as a requirement for adulthood (Arnett, 2003). The boomerang child phenomenon represents a new stage of life course development, identified by Pickardt (2011) as a "trial independence." This experimental phase which is becoming more the norm than the exception in certain socioeconomic pockets of America, thereby representing a shift cultural expectations. This study was specifically designed to explore the interaction of the empty nest phase of the life course theory with the countertransitional boomerang child .

Nature of the Study

This study examined the life experiences of 23 empty nest mothers of varying ethnicities who permitted their boomerang children to return to the parental home to reside. This study employed the qualitative phenomenological tradition using in-depth semistructured interviews as the primary data collection method. Participants were selected using a purposeful criterion-based sample strategy of convenience that focused the study on a population with direct experience of the phenomenon being studied: empty nest mothers with boomerang children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

I gave potential participants who met the screening criteria and agree to participate a proper informed consent according to IRB and APA ethical provisions. Participants' identities were protected using pseudonyms (colors) for data organization, analysis and coding purposes. In-depth interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded on digital audio media. Recordings were verbatim-transcribed. Trustworthiness of data was achieved through using the verbatim transcripts to locate similarities and

differences between the participants and comparing these to previous studies. Key phrases and data rich statements were clustered to form categories from which themes emerged. Data were then analyzed and findings were interpreted. These findings will be disseminated through professional journals and popular media.

Definition of Terms

Boomerang Child: A child who left the parental home to make it on their own, but had to return home for a variety of personal, relationship and/or financial reasons (Mitchell, & Gee, 1996).

Boomerang grandchild: A young child who accompanied their boomerang parent(s) to live back in the parental home with their grandparents (Livingston, 2013; Mitchell, 2008)

Empty nest: A term referring to a parental home after the last child has departed and attempted self-sufficiency (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan, & Coleman, 1989).

Empty nester: A mother who last child has left home, most often in middle-age who experiences a variety of psychological, social and emotional changes ranging from despair to elation (Arp & Arp, 2001).

Experimental life course phase: A term referring to a new phase in the life course model representing a shift in cultural expectations. This phase indicates when a child leaves home to become self-reliant but fails, and therefore must regress to life back home with their parents and is referred to as a boomerang child (Kins, & Beyers, 2010; Seiffge-Krenke, 2013).

Life course perspective: A perspective of human development as the result of a confluence of biological, social, ecological, and psychology forces acting on the organism along an age-norm continuum from the cradle to the grave (Elder, 1995).

Assumptions

This study had five primary assumptions that were made based on my personal experience and the literature review findings concerning empty nesters and boomerang children. The first assumption was that the empty nest mothers' normal life course progression is interrupted by the return of a boomerang child into the home. This assumption was based on the life course paradigm where mothers advance from one life stage to another based or key events. The second assumption was that boomerang children in the United States are returning home more frequently than they have in the past. This assumption was based on statistics which show the return rate has doubled in the past three decades. A third assumption was that because adult children return home, roles need to be renegotiated with their parents. This was based on the conceptual framework underpinning this study which encapsulates research discussed in the literature review.

The fourth assumption was that coresidency arrangements with boomerang children can lessen or enhance the mother's life experience. This was based on prevailing thinking in the field which has shown both positive and negative constructs to be associated with the coresidency experience. The fifth assumption was that there are certain thoughts, actions, and behaviors that can facilitate co-operation and harmony in

the home. This was based on the observation there are always things which can help or hinder personal co-relations among human beings. These five assumptions propelled the study forward into an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of empty nest mothers living with their boomerang children.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on the life experience of empty nest mothers with boomerang children, a narrow construct compared to the general life experience of motherhood. Once a mother has spent decades raising her children and preparing them to make their way in the world as self-realized human beings, she passes into the next phase of human development. This ideally would be characterized with feelings of a job well done. When a child fails to achieve total self-sufficiency and must return home, often as their last option, it can affect the mother's life experience negatively as she must reassess her work, or regress into a stage of life she thought was over. Conversely, there are enhancing benefits to this countertransitional phase, such as providing companionship or allowing the mother and child to complete unfinished developmental tasks which will better prepare the child for a successful relaunch.

In order to study this shared phenomenon, the defined sample was specific, whereas the mother: (a) must have had her last child leave home for three months or more to make it on their own, (b) must have had the child return home to live due to failed circumstances, and (c) must have been living back in the parental home for at least three months. The child could be either male or female and could either return home alone or

with a child, or a boomerang grandchild. I purposefully selected a culturally mixed sample which included White, Black, Hispanic and Asian empty nest mothers with boomerang children, with and/or without boomerang grandchildren. Most other studies which have approached this subject have been done by females and, as I am a male, this makes this study unique.

Limitations

I initially planned to conduct this study within the greater geographical area of Lexington, Kentucky, for reasons of expediency and practicality. Lexington is a medium-sized U. S. city with a population of roughly 300,000. However, I quickly found it difficult to obtain a sample which approximated my original criteria. I then decided to expand the reaches of my study to include the territorial United States and was able to obtain a sample of 23 qualified participants from Lexington and five other cities: New York, San Francisco, Miami, San Antonio and Houston.

The phenomenological research approach was chosen for the potential to mine rich and meaningful data which can help elucidate problems and solutions which can make the mother/child dyad more harmonious in its interaction, and enhance or detract from the mothers' life experience. Dependability, and other indications of trustworthiness, were limited by the honesty and willingness of the participants to express the details of their experiences, relative to the accuracy of their perceptions and descriptive eloquence.

I expected to find that one or more of the female boomerang children would return home with a child of their own, due to separation, divorce or giving birth out of wedlock. The 23 participant mothers selected for this study had 30 boomerang children collectively with seven boomerang grandchildren. This provided me with a glimpse of an expanded family dynamic, where three generations coexisted under one roof instead of just two.

My understanding of this topic is informed by my experience as a father living with an empty nest mother for two years, who then admitted a boomerang child and boomerang grandchild in to the home. They lived with us for a year and a half, during which time we were able to complete the business of child raising, helped enable our daughter to find employment, achieve financial self-sufficiency and move out on her own. I believe that this experience did not bias me in any way about this study, but instead provided me with an informed perspective from which to focus interview questions and collect relevant data. It also facilitated rapport development with my participants who, I felt, provided more candid and in-depth information due to our common shared experience. Aware and vigilant, I never found myself becoming subjective in any way during the course of this study, and practiced entering the *epoche* as discussed in Chapter 3.

Significance

The rationale for this study comes from the researcher's desire to uncover ways the empty nest mother / boomerang child coresidency arrangement can be made more

harmonious and fulfilling. A primary contribution of this study is an understanding of what works and what doesn't work within the empty nest mother and boomerang child dyad, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. That is, how they communicate, and what they do to work out any difficulties in their coresidency arrangement. The goals being to enhance the empty nest mothers' life experience and prepare the boomerang child for successful relaunch into self-sufficiency in the outside world. This data, when disseminated through professional journals and the popular media, will be useful to help millions of people who enter this situation every year in the United States and other countries. They will realize they are not alone in these difficult life circumstances, and that there are things which can be done to make this situation more positive and productive. Counselors and policy makers who deal with these issues will become more fully informed, resulting in better and more workable decisions.

Summary and Transition

This chapter has introduced the life course perspective as the theoretical / conceptual framework within which to understand the empty nest mother with boomerang child experiential phenomena. The background and context of this study have been summarized in anticipation of a more in-depth discussion in Chapter 1. The research problem, purpose and questions have been stated along with assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. Key terms have been defined and references provided. And, the significance of this research, for personal, academic and professional applications, has

been previewed. More complete information about these topics is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review examines research on the physical, psychological, and emotional development of middle-age women in the empty nest stage of life. This stage is usually considered to begin when the youngest child leaves home and strikes out on their own. Aspects of the empty nest stage include: attachment and separation, subjective well-being, marital satisfaction, employment, finances, identity and individuation within cultural and ecological framing. This review also examines literature on the growing phenomenon of boomerang children who return home to live for an extended period of time and how their empty nest mothers perceive their life experiences. This change in family dynamics includes: lengthened young adult transition, revised cultural expectations, renegotiation of adult roles, influences on marital satisfaction, personal life fulfillment, and boomerang grandchildren. The theoretical foundation of the life course perspective is established followed by the conceptual framework of the study.

Literature Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted using Walden's library article search feature of these databases: PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, MEDLINE, PsycCRITIQUES, Psyc EXTRA, PsycINFO, LGBT Life with Full Text, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and SocINDEX with Full Text. Searches were performed at various times between June 2013 and April 2014 using a variety of key words and key word pairs, including: empty nest, empty nest syndrome, nest, female mid-life, adult

female development, women, transition, separation, individuation, adult life-cycle, midlife crisis, attachment, well-being, subjective well-being, martial happiness, separation, adulthood, and postparental. These keywords were searched using several layers of applicability, first using the title line, then the abstract designation and finally within the whole text. Databases were searched for all relevant publications between 1966, when the term *empty nest* first appeared in a peer-reviewed journal article title (Deykin, Jacobson, Klerman & Soloman, 1966), and 2014. Thousands of results were returned and examined for relevance to the present study. Some of these individual searches returned hundreds of results, such as the search using *women + midlife* which returned articles in 1,221 separate publications I culled by reading cited descriptions.

During the review and writing process, I encountered the phenomenon of boomerang kids, children who left home and created the empty nest, only later to return home and repopulate the nest. I began a new round of searches using the same databases with the keywords: human / lifespan + development + theory / theories interchanging the terms adolescent / adolescence, adult, young adult, fledgling adult, adolescent development, and boomerang kids. I then performed a separate article title search using the terms family + dynamics and family + ecology which yielded some excellent current references. The notion of "attachment" began to appear prominently as breaking the parental bonds and then returning to the nest is a kind of reattachment. I thus searched the databases using the term attachment in conjunction with a variety of other terms such as parental, child-parent, parental + reattachment, and so forth.

Reading and absorbing what had been written about empty nest mothers and boomerang kids, there seemed to be a missing component which linked the two phenomena from the mothers' points of view: How did the mothers perceive their own life experience when children they had detached from returned to live in the parental home? This realization necessitated another literature search about life satisfaction and its determinants. The key search terms that I employed singularly and in combination were: life + satisfaction, happiness, well-being, subjective + well-being, mid-life + satisfaction, and needs + satisfaction. This led me into the area of life course development, and specifically to life course perspective theory, which unified all the elements of my study. I conducted another literature search to obtain current thinking about developmental theories and life course using these keywords: life + course + perspective, life + event, human + developmental + theories, life + stage, life + transitions, and family + transitions. These searches provided me with hundreds of articles published during the past two decades which formed the basis for my theoretical foundation. References cited in all the works collected were also examined for their relevance to the present topic and obtained where applicable and practical.

I also located applicable dissertations in the Walden and ProQuest dissertation databases using the same keywords. These searches revealed several dozen dissertations which were examined for relevance, and referred to where applicable. I also wanted to read dissertations using the research methodology I intended to employ in this study, and searched both the Walden and the ProQuest dissertation databases using various

combinations of keywords: qualitative, phenomenological, women, psychology, empty nest, and life course. Key dissertations and articles referenced, but not readily available within the Walden databases, were requested from the library using the Iliad document delivery service. Most of these requests were returned unfulfilled as the documents were not available or their cost exceeded the $55 threshold. Those able to be retrieved became part of the collection of publications amassed for consideration within this review.

Respecting feedback from my dissertation chair, Dr. Susana Verdinelli, I performed several more database searches to locate articles in reference to certain areas she felt my proposal needed for more depth and understanding. These searches were made using various combinations of these keywords: intergenerational, multigenerational, family, grandparent, diverse, ethnic, ethnicity, parent, grandparent, child, Hispanic, Asian, Black, African-American, white, and Caucasian. These searches returned articles containing information which allowed me to expand the viability of focusing this study on ethnic diversity in multigenerational households, incorporating both empty nest mothers, boomerang children and grandchildren.

To be thorough, online searches using Google and Google Scholar were conducted using the same key words and chronological search criteria, resulting in relevant publications in consumer and quasi-professional journals, both in print and electronic formats. These articles were studied and included where applicable within this chapter. In addition, a dozen books written for the popular audience were purchased and studied, also reported in this chapter.

Theoretical Foundation: The Life Course Perspective

The empty nest and boomerang child phenomena can best be viewed as life course stages in human development with interpersonal implications. Erik Erikson defined human development into eight stages where growth occurs by overcoming psychosocial conflicts (Slater, 2003). Piaget depicted four stages of human cognitive development "wherein the individual constructs individually or solitarily" (Lourenco, 2012, p. 282), while Vygotsky saw development being facilitated by close proximity to more able like others (Lourenco). Bandura's social cognitive theory views individuals as social agents who play a key role in their own development "within a broad network of sociostructural influences" (Bandura, 2001, p. 1). Kohlberg saw human development as a continual restructuring the concept of self within moral standards and values of a social group (Hayes, 1994). Bronfenbrenner's human ecology theory depicts five dynamic environmental systems with which an individual interacts and development change results (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). These are all good models for understanding human development.

However, the purposes of this study are best served by aligning its conceptual framework with the life course perspective formulated by Elder, which incorporates characteristics of these theories into a composite model which addresses both the empty nest and the boomerang child phases of human development (Elder, 1998, & 2000). The life course perspective views human development as the result of a confluence of biological, social, ecological and psychology forces acting on an organism along an age-

norm continuum from the cradle to the grave. For every age, according to Elder, there is a socially expected set of life course events, from birth through childhood and adolescence, to maturity, individuation and self-sufficiency, to selecting a mate, having children, launching children, aging and finally expiring. One's life course occurs within a historical trajectory, relative to their position in space and time, characterized by a unique set of challenges, barriers, variables and opportunities. Those who develop on schedule are seen as well-adjusted and supported by the environment, while those who develop ahead or behind schedule are vulnerable to personal problems or sanctions imposed by the social milieu.

Figure 1 encapsulates the framework of the life course paradigm through four interrelated elements (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 11). Development of the human agency occurs when the individual meets their needs by adapting behavior to the environment. One's existence in space and time exists within geographical and cultural boundaries. A person's life is irrevocably linked, or socially integrated into other people's lives through culture, work, play and other social interactions (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 9). Timing is the organizational component where one's chronological age, exigencies imposed by the environment, interpersonal relationships, opportunities, personal choices, and other factors determine the life course trajectories of the individual.

The life course paradigm provides a useful anchoring and organizing structure for the findings of this qualitative study, as well as a method for framing perceptions of life events relevant to understanding the experiences of the boomerang child / empty nest

parent dyad. Central to the life course paradigm, and to this study, is the reproductive cycle as parents and their children are inexorably linked throughout the duration of their lives, in both good times and bad. Should a young man grow up, finish college 'on schedule' at age 21, secure good career employment, wait to marry and have children until he has achieved a comfortable level of disposable income, he will be rewarded with respect and admiration from his parents and social group, while enjoying autonomy and self-esteem. Conversely, should an unmarried daughter get pregnant at fourteen, drop out of high school, be unable to find a job or a mate, and thus relegated to living under her parents' roof and being dependent on her parents emotionally and financially, she will not experience the growth benefits which accompany self-sufficiency.

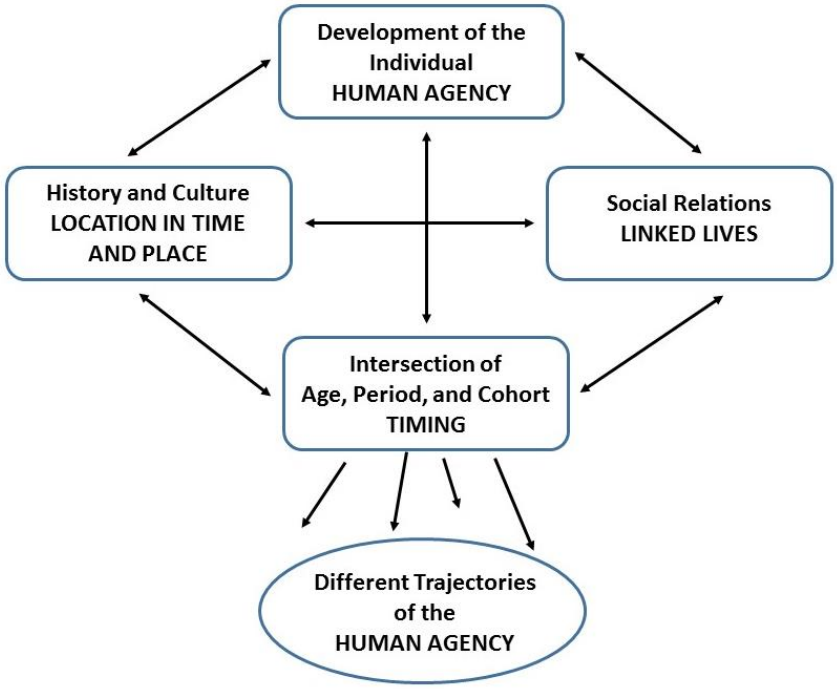


Figure 1: The four key elements of the Life Course Paradigm. Adapted from *Methods in Life Course*

The ordering of key life events along the continuum of chronological age serves as a social measuring stick where a person should be, and what he or she should be doing, compared to their birth cohort. The life course perspective derives from three age-based perspectives: "*lifetime* and its focus on the process of aging from birth to death; *social time*, as expressed in the age patterning of social roles and career lines; and *historical time*, location of the individual in the historical process through cohort membership" (Elder, 1975, p. 186). A child's failed marriage or job loss can return a child to the nest, thus causing postponement of his parents' plans for retirement, change of residence, or other plans, enveloping the parents in a countertransitional phase of life course deviation.

The life course perspective focuses on external social forces which affect human development in conjunction with internal reactions to these forces as manifested in thinking and behavior. Normal biological development makes it possible for a couple to physically conceive a child before they are emotionally, psychologically or financially able. This transfers partial responsibility to the parents who offer support, motivated by genetic survival and personal feelings about their inability to have done a proper job of childrearing. This implies the notion of mutual embeddedness, the parents in the lives of the children, and the children in the lives of the parents, throughout the age-graded events of the life course (Elder, 1995). Living together under one roof in coresidency, this mutual embeddedness is evident in practical agreements about household chores, living

arrangements and expenses, and extends to more ethereal constructs of honesty, trust and loyalty.

Predictability along one's life course promotes social confidence, and when a life course role takes a step backward, social comfort is affected. Timing is considered to be a factor in life-course development from two perspectives: the historical time related to events in the world, and events within the family (Elder, 1995). Transitions in role involvement and personal identity are a key element life course theory, especially in the social arena of the family (Hagestad, 1988). A dependent child is expected to become an independent adolescent, who becomes a self-sufficient breadwinner, who becomes a supportive father and then a grandfather. Countertransitions are indicated when a young adult loses self-sufficiency and becomes again dependent on his parents when he or she moves back home. "Transitions which are not anticipated or which occur off-time are much more problematic than changes which happen as expected" (p. 405). The life course model provides a framework within which to understand the experiences of the empty nest mothers in relation to her boomerang children and/or grandchildren, and her ensuing perceptions about her life experience during this countertransitional phase of modern American family life.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study employs the life course perspective to understand the phenomenon created in a family dynamic when empty nest mothers receive their boomerang children back into the home. Most of the mothers in this study

are in or near middle age and are experiencing normal age-related changes in their physical and emotional well-being. When they allow adult children back into the home, mothers had to make adjustments in both their physical living arrangements and the way they spend their time. In some cases boomerang children enhanced their life satisfaction, and in other cases the mothers' life enjoyment was curtailed or hampered. Exigent factors include: socioeconomic status and living costs; the willingness and ability of the mother and child to renegotiate roles; effects of the cohabitation on marital satisfaction and parental personal life fulfillment; and, the boomerang child's life event promotions enabled by this arrangement.

Previous studies have shown that empty nest mothers experience a wide range of emotional and psychological challenges when their last child leaves home and strikes out on their own. These symptoms range from severe separation anxiety and sense of loss to feelings of freedom and liberation (Axelson, 1960; Borland, 1982; Glenn, 1975; Harkins, 1978; Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009; Tallmer, 1986). This study revealed how these challenges were dealt with prior to, and after, the boomerang child reentered the home and took up co-residence. This study also revealed the expectations and trepidations held by the participant mothers against the reality of what actually happened. A main area of discovery showed how this changing dynamic revealed itself though life experience perceptions of the boomerang children's' mothers.

Figure 2. Perceptions of emoty nest mothers with boomerang children.

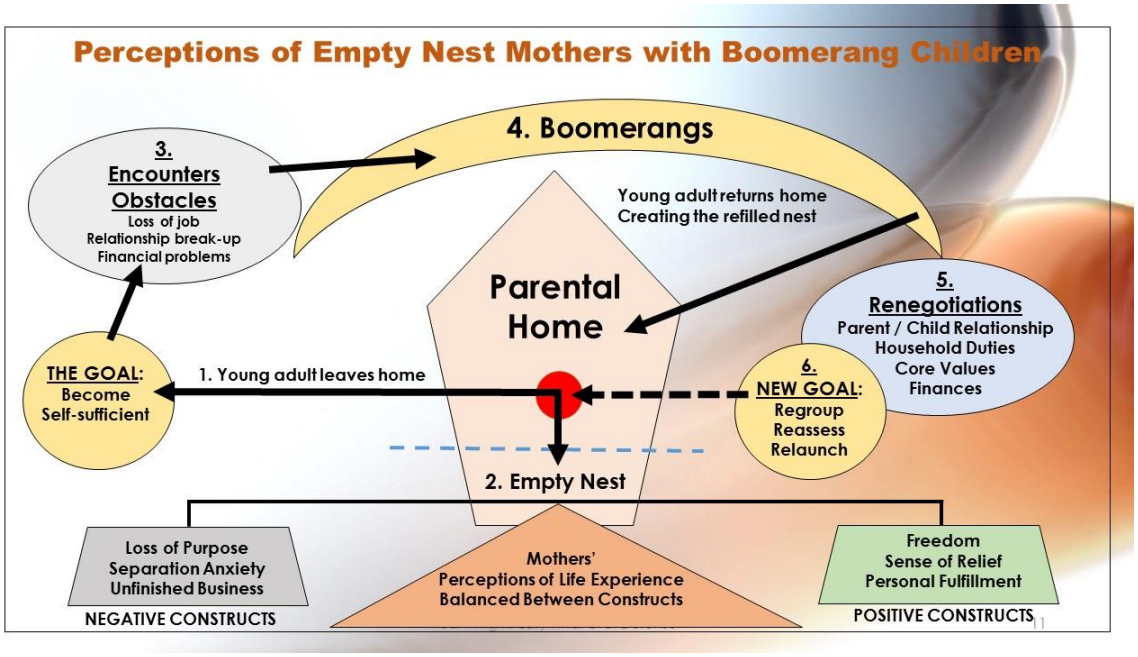


Figure 2 illustrates the influences imposed by this changing dynamic on the empty nest mothers' life experiences. The conceptual framework for this study begins to take shape when the last child leaves home. This allows the child's mother to enter the empty nest phase of human development where she must balance the positive (freedom, sense of relief, personal fulfillment) and negative (loss of purpose, separation anxiety, unfinished business) constructs associated with the experience.

When the child fails to achieve their goal of self-sufficiency due to loss of employment, relationship break-up or financial problems, the child returns home, refilling the nest. When the mother readmits the child back into the parental home, this creates a countertransitional phase for both the mother and the child. To make things

work out, the mother and child must renegotiate their relationship, divide household duties, establish core values, and work out the financial arrangement regarding expenses. The degree to which the mother can effectively balance the positive and negative constructs associated with the dual phenomena, will determine her perceptions of whether or not this arrangement is positive or negative experience. Like life in general, there are good days and bad days, and this study revealed a wide range of perceptions provoked by the day-to-day vicissitudes of this revisited familial dyad.

Conceptual framework analysis involved constant comparison between the life course perspective and data derived from in-depth personal interviews of the participants relative to the constructs discussed in this chapter. Baseline data of mother and child ages, occupations, educational attainment, religious, ethnic and cultural persuasions established a point of reference. Participant mothers were selected if their last child had been away from home for at least six months and has been living back at home for at least six months.

Literature Review: The "Empty Nest"

The conception of the empty nest phenomenon as a time of stress, anxiety, and depression traces back to Freud. Freud's notion of melancholia was rooted in replacing a loved person who died or is lost (Freud, 1917). Early psychoanalysts described observations of depressed women, citing the cause to be the loss of parentship when children left home, leaving the mother with an empty nest. This notion was affirmed in a seminal study of 16 hospitalized middle-aged women (median age 59 years), where the

empty nest syndrome was devised to be the "temporal association of clinical depression with the cessation of child rearing" (Deykin, Jacobson, Klerman & Soloman, 1966, p. 1422). The findings were presented by the authors at the 121st annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association (New York, NY, May 1-7, 1965) and subsequently published as the seminal article titled, *The empty nest: Psychosocial aspects of conflict between depressed women and their grown children* (1966). This was the first time the term *empty nest* was used in print. Depression and the end of child rearing became inexorably linked in the media following this study, spawning a plethora of subsequent studies and books which perpetuated the notion that women, like female birds, had served their primary purpose when their offspring left the home (nest) and went off to make their way in the world alone without their parents.

Empty Nest Syndrome has never been classified as a psychological or a psychiatric disorder, including in the current edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).* For all practical purposes, the term empty nest syndrome belongs more to popular culture than it does to science. I have noticed that some women wince when they hear the term *empty nester* used in reference to themselves, the intention being to compare their child rearing efforts to those of a bird. Searching online for current popular data, I came upon a website with a headline that boldly stated "Don't Call me an Empty Nester" (Benjamin, 2013). This website was promoting a contest seeking a different name for this transitional period in a woman's life, and offered the winner a $100 prize. Many women had posted suggestions, such as:

Emerging Eagles, Free Birds, Blossoming Butterflies, or even *Faboomers,* a combination of *fabulous* and *boomers.* One member of this group offered this summary of her viewpoint on the life cycle experience change:

> But now, it's my time. I am lavishing in this season of my journey. I can buy the kind of cereal I like. I can finally add banana peppers to my pizza. I play my music as loud and as often as I like and dance like everyone's looking at me! I am getting to know me and how much I like who I am without being someone's Mom. Empty nest to me, means, I have successful loved, nurtured, raised, guided and launched a well-rounded, intelligent, independent person into young adulthood (Benjamin, 2013, p. 1).

This woman did not exemplify the attitude of a person used up, defeated, depressed, or without purpose, but rather one who joyously embraces the next stage of life boldly with anticipation of reaping rewards justly deserved. This made me question the use of the term *empty nest*, in alignment with others who have concluded that the term is more cultural myth than reality (Clay, 2003; Howell & Beth, 2002; Rubenstein, 2007; Tallmer, 1986; Thorn, 2012). Thus, the empty nest phase in the life course of a woman, is seen to involve a dynamic balance between positive and negative constructs in the attempt to achieve homeostasis.

The concept of the empty nest has been defined in various ways through the years by researchers, whose works relate to the specific way they describe the issue. Generally,

the empty nest refers "to that period of life when children have finally grown up and left the home" (Harkins, 1978, p. 549). However, for purposes of this dissertation, *empty nester* refers to a married woman who spent most of her adult life raising children and whose youngest child left home at least six months ago, leaving her to grapple with issues attendant to this transitional phase of life. This is the time when the effects of this life stage of experience are pronounced and the findings from this study most illustrative, particularly with respect to receiving boomerang children back into the home.

Postparental Midlife Crisis

The notion of a "midlife crisis" is a modern phenomenon promulgated by advances in science and medicine, such as the discovery of antibiotics in 1928 by Alexander Fleming. The average lifespan in the United Stated has nearly doubled during the last century, creating interest in geriatrics, adding later life phases to development psychology including the experience of a midlife crisis. In the United States today, the average man has a potential lifespan of 75.6 years and the average woman 80.8 years. In Swaziland where the living conditions are primitive, and there is poor access to medication and healthcare, the figure drops to 41.7 years for men and 42.4 years for women, (Disabled World, 2013), about the level where it was in the United States in 1890 (U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2013). In the United States in 2010, there were 43,279,000 women 40-59 years of age, representing 14% of our nation's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). "Middle-age" in today's human life cycle is usually considered to begin around age 40, the point when most all children have

typically left the home, making a mid-life crisis a condition barely 100 years old (Deutscher, 1964). The postparental phase, when a couple must deal with a childless household for the second time in their marriage, did not begin to emerge until around 1900 and was not studied in earnest by social scientists until the mid-1950s.

Women entering the empty nest phase of life invariably confront common key life issues regardless of geography or culture. These are well documented in the literature and include: sexuality, marital issues, career or employment, physical body and appearance, spiritual orientation, end of life issues, midlife crisis, value changes, ego-resiliency, identity, happiness or subjective well-being (Adelmann et al, 1989; Arpanantikul, 2004; Axelson, 1960; Baruch, & Barnett, 1986; diScalea, 2012). One of the first postparental studies was conducted by Deutscher (1963), his method being a door-to-door survey of 540 households in Kansas City, Missouri, netting 33 postparental households, with 31 consenting to be interviewed. Forty-nine of the urban middle-class spouses participated in the one-to-three hour taped interviews, the focus being to describe the ways they reoriented themselves to the postparental phase, and did they find it favorable or unfavorable and why. Twenty-two of the forty-nine participants found the postparental stage to be 'better' than the preceding life cycle, while only three described the transition as a time of 'great difficulty'. The majority offered comments extolling the stage to be a time of new found freedom from financial worries, housework and other chores, freedom to be mobile and "freedom to be one's self for the first time since the children came along; no longer do the parents need to lead the self-consciously restricted existence of

models for their children" (p. 55). The women reported more extreme reactions than did the men.

A personal midlife crisis provoked by anticipation of the empty nest condition has been studied for decades with mixed findings. In a qualitative study using in-depth interviews of 54 middle and lower-middle class San Francisco area men and women whose youngest child was about to leave home, the consensus was more a sense of relief than trepidation (Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1972). The results from these American studies were confirmed and expanded by studies conducted in other cultures. Chima and Nnodum (2008) interviewed 46 retired empty nesters in Owerri, Africa, prior to conducting a quantitative assessment of therapeutic counseling measures and found that the "empty nest syndrome was more difficult for widowed, separated, divorced and unmarried than those in the intact marriage group" (p. 190). In a study about the life experiences of Thai women, it was emphasized the midlife stage is not universal, exigencies arise from specific historical, geographical and social condition which express accepted values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior (Arpanantikul, 2004). Aging empty nesters in remote rural areas of China experience decreased life quality due to loneliness (Liu, & Guo, 2007). Borland (1982) employed an ethnic cohort approach to studying the empty-nest syndrome, as previous research had only dealt with population samples of White middle and upper-middle-class women. Female adults in the mid-life empty nest stage are more readily disposed to displaying negative emotions and behaviors such as identity crises and alcoholism (Aune, Aune, & Buller, 2001). Considering historical,

social and ecological factors of White, Black and Mexican-American middle-aged women, Borland did not find equal manifestations of empty-nest attributes among the cohorts, suggesting that "further research is needed to determine whether or not the empty-nest syndrome actually exists" (1982, p. 128). Thus, the empty nest phenomenon has not been found to be universal it its manifestation or severity, and is embodied with both positive and negative attributes which can vary as to culture, ethnicity, history, and geographical location.

The transition out of the childrearing phase carries more impact for the mother, as her day-to-day activities and concerns revolve around her children, while the father is mainly concerned with his work. In a study done to assess the satisfactions and regrets of preempty nest Caucasian parents, surveys were sent to 147 mothers and 113 fathers with a child graduating from high school. In general, they found the mothers had anticipated and planned for the transition while the fathers were "less aware of the personal implications of this family transition and are less prepared for its emotional impact" (DeVries, Kerrick & Oetlinger, 2007, p. 6). This is why studying mothers entering and exiting the empty nest phase of midlife reveal a richer portrait of this human experience, as "the landmark event of the midlife parenting stage is the home leaving of the child" (Ryff, & Seltzer, 1996, p. 11). The age at which women elect to become mothers has occurred later and later during the past four decades (Vespa, & Lewis, 2013). This emphasizes the rational for viewing adult development via a series of evolving life course

stages, which serve as a basis to predict and assess behavior, instead of using chronological age as the primary determinant.

Attachment and Separation Anxiety

When children leave home and go off on their own, there is a sense of loss, a feeling of emptiness, a void left in a woman's life from the physical, emotional and psychological space the child occupied when they were present. The end of child rearing is a natural phase in the development of a family, and often the anxiety begins to occur with anticipation of the separation and the perception of what the future will be like, "separation of adolescents from their parents is imminent and represents a major life transition" (Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, & Widaman, 2001, p. 284). Separation from parents is a normal and natural life cycle change as is parental separation anxiety, an unpleasant emotional state linked to the separation experience. Modern attachment theory employs an ecological perspective which unifies family members in a dynamic equilibrium of interpersonal processes represented by shared frames of emotions, cognitions and behaviors which creates certainty and promotes comfort and mutual survival (Hill, Fonagy, Safier, & Sargent, 2003). As adolescents mature and reach launch stage, there is the inevitable disconnect of these shared frames as the young adult becomes self-reliant and self-sufficient, and develops their individual personality in a world away from parental constraints.

Attachment theory identifies key stages in the life development of a child. These begin with the infant / mother bond, lasting up to age three or four when the attachment

becomes more a goal-directed partnership facilitated by language acquisition and verbal communication (Bowlby, 1982). Hormonal changes in adolescence lessen the parental attachment as the young person seeks to find a partner [usually] of the opposite gender, a biological evolutionary attribute programmed in the genes. The sense of loss one feels upon the death of a parent is evidence that bonds of the child-parent attachment endure throughout the lifespan (Ainsworth, 1989). This lessening of parental attachment promotes autonomy as the child reaches maturity, leaves home and forges a life of their own.

The intensity and duration of the separation anxiety for the mother depends upon a number of factors, such as number of children, position of child in the birth order and parenting style. A mother with an only child, who's parenting style is protective and controlling, is liable to experience strong separation anxiety, compared to a mother with eight children whose attention and energies have been continually detaching from the older children as the new children entered the family. In a study of parental separation anxiety caused by these emerging adults (N = 232), "parental characteristics and behaviors remain important antecedents of separation-individuation pathology even when one no longer loves in the parental household" (Kins, Soenes, & Beyers, 2011, p. 647). In dysfunctional families, the transitional phase of adolescence may be protracted by the mother as an emotional substitute for a unsatisfying martial relationship (Schindler, Thomasius, Sack, Gemeinhardt, & Kustner, 2007). Separation anxiety can thus be

enhanced or assuaged according to affinity in the marital relationship and the success or the launched young adult's readiness for success as a result of parental preparedness.

Subjective Well-Being

Studies have shown the empty nest phase of life can exert a positive or negative influence on a mother's subjective well-being. This is dependent upon antecedent factors, such as historical cohort membership, physical health, marital relationship, personal goals and employment status (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan & Coleman, 1989; Liu, & Guo, 2007; Tallmer, 1986). For some women, the maternal role is central to their subjective well-being and when the last child leaves home, depression and identity crisis may result along with other psychological and physiological problems thought to be psychosomatically induced (Mitchell, & Lovegreen, 2009; Phillips, 1957). Other researchers have found the opposite to be true, that entering the empty nest phase of life brings elevated states of well-being (Glenn, 1975; Tallmer, 1986). Subjective well-being, or happiness, is directly related to the mental and emotional state of the mother after the last child has left the home.

Historical cohort experiences relate to the culture within which a woman is raised and raises her children. This includes socialization to traditional family-related attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors relative to the era. For example, the empty nest syndrome was found to be prevalent among White women born in the 1920s and 1930s, but was found less affective in women born from 1900-1920, or from 1940-1960 (Borland, 1982). America was flourishing at the end of the Industrial Revolution during 1900-1920, found

renewed purpose in the 1940s during World War II and afterwards with the economic expansion of the post-war era. During the 1920s and ‘30s the United States was gripped in a national economic depression which affected the confidence and personality of the entire populous, mothers and empty nesters included (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan, & Coleman, 1989). In an interview study of midlife parents (N = 215, M age = 53.7 years) seeking to understand the reactions of the parents to how well their adult children (M age = 27.6 years) had turned out, multiple regression analysis “revealed that the children’s perceived adjustment significantly predicted 6 of 7 well-being outcomes for mother and fathers,” but “parents who saw their children as better adjusted than themselves had lower well-being” (Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1994, p. 195). This shows that even after the children have left the nest, parents’ well-being is still inextricably linked, both psychologically and emotionally, to their children.

Marital Satisfaction

A prime concern of researchers has been the effects of the empty nest transition on the marital relationship. This is important as marital satisfaction is likely to be a key determining factor of overall happiness (Glenn, 1975). Predictors of what can lead to a satisfactory marital relationship have been viewed as elusive (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983). A good working definition of marital satisfaction might be, “the subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by a spouse when considering all current aspects of his [or her] marriage… from much satisfaction to much dissatisfaction” (Hawkins, 1968, p. 648). Researchers in Kansas City found that 71% of

the husbands and 79% of the wives (N = 49) assessed the postparental stage to be as good as or better than the preceding stages in the normal human life cycle (Deutscher, 1964). A survey study of 199 fathers and 265 mothers in Washington and Idaho, researchers found the participants regarded the postparental period as satisfying as earlier periods, especially with regard to financial worries, though the women did report concern with their physical health and increased loneliness (Axelson, 1960). These early studies sought to define the postparental experience generally, in either positive or negative terms.

More recent studies begin to look for variations in the intensity and variety of the experience along with the underlying causes. These include traditional attitudes toward the woman's role as a mother, how long the couple had been married before the transitional phase, how many children the couple had, financial resources, if both parents were employed, menopausal status, life satisfaction prior to the transitions, and other significant life events (Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008; Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). In an attempt to quantify the effects of such variables, Harkins (1978) administered a mail survey to 318 women in Durham County, North Carolina, who were in three life phases – preempty nest, post-empty nest and in the transition period – relative to their youngest child graduating from high school. She concluded that "the empty-nest transition has, at most, a rather slight and transitory effect on the psychological well-being and essentially no effect on the physical well-being of mothers" (p. 555). This study affirms the notion that there are many influences, both internal and external, which coalesce to determine the relative positive or negative life experience of each empty nest mother.

Other studies using domestic and international populations produced similar results. In an American study using a small but representative subset (N = 12) of a larger population (N = 260) of empty nest mothers contacted 11-12 years after the larger study, where time afforded a more complete perspective of the empty nest transition, it was found that the determining factor responsible for a positive or negative viewpoint was "the individual's perception of the events" (Campbell, Devries, Fikkert, Kraay, & Ruiz, 2007), rather than the events themselves. In Sari City, Iran, a quantitative study (N = 348) using questions extracted from Ryff's psychological well-being questionnaire, found that perceived marital satisfaction increased after the children left home (Iman & Aghamiri, 2011). In a study involving 72 married middle-aged men and women who either had children and were in the empty-nest phase or had childless marriages, there was no appreciable difference reported in satisfaction with 11 key areas of the life experience, indicating having children is not a prerequisite for a satisfying life experience (Bell & Eisenberg, 1985). From these studies is can be concluded that a mother's attitude influences the strength and range of her empty nest experience.

Researchers have also found duration of the marriage term to have an influence on marital satisfaction sustainability. A meta-study, using data from the 1967-1989 waves of The National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women ages 30 to 66, which assessed marital happiness and family economics from a representative sample of women in their first marriage with at least one biological child, marriage stability and satisfaction correlated positively with the duration of the marriage (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, &

O'Rand, 1998). Due to changes imposed on the family dynamics and marital relationship during the childrearing years, in some cases, the empty-nest transition served as a point where separation or divorce occurred, serving "as a final step in the social selection process prior to mortality in marital dissolution" (p. 221), even though other studies supported the notion that having children "served to strengthen their marriage dyad" (Bachand, & Caron, 2001, p. 114). Another study found the empty nest transition served to increase women's "enjoyment of time with their partners, but not via an increase in the quantity of that time" (Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008, p. 1194). Clay (2003) found the empty nest phase was a time for parents to reconnect with one another, pursue interests that had been for years on hold. Children who leave home and make it on their own as self-sufficient adults have been shown to enable a relationship with their parents that is fuller, more mature and emotionally meaningful (Fingerman, 2001). Respecting the general quantitative data derived from these studies, more in depth qualitative works needs to be done to explore what works and what doesn't work to enhance marital satisfaction during the empty nest phase.

Identity and Individuation

When the youngest child leaves home, the mother, who has devoted most of her family life to the nurturing, care and raising of the child, experiences a dramatic loss of purpose. This can lead to confusion, depression, and a loss of identity, as what she was, she no longer is (Adelmann, Antonnucci, Crohan, & Coleman, 1989). She must then fill that void with something which provides anchoring, and serves as a basis for regeneration

of her ego-identity, along with a sense of fulfillment, self-esteem and well-being. In short, she has to reinvent herself, turn a page, find herself anew, and reframe what she was into what she wants to be. She has to forge a new identity through becoming a self-determined individual.

Not every empty nester can do this easily, as the speed and completeness of this achievement can vary widely with respect to a host of factors. In a grounded-theory data analysis of an ethnically and culturally mixed group of eleven Manhattan women (ages 40 to 60), a three-part developmental model was created around the women's midlife experiences (Howell & Beth, 2002). This study sought to overcome shortcomings of a similar study conducted by Howell (2001) which utilized a homogenous sample of all Caucasian women living in a college town in rural Idaho. The model's goal was to depict how midlife development lead to "acceptable levels of satisfaction by aligning personal values with circumstances and behavior" (Howell & Beth, 2002, p. 190). This was accomplished by first examining awareness of external control environmental influences which cause anxiety, confusion and anger. In the second step of the model, the women dealt with realizations of midlife, experienced cathartic emotions of sadness and mourning which produced awareness of personal values, then finally let go of antiquated assumptions. In the third stage, the women came to grips with their situation, clarified goals, became stimulated about their futures and changed their behaviors accordingly. Both studies produced similar findings, authenticating the model across cultures. The women also found they were "less influenced by other people's opinions, more self-

assured, and more free to enjoy themselves" (p. 204), being comfortable in their new identities. A key component to the process involved rectifying the conflict between views the women projected as being part of the midlife experience and their own personal experiences, a necessary step before acceptance of that life stage could occur.

Employment and Finances

Employment has also been found to be a mitigating factor in the life experience of empty nesters. Mothers who earned money, maintained careers in conjunction with raising children, or developed careers after the last child left home were found to experience more physical and mental well-being than those without careers or paid employment (Baruch & Barnett, 1986). Having joint finances helps keep married couples together during the empty nest transition, as jointly owned assets such a home contribute mutual security and marital stability (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, & O'Rand, 1998). A woman who contributes substantially to the marital income achieves a certain level of financial independence, a factor that may tip the scales in favor of going it alone if things with her spouse become intolerable. Examining data from a representative sample (N = 5,083) women from the National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women (NLS-MW) years 1967-1989, controlling for effects of race, home ownership, education, and work experience, results indicated that wives' economic independence, measured in terms of wages or employment status, had a positive effect on the likelihood of marital disruption among women in midlife" (Hiedemann, 1998, p. 229). The empty-nest phase forces a woman to reassess her life purpose and reframe her ego-identity. And, when she finds

herself anew, she might realize she likes her new self better without her marriage partner than with him, her financial independence providing her the ticket out.

The Feminine Mystique

America is a nation characterized by evolving ideas of personal expression, guaranteed by the *First Amendment* of the *United States Constitution* in the *Bill of Rights*, subject to continual redefinition in the courts since ratification in 1791. The *Thirteenth Amendment*, signed into law in 1865, abolished slavery and involuntary servitude. In 1920, the *Nineteenth Amendment* gave women the right to vote by eliminating constraints of gender. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) originally drafted in 1923, was designed to guarantee equal rights for all people (especially women). Ironically, it has been revised and presented to Congress numerous times, but has not managed to get enough votes in both Houses to become law. Undaunted by the lack of legal support a constitutional amendment would provide, the National Organization for Women (NOW) rallied to work outside Washington and generate support on their own. Among its founders was Betty Friedan (born Bettye Naomi Goldstein), author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a book about "the problem with no name" with its famous opening lines:

> The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate

peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to even ask of herself the silent question – 'Is this all?' (Friedan, 1993, p. 57).

This disquietude of certain American women in the 1950s, runs parallel with bourgeoisie life a century earlier in France, embodied in the character of Madame Bovary, a doctor's wife suffering from *ennui*, a pervasive feeling of disinterest and discontent due to boredom. This ennui seemed an inextricable trap French women were powerless to escape, blocked as they were by social custom:

> But a woman is checkmated at every turn. Flexible yet powerless to move, she has at once her physical disabilities and her economic dependence in the scales against her. Her will, like the veil of her bonnet, is tied to a string and flutters in every wind. Whenever a desire impels, there is always a convention that restrains. (Flaubert, 1856, Chapter 12)

Madam Bovary seeks diversion from her interminable lassitude through a series adulterous affairs which provide surcease, temporary solace and freedom, in an attempt to find life's meaning.

This notion of escape from a life condemned to repetition and meaninglessness, revived in modern context by Friedan, underpins the whole universe of empty nest issues. However, instead of indulging in sentient pursuits which provide only transient relief, Friedan's central solution to ennui was to find employment away from home, pursue a

career, earn money, and thereby enjoy benefits of independence, success, elevated self-esteem, and sustaining fulfillment through self-actualization (Cady, 2009). To Friedan, a woman is not second fiddle to the breadwinner husband, but a vital individual who can survive alone if need be. Not only survive, but prevail and flourish. Friedan sought argument with Freud's assertion that a woman's station in life was determined by her natural gifts of beauty, charm and sweetness at an early age, while men had to spend years carving out a destiny through work and achievement. An understanding of Friedan's ideas are helpful when exploring how the phenomenon of the empty nest is viewed and coped with from a modern woman's perspective.

Review of the Popular Literature

As part of performing a proper due diligence, I thought it important to read how experiences of empty nesters were conveyed in the popular press, searched Amazon online, and purchased the available titles. I was hoping these books would provide pithy vignettes and experiential descriptions similar to what I would elicit during my forthcoming interviews for this project. The books arrived and I quickly found, to my dismay, the writing was sanitized to the point of being practically worthless for scientific purposes. Stabiner (2007) states on the front cover "31 parents tell the truth about relationships, love, and freedom after the kids fly the coop." Instead of useful unvarnished scientific reporting about how the empty nest mother grappled with salient issues, the pages read like a romance novel:

> I watched him in the surf as I had for so many summers past. His body moved easily now with the slow, strong undulations of the waves, as if he was in his own element. Graceful, fearless. I felt a quiet triumph that he had mastered the vicissitudes of the sea; yet buried in that triumph was the devastating awareness that he no longer needed me to be there watching. (p. 51)

Stabiner failed to recall an argument between spouses over what to do, or what not to do to make things work, delivering no constructive or helpful comments.

I had hope for one of the *Chicken Soup* books, as this series is supposed to be about real people telling real stories. Though *Chicken Soup for the Empty Nester* contains 101 stories "about surviving and thriving when the kids leave home" (Canfield, Hansen, Rehme, & Evans, 2008, cover), the New York editors were apparently at work, euphemizing sentences full of nostalgia, hope and encouragement:

> But I couldn't help feeling sad that every step in that journey would take him farther and farther away from me. There would be no going back to training wheels, no going back to toddler-hood or infancy. I knew I would have to face forward, focusing my energy on the future and trusting that something was waiting for him over there. (p. 181)

The above sentence does hint of reoccurring themes of attachment and letting go found in the scientific literature common to empty nesters. Reading the sweet summaries

in this book makes me eager to get in the field to conduct real interviews and see how raw, but real, the responses would be to questions such as: "How did you feel when your youngest son's car, loaded with his possessions, pulled out of your driveway that last time?" "Was it be a time of loss and sorrow, or joy and rejuvenation?" I read another wistful paragraph:

> Now, with our youngest child a year away from the university, Rick and I are making plans for the next stage of our lives. He recently bought a pickup, and now he's eyeing fifth-wheel travel trailers. Occasionally, I catch him salivating over travel brochures on Alaska and the Yukon. I'm salivating over my own – on Hawaii and Tahiti, or anyplace involving bare feet on sandy beaches. Aahh… those warm, exotic beaches. I can see them; I can feel them; my feet are digging in the warm, seductive sand. (p. 246)

The above passage made me wonder if I would encounter such eloquent dreamers when I conducted my interviews, empty nesters with vivid imaginations and fantasies they are dying to play out. My musings were rewarded with richer descriptions that I had anticipated. Flowery as this writing may be, another theme emerges which is present in the scientific literature – bringing one's postponed desires from the back burner of their lives to the front. Whether or not these desires are ever actualized is separate from allowing the desire to manifest in present time and become a real possibility. This

passage also embodies the feeling of rewards justly earned from a job well done, another theme common to the journal articles.

Two other books were written as self-help manuals to assist empty nesters in understanding the psychological, emotional and relationship issues they will encounter. *Empty Nesting: Reinventing your marriage when the kids leave home* (Arp, Arp, Stanley, Markman, & Blumberg, 2001), extolls the efficacy of the PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) approach developed by psychologists and marriage experts as a tool to reassess and work through problems between spouses. The book is full of advice and serves as a manual for those who capable of working things out after the kids are gone. In *Beyond the Mommy Years: How to live happily ever after… after the kids leave home* (2007), social psychologist Rubenstein uses her on her own personal experiences with the empty nest phase as a touchstone with which to examine the experiences of others. She argues that "there is no empty-nest syndrome" (p. 1) and sets out to prove this in her own life by mastering the emotional, psychological and relationship challenges through logic and communication, while interviewing more than a thousand women within the same developmental stage of life. Rubenstein encapsulates the post parental experience for women passes through three stages: grief, relief and finally joy. The most scientific and realistic of the popular books, Rubenstein's extensive bibliography contains references to professional journals, consumer magazine articles and professional trade books. She balances facts with real-life experiences, amalgamated through the keen lens of the social psychologist into a highly readable and useful treatise.

Rubenstein's book is an excellent summary of the literature in the field and a proper launching pad for my intended study of the interaction between the empty nester and the boomerang children who return home and disrupt this stage of parental life. In today's tumultuous world, with an over-educated work force facing a dearth of employment opportunities, an economy bloated with inflation and abuse, the parental home has become the place of best resort for the fledgling adults unable to find work or handle the exigencies of living alone, at least temporarily.

The most recent popular publication, *Emptying the nest* (Sachs, 2010), is written by a clinical psychologist with dozens of pithy examples drawn from his decades of experience in counseling families with adolescents stuck in the prelaunch phase. The theme of the book is centered around facts that show fiscal self-reliance and residential independence were achieved by two-thirds of men and three-quarters of women in 1960, but only one-half of women and one-third of men when the book was published in 2010. The life course perspective affirms historical age-related milestones for these events. When they are not being met on time, disruptions can occur within the family both internally and externally via social sanctions. Young adults who fail to launch on time are given monikers such as: *Meanderers* (those who grow sideways or backwards instead of straight ahead); *Regroupers* (those who left for a short time and return home to plan their next attempt at self-reliance); *Recoverers* (those who get beat up financially, emotionally or otherwise and return home to lick their wounds without a clear plan); or *Flounderers* (those without resolve to accept adult responsibility). The healthiest laggards are named

Progressers, who live on their own, are working toward goals and require little support. This book coaches parents on how to let go and get their kids moving toward self-sufficiency as painful as it may be to both sides of the dynamic. Describing therapeutic exercises used with clients, the author places responsibility on the parents to take control of the situation to hasten the launch. Their lives, and the lives of their self-sufficient children, will be better for it, and their relationship will have a chance to reform from a perspective more in tune with life course theory. It also promotes the rationale for the next section of this chapter on boomerang children.

Conclusions

Social scientists' understanding of the empty nest phase of life has changed dramatically over the last six decades, beginning with the Freudian perception that children leaving home resulted in anguish and depression for mothers who had lost their offspring, and thus their purpose. When the youngest child leaves home and strikes out on their own, the mother enters the postparental phase of life, known as the empty nest phase, a term brought into the in popular culture in 1965 (Deykin, Jacobson, Klerman and Soloman, 1966). Studies by social scientists in the 1960s and 1970s focused on the negative aspects of this transitional period, noting adverse psychological, emotional and physiological problems, such as depression, caused by loss of purpose or identity, or the void left by the departing child.

Rising parallel to the women's independence movement spearheaded by Friedan's the *Feminine Mystique,* studies began to appear in the literature which viewed the empty

nest phase as something positive and rejuvenating, both in relation to mothers' personal identities, and their relations with their spouse and friends outside the home. More research is needed in this area as "entry into the empty-nest phase is a family transition with changing parameters and effects that we are only beginning to understand" (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, & O'Rand, 1998, p. 221). Parameters can be expanded by including empty nest mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds whose perceptions are influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Future research on the empty-nest transitional phase and attending midlife issues is suggested by DeVries, Kerrick and Oetlinger (2007) as it would be "most valuable in clarifying how parents negotiate this major shift in family relationships and life roles" (p. 15). Digging deeper through a qualitative study to examine this phenomenon and discover what works and what doesn't work, can provide practical data that may help tens of millions of middle-aged women who will confront these life phase issues.

Literature Review: "Boomerang" Children

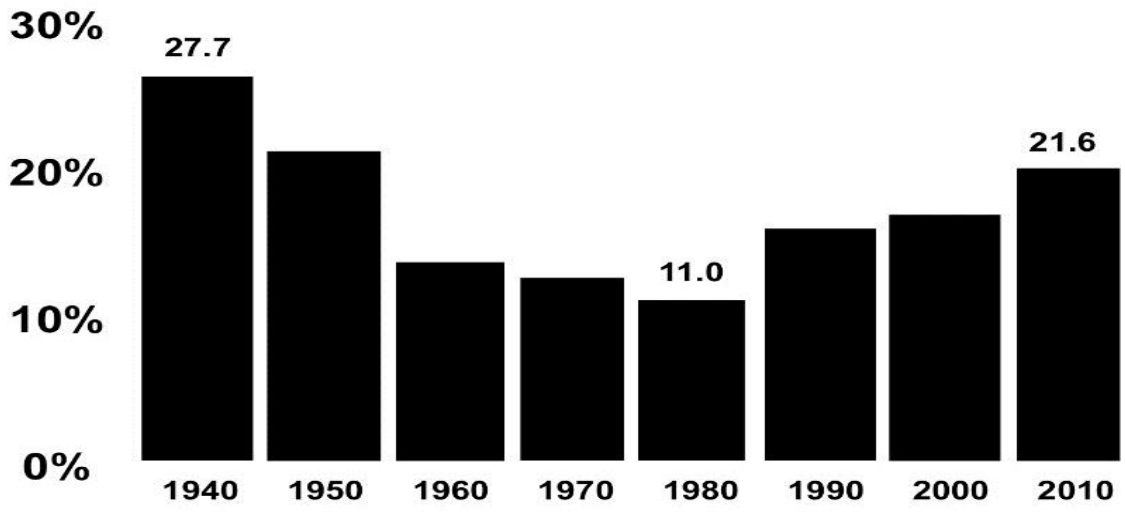
Everyone knows a boomerang is a curved and beveled piece of wood used by aborigines of the Australian outback to hunt and retrieve objects too high or distant to reach. The boomerang is grasped with the throwing hand and flung outward so its aerodynamics will cause the device to fly out to a certain point and then arc back to its point of origin. Used as a metaphor, boomerang children are those who leave home, confident they can make their way in the world, yet somehow fail and return home out of necessity, often as a last resort. The profiles of boomerang kids can vary widely, ranging

from hardworking productive professionals who lose their jobs, to deadbeats who smoke too much dope and have rendered themselves incapable of handling even a modest life of self-support, to unwed mothers with infants who retreat back home to live with new grandparents. This has created the "Boomerang Generation", or "Boomerang Age", a psycho-socio phenomenon characterized by "less permanency and more movement in and out of a variety of family-related roles, statuses and living arrangements," due to "significant alterations to both public realms (e. g., economic, educational, work, and technological), and private spheres (e. g., emergence of new family forms and structure, gender roles" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 1). Children who return to the family home following failure to make their way in the world has added a new dimension to the life experience of empty nest mothers.

The length of time boomerang kids remain under their parents' roofs can vary widely, from a month or two of solace and reengineering, to years of lassitude. It is not uncommon for children to boomerang back home several times before finally being able to make life work on their own in the real world. According to the official 2000 U. S. census, almost 4 million young adults between 25 and 34 years old were living with their parents (Parker, 2012), "possibly the result of tough job market, delayed marriage, high housing costs and other factors" (Clay, 2003, p. 41). The percentage of men aged 25 to 34 living in their parents' home increased from 14% in 2005 to 19% in 2011, while women aged 25 to 34 increased from 8% in 2005 to 10% in 2011 (Bernstein, 2013). These trends indicate a shift in the life course of young adults who are leaving home later than

previous generations to establish careers and start families (Goldscheider, & Goldscheider, 1999; Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). Expanding the age bracket from 18 to 34, young women (38%) and young men (40%) have boomeranged back home for an extended stay regardless of ethnicity: Whites (38%), Blacks (32%), and Hispanics (45%). Figure 3 shows the number of young adults living at home in the United States nearly doubled from 1980 to 2010.

Figure 3. U.S. adults 25-34 years of age living in multigenerational households.



Adapted from "Pew Research Center analysis of U. S. Decennial Census data, 1940-2000," and "2010 American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Micro Samples" by Parker, 2012, *The boomerang generation*, p. 14. Copyright 2012 by the Pew Research Center.

Employment is a major factor, as full-time employed young adults are less likely (30%) than their unemployed counterparts (48%) to move back under their parents' roofs. Education is also a factor, as those ages 30 to 34 with a college degree are half as likely (10%) to move back home than those without a degree (22%) (Parker, 2012). This section

discusses the boomerang kid phenomenon in relation to how it has been shown to influence the life experience of empty nest mothers.

Lengthened Young Adult Transition

Today there are many more children being raised in divorced, remarried, or single-parent homes than ever before, resulting in less time spent by adults with their children during the rearing process. The changing complexion of American families since the 1950s has transformed the idea of the 'traditional' family where: the father goes to work; the mother stays home to raise the kids; the well-nurtured young adults leave home; go to college; enter the workforce; get married; and have children of their own (Demo, 1992). This has resulted in accelerated independence of the children on one hand, which may or may not have better prepared them for living on their own, and accelerated detachment on the other, making the transition away from home easier and less complicated.

However, unlike the 1950s when entry level work opportunities were plentiful and a young person could move into a job and make it a career, social and economic conditions have changed in the United States and other countries. This has made the transition more difficult and the incentives to move away from a secure base less attractive (Setterstein, & Ray, 2010). In 1984, nearly 18 million of the 50 million young adults in the United States ages 18 to 29 were living at home with their parents (Glick, & Lin, 1986). In neighboring Canada, 41% of young adults ages 20-29 lived under their parents' roofs in 2001, up from 27% in 1981, in a condition called "mature coresidency"

(Mitchell, 2006, p. 328). These factors have created a kind of role maturation quagmire with "the movement toward adult roles and statuses envisioned as chaotic, risky, and less permanent relative to earlier family life" (p. 325). Today's young adults are redefining the life course paradigm in response external forces, while viewing the parental home as a safety net of lasting appeal.

In the United States today, as well as in other Western countries, parents are providing emotional and financial support to their children through their twenties and thirties. The perception of the recent economic crises and resulting financial pressures, has produced anxiety, depression and pessimism in both parents and their children out of a mutual concern for the welfare of each other (Stein et al, 2011). Greater dependence on parents challenges the life course tradition of the parent/child dyad (Mendonca, & Fontaine, 2013). The trend of young adults ages 25 to 29 living at home has been arching upward since the 1970s, with 20% of the men and 12% of women in the United States, 25% of the men and 11% of the women in France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and 65% of the men and 44% of the women in Greece, Spain and Italy where parents receive welfare benefits (Goldscheider, 1997). Decline in the rate of marriage in America and Western Europe has also been cited as reason for delayed departure from the family nest, as it is easier for single children to remain at home than married couples (Cherlin, Scabini, & Rossi, 1997). In Asia where the population of young adults has doubled between 1960 and 2000, now accounting for more than 60 percent of the total world youth population, it is typical for a young adult to live with their parents until marriage

(Yeung, & Alipio, 2013). In Taiwan, age 30 is the typical age for marriage with children occurring years later (Huang, 2013). This lengthening transition to adulthood is a worldwide phenomenon among many cultures in post-industrialized countries.

The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 surveyed 22,000 adolescents in the spring of 1972 and the fall of 1973, 1974, 1976, and 1979, and found many young graduates returned home due to unemployment, loss of job, marriage break-up, completing college or after a stint in the military. Many of these young adults viewed the parental home "as a normal base of operations during the period of early adult life which precedes marriage" (Davanzo, & Goldscheider, 1990, p. 254). Other studies have shown extended attachment or dependence on parents, need for protection, or even parental happiness can retard the departure for independence (Clemens, & Axelson, 1985). Studies of 'helicopter parents' who provide an inordinate amount of financial, emotional and psychological support to their 'landing pad kids,' report grown children who are better adjusted and have greater life satisfaction than the norm, while parents "who perceived their grown children as needing too much support reported poorer life satisfaction" (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselman, Zarit, Furstenberg, & Birditt, 2012, p. 880). Thus, perception of the support can be as influential as the support itself, though this is a simplistic notion and there are other variables related to culture, socioeconomic status, physical health of the parents, and generational differences.

Living at home with mom and dad does have its advantages and disadvantages. Limited employment opportunities have caused children to stay in school longer to

achieve advanced education while living on student loans, adding to the stress and anxiety about their futures (Seiffge-Krenke et al, 2012). Living at home with mom and dad is a way to keep the bills down temporarily as they move in and out of living arrangements in dorms, on military bases, with roommates, by themselves or with intimate partners as a test before committing to a long term relationship (Thornton, Young-DeMarco, & Goldscheider, 1993). While independent living has been shown to accelerate the achievement of attaining full adult status, "continued coresidence with parents during emerging adulthood slows down the process by which an individual moves towards becoming a self-sufficient and independent adult" (Kins, & Beyers, 2010, p. 743). Sociologists have given this middle-class American family system's countertransitional phenomenon a name, "the returning young adult syndrome," or RYA, characterized by the following conditions:

1. children's unanticipated economic dependency and/or failure(s) to 'launch careers' and become successfully autonomous adults;
2. deviance from parental expectations that children will physically separate from parents in 'young adulthood' (college years or post-college);
3. one or more 'attempts' by these children to fulfill these expectations, followed by a return to a parental home for varying periods of time; and
4. anomic context for household labor organization and allocation of family resources where there is a returning young adult in the household; anger of parents (and

often of children), and substantial conflict over these issues (Schnaiberg, & Goldenberg, 1989, p. 251-252).

This can result in a variety of negative constructs – anger, shame, resentment, guilt – which further exacerbate the problem of redefining roles and preparing the incompletely-launched young adult (ILYA) for relaunch into a world of increasing tougher competition and diminishing social support resources (Settersten, & Ray, 2010). These ILYAs often create disquietude in the minds of their parents, especially those working in professional, managerial or technical capacities, who feel they have failed in their parental duties.

Cultural Expectations

From a cultural perspective, admitting a boomerang child back into the home can create a problem arising from those in the surrounding culture, who perceive something may be *wrong* with the family. In the United States there is a general expectation when children reach the age of eighteen, they are adults and should know how to take care of themselves (Settersten, & Ray, 2010). This necessitates leaving the parental home and living distant, either individually or with roommates. If the child goes to college, he or she lives away near the campus and returns home for holidays or vacations. When children settle down and get married, they live with a spouse in a home of their own making. In most cultural groups, this is an expected normal stage of development, and if it doesn't happen, others in the group want to know why. Did the parents fail in their preparation for the child to succeed? Is the child a born loser? And, when children return

home to live, often as the only alternative, they may find the parental reception not as warm as they may have anticipated (Glick, & Lin, 1986). Either way, boomeranging back to the home is a sign that something in the family is not normal, askew, out of step with typical life course development.

Common among the four major cultural groups in the United is the definition of what characterizes the transition from a child into an adult. In a sample of young adult Americans ages 18 to 29 (N = 574) living in the greater San Francisco area (109 White, 122 Black, 96 Latino and 247 Asian), four common defining characteristics of achieving adulthood were agreed upon by at least 70% of those in all ethnic groups:

a) accept responsibility for consequences of actions,

b) decide on personal beliefs and values,

c) financial independence from parents,

d) establish relationship equality with parents (Arnett, 2003, p. 70).

In a similar qualitative study employing open-ended in-depth interviews of thirty young adults ages 21 to 36 (14 female and 16 male), which confirmed the Arnett (2003) criteria, the missing component of economics was identified as an essential component to achieving self-sufficient adulthood status (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008). General pessimism about the U. S. economic situation in light of recent financial crises, has lessened parental expectations about their children achieving fiscal self-sufficiency, thus loosening the cultural constraints of life course events and making boomeranging easier with less attached social stigma (Stein et al, 2011). Young adults understand what

needs to be done to become a self-sufficient adult, but for whatever reason fail to follow through and make it happen. Thus, allowing children back in the home is a double-edged sword which provides a safe harbor to reassess and plan in the short term, but may thwart the goals of attaining adulthood in the long term.

Renegotiating Adult Roles

Unlike other species in the animal kingdom where the baby bird gets pushed from the nest one time, or the bear cub gets run off from the den, the compassionate human being will tolerate offspring to reenter the parental home multiple times. This creates an interesting phenomenon in the mother/child relationship whose broken bonds must reform in a new way. It also creates an interesting set of psychological and emotional conditions in the mother, who has entered the transition phase of being an empty nester, and now must readjust to others in the nest (Seagull, 2013). She has to confront issues she may have buried or forgotten. She has to redefine her relationship with her offspring who have become adults.

One of the main issues faced by parents with boomerang kids is unresolved conflict. To become an adult, one must divorce theirself from their parents, cut the umbilical cord of control inherent within the parent/child relationship. This separation inevitably creates conflict. The degree of conflict severity is related to a variety of personal, social, and ecological factors such as: educational levels of the parents and children, their socioeconomic status, friends, satisfaction with employment, and strength of the marriage (Deykin, Jacbson, Klerman, & Soloman, 1966). Central to handling

conflict and promoting amicable relations, is the framework of core values based on respect and honesty, facilitated by the key tools of courtesy, warmth and structure (Seagull, 2013). This framework is established and modified by constant communication, where problems and misunderstandings can be clarified, resulting in the strengthening of the reform parent/child dyad (Dun, 2010). Returning home places this unresolved conflict on the front burner where it can either be addressed via communication, mutual respect and understanding, or exacerbated, making the living arrangements tenuous at best.

Boomerang children and their parents are challenged to find new ways of relating to one another in this countertransitional phase of development. Interestingly, "parents who reported having good relationships with their children were more likely to have an adult child living with them" (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006, p. 865). This presupposes a corollary between child / parent affinity and parental willingness to accept the boomerang child back into the home. It has been shown that poorer parents often extend more emotional support than do affluent parents, thereby promoting more relationship stability which can lighten the friction inherent within renegotiating roles (Sage, & Johnson, 2012). In addition to paying typical living expenses of housing, utilities and food, more affluent parents can also pay for a boomerang child's car expenses, educational expenses, clothing, tools, health insurance and even provide spending money. Families attempt to work out the boomerang arrangement regardless of their socioeconomic station, and succeed to a greater or lesser extent. Finding out how mothers from different ethnic

backgrounds respond to these exigencies provided interesting insights into the shared life experience of the study participants.

Coresidency Dynamics

When fledgling adults leave the nest, strike out on their own, and then return home for any of a multitude of reasons, their reentrance back into the family domain inevitably affects the stability of the family's dynamics. The young adult / parent dyad becomes challenged and altered in ways which foster manageable coresidency in the parental home (Boyd, & Pryor, 1989). Refilling the nest alters the traditional model where adults mature, depart from the home and make it on their own. "Regardless of a mother's age, multigenerational coresidence is highest when the mother is unmarried and her child is newborn" (Gordon, 1999, p. 530). In a qualitative study of 119 coresident urban African-American grandmothers and adolescent mothers with 18-month-old children, four models emerged as being characteristic (Apfel & Seitz, 1991). Children bringing children of their own into the parental home has been shown to decrease the level of parental satisfaction in Blacks, and increase satisfaction in Hispanics (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). In the Parental Replacement model (10% of the families) the grandmother provided most of the care to the infant. Cargiving responsibilities to the young child were shared equally by the mother and grandmother in the Parent Supplemental model (50% of the sample). The mother assumed primary responsibility with occasional assistance from the grandmother in the Supported Primary Parent model (20%). And, in the Parental Apprentice model (10%) the grandmother served as a

childrearing mentor to the mother (Oberlander, Black, & Starr, Jr., 2007). Boomerang kids who return to the nest with a small child mean three generations are living together under one roof, a throwback to the way life was in the United States more than a century ago.

In tough economic times, multigenerational families living under one roof have certain distinct financial advantages than living apart, though autonomy and privacy are curtailed in the balance. This arrangement redefines the idea of the 'extended family' where mommy and daddy do the household chores and pay the bills rather than everyone chipping in (Rosenberg-Javors, 2006). In a Pew Research Center nationwide survey of adults (N = 2,048) it was found that the socioeconomic level was not a limiting factor. Parents earning $100,000 reported their boomerang child was just as likely to have returned home due to financial problems as those with household incomes under $30,000 (Parker, 2012). Under federal welfare policies promulgated in 1996, adolescent mothers receive public benefits only as long as they live with their mothers, thus possibly extending the stay (Gordon, 1999; Oberlander, Black, & Starr, Jr., 2007). Whether or not the boomerang child is employed, earning an income, and contributing to family living expenses while living back at home, is a concern to poorer families who are more likely to view the boomeranger as an unplanned financial burden which adds stress to the family dynamic. Those who do contribute money towards the communal living expenses are generally viewed more favorably by the parents, as are those who contribute in other ways such as doing household chores.

Children living at home can be financially rewarding in certain circumstances. A dependent child can be used a federal income tax deduction up to $3400 per child (and/or grandchild) in 2013 (TurboTax, 2014). In some areas, having additional children sequestered under one roof allows the parents to receive financial stipends, food stamps, welfare payments or other government sponsored remuneration, thus assuaging the financially-imposed burden. Studies have also shown that parental support – financial, emotional, life experience, or otherwise – is not always given to children with the greatest need or on a contingency basis. Rather, parents have been shown to provide support to grown children they perceive as being more successful "which may benefit themselves via reflected glory or reciprocated support" (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt & Zarit, 2009, p. 1229). This aligns with self-serving activities based on human survival instincts programmed into the genes.

Key to promoting the accepted life course trajectory into adulthood is financial self-sufficiency. Having a job, trying to find a job, going to school in preparation for a job, are all signs to a post-adolescent supporting parent that their child is making progress. Those who sponge off their parents and feel they are clever for doing so, or borrow money from their parents they don't pay back, "generally classified their actions as things that children do, rather than the behavior of responsible adults" (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008, p. 693). Others contribute only begrudgingly, even though they believe economic self-sufficiency is a primary characteristic of adulthood. Pitching in and helping out with the practical day-to-day chores also expands a parent's sense of

welcome. In one study of Canadian families (N = 218) who experienced this transition reversal, conflict and dissatisfaction were not typical, and that "parental satisfaction is greater when children reciprocate exchanges of support, are more autonomous, and are closer to the completion of adult roles" (Mitchell, 1998, p. 21). The common sense logic of these activities has not been found to be present in all boomerangers, many who feel an extended sense of entitlement living again under their parents' roofs.

Influence on Marital Satisfaction

When the child moves back home, the parents' long awaited for, and anticipated state of freedom and tranquility, is compromised. Research has shown this situation can be either a positive or negative experience for the empty nest mother, relative to her current state of marital satisfaction. Returning dependent children have been shown to lower marital satisfaction in proportion to the financial resources of the parents, as those in lower income situations report more stress and strain than those better off (Shehan, & Dwyer, 1984). Returning home after launch causes marital disruption in inverse ratio to the frequency of returns, as children who return multiple after leaving are perceived as "more severe violators of life transition norms" (Mitchell, & Gee, 1996, p. 443). Having adult children in the home also may prolong marital dissatisfaction among couples who know they have problems, but were waiting for the space to work them out after the children left home (Clemens, & Axelson, 1985). Boomerang children can curtail the opportunity for parents to spend quality time together, and loom as an imposing impediment to resolving spousal conflict.

A major complaint from married empty nesters whose kids are back under their roofs, is the imposition on privacy. After spending a decades raising kids and dealing with issues of maturing adolescents, aging parents look forward to getting their personal space back where they can renew their curtailed intimacy. A study of mid-aged Australian women (N = 438) found boomerangers can adversely affect the quality and frequency of parental sexual relations (Dennerstein, Dudley, & Guthrie, 2002). The extent to which boomerang kids can put a crimp in the relationship evolution of their parents, and what parents can do to offset this disruption, was a key finding of this research.

Influence on Parental Life Fulfillment

One of the positive constructs anticipated by mothers entering the empty nest phase is having time to engage in personal activities and interests formerly precluded by their parental duties. The life course perspective places emphasis on the prevalence, timing and sequencing of life stage transitions (Elder, 1975; Hagestad, 1988). After spending years putting children first and subordinating personal desires, the uncluttered household and free time are luxuries to be enjoyed. With less stress, more confidence and kudos from a mission accomplished, the middle-aged mother looks forward to spending more time with her spouse, traveling, reading books, entertaining, taking up a hobby or sport she has yearned for. This loss of freedom to pursue personal interests can build into feelings of resentment that do not get expressed, psychosomatically affecting the health of the parent (Clemens, & Axelson, 1985). Often, it takes months or years to adjust to the

tranquility and order of the empty nest, with the option of springing ahead into new endeavors and simply enjoying doing nothing. Boomerang kids not only impinge on the mother's time, space and resources, they can call into question her parental competence: did she really do as good as job as she gave herself credit for? Instead of moving forward and enjoying the fruits of her labors, she must now take a step back to reappraise her unfinished work, find out where she went wrong and redouble her efforts to make the relaunch succeed. The personal fulfillment she felt when her last child left home is thereby diminished.

Determinants of personal life fulfillment of empty nest mothers has been shown to have an historical time-related component reflective of the era in which the mother lives. Women's roles have changed dramatically over the past century, from selflessly devoting themselves to the needs of their children and husbands, to forging their own personal identities through hobbies or in the workplace (Dennerstein, Dudley, & Guthrie, 2002). Coresidency with adult post-college age children has been shown to have greater negative psychological effects on mothers than fathers, as "raising independent and successful children is particularly important to mothers' well-being" (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010, p. 620). When adult children reenter the home, it can curtail the parents' normal life development, as they must spend time, energy and attention away from engaging in activities that can promote feelings of personal fulfillment.

Boomerang Grandparents

Not only have children boomeranged back to refill the empty nest in record numbers, the boomerang kids are bringing their kids with them: boomerang grandkids. The nexus of the problem is the unmarried teen parents under 25, who are unemployed, have no high school diploma or are in school. Many of those young adults who boomeranged home fit this profile. In 2011 in the United States, 7.7 million children (1 in 10) were living with a grandparent, three million with a grandparent as the primary caregiver (Livingston, 2013). One of the grandchild's parents are also living in the household in 80% of the cases. These numbers increased dramatically between 2005 and 2010, in response to the economic crisis caused by the real estate market crash-based recession. Broken down statistically by ethnicity, 38% of children living with a grandparent are white, 29% Hispanic, 20% black and 6% Asian. The majority (44%) of the children are under the age of six, while 35% are ages 6 to 12 and 21% are ages 13 to 17. Forty-five percent of the children having grandparents as primary caregivers are under the age of six. Family finances also correlate, as 22% of the children living with a grandparent are below the poverty line, and 49% at or just above, while 23% of the households earn incomes more than three times above the poverty line. Nationally, about 22% of all U. S. children live below the poverty line. (Livingston, 2013). Boomerang grandchildren are a phenomenon present in all socioeconomic groups in America today.

Boomerang grandparents vary in their reactions to these unplanned roles relative to their ethnicity and whether their child raising duties are shared with the parents. Across

the country, one in ten children live with a grandparent. Four in ten of these children are being raised by that grandparent, and one in five of those families are living below the poverty line. This all adds up to approximately 2.9 million children in both formal and informal kinship care. African-American full-time custodial grandmothers experience greater well-being than do those who co-parent with their daughters, possibly reflecting "a long historical tradition of surrogate parenting in the African-American community," while Latino grandmothers find greater well-being in the co-parenting role, "signifying a cultural ideal of intergenerational reciprocity and close familial ties" (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010, p. 618). Research into the area of intergenerational multicultural households area is important, as a "greater understanding of these intergenerational ties will benefit research on families and individual development" (Crosnow, & Elder, 2002, p. 1089). Including ethnically diverse households with boomerang grandchildren added an important dimension to the study.

Review of the Popular Literature

As the phenomenon of boomerang children is relatively new, not much has yet appeared in peer review journals or the popular periodic media. In exception are two regurgitations of the comprehensive *Pew Center Report* (Davidson, 2010), one on the New York Life (2013) website. On the AARP website, Robinson (2010) cherry picks salient statistics from the Pew Study and diverts the attention away from 'today's wheezing economy' onto parental divorce, the high cost of living, and college loans. The article then discusses the views of psychotherapist and author, Susan Ende, who offers

advice to parents about admitting a launched child back into the home. “Don’t be the one to suggest that your child should move back in with you… unless there is a real emergency” (p. 1). She also stresses the importance of establishing rules and boundaries, sharing concerns, and not allowing the young child to cramp the remaining future of the aging parents. Good advice which stimulates interview questions to be asked of participants in this study.

An article in the *New York Times* (Henig, 2010) discusses the subject of 20-somethings missing their life course launch dates and provides an interesting rationale linked to Maslow’s Need Hierarchy, whereby humans can only pursue elevated goals of self-esteem and transcendence once their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing are satisfied. The boomerangers dodge personal life course responsibility of becoming self-sufficient, coping out with the notion their time is better spend pursuing intellectual activities while their parents continue picking up the bills for their living expenses. A web-delivered CNN Money article (Christie, 2013) cites a Coldwell banker survey of 2,000 young American adults ages 18 to 34, who see nothing wrong living at home for five or more years after college. The article features a photo of just such a respondent in shorts and T-shirt, hunched down on the floor of a darkened room playing a video game, secure within a nest comprised of an empty pizza box, a stereo speaker, a stack of books, a couple of sports balls, tennis shoes and rumpled clothes, his departure into the real world stalled indefinitely.

One self-published book the subject of boomerang kids is an attempt by the author to seize the limelight. *The Crowded Nest Syndrome* (2004) by self-styled expert Kathleen Shaputis, moves the boomerang child experience into the realm of a psychological syndrome. Shaputis, who works by day in a printing company and looks for ghostwriting assignments, writes a humorous account of her own challenging boomerang child experience and offers advice ranging from using color-coded locks on kitchen cabinets to protect groceries, to making friends with a storage guy, to doubling a prescription for Prozac. She manages a website selling her book and has even appointed June 12 as 'Crowded Nest Syndrome Day.' Not much here of real value except a few commiserating laughs from colleagues who share her quiet desperation. She somehow got her book listed in *Wikipedia* to the exclusion of the other more qualified authors mentioned in this section. Shaputis has fictional company in the film parody *Failure to Launch* (2008), where crowded-nest parents (Kathy Bates and Terry Bradshaw) of 30-year-old Tripp (Matthew McConaughey) enlist an alluring female (Sarah Jessica Parker) as an incentive to get their languishing son to finally leave the cushy benefits of home. Silly as the movie is, it does reinforce the phenomenon as a relevant topic of discussion in modern American society.

Two other books on boomerang kids contain information germane to this study, approaching the subject from opposite points of view: *Boomerang Nation* (Furman, 2005) and *Boomerang Kids* (Pickhardt, 2011). Furman writes from the perspective of being a boomerang kid herself, sympathizing with others who share the same dismal fate of

coming home, as evidenced in the book's subtitle "How to survive living with your parents… the second time around" (cover). The book is filled with compromising tales of others like her who failed to make it for a multitude of reasons, and have to deal with the emotional and status diminishing role of a boomeranger. "Panic, shame, depression, confusion and regression: these are just some of the nasty emotions that you'll have to battle on a daily basis" (p. 101). In the end, she offers lots of handy tips on how to make the next relaunch the last one. Clinical psychologist Carl Pickardt, PhD, the only male author in the group, views the boomerang phenomenon as a result of the final stage of adolescence he calls 'trial independence,' a kind of test stage young people use to experiment with life before committing themselves all the way to adulthood. Pickhardt thus expands the framework of the life course theory to include this fourth stage of adolescent development and advises parents to make allowances, to "change their role from being *managers* (imposing supervision and regulation) to becoming *mentors* (offering consultation and advice – when asked)" (p. 17). I find this book to be very refreshing and innovative and plan to incorporate some of Dr. Pickhardt's ideas in my interview questions.

One other book crosses the line between popular and scientific writing. *The Boomerang Age (2008)*, written by Barbara Mitchell, professor of sociology and gerontology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada. Dr. Mitchell is widely published in professional journals and has rewritten her academic papers in a style palatable to a general audience. She discusses most all of the issues presented in this

chapter, and is quoted as an authority, and uses the life course theory as a unifying structure which lends credence to my study. As she resides in Canada, she looks toward the socialistic government as a source of support for boomeranging young adults: "…young people can wisely see government as a potential form of valuable social capital that family policy practice requires for constructing policy solutions to family problems" (p. 163). Being from America, a country with a more individualistic culture, I am interested to see how the American families I study rely on self-determination as a source for solutions to their problems.

Conclusions

The life course perspective indicates typical stages in human development. A child grows up in a two-parent household, goes through high school in college, gets a job, leaves home, finds a mate, gets married and has children of their own. This model of development is recognized and anticipated by most cultural groups in America (Settersten, & Ray, 2010). Children who fail to keep pace with their peers bring social sanctions on themselves and their families. In the past several decades, this model has be challenged as children are living at home longer, waiting longer to have children or not having children at all. Underlying causes are reported to be financial difficulties, employment problems, relationship break-ups, couple with the option of staying within the secure confines of the parental home rather than having to carve one's niche in the world. These conditions have also resulted in a phenomenon termed the *boomerang*

generation, comprised of children who leave home to make their way in the world, run out of options and return home to live.

This failure to launch, or countertransitional movement of young people, has increased dramatically in the past two decades. Empty nest mothers who were beginning to adjust to the experience of middle age without children, suddenly find their lives in turmoil. Retirement plans get relegated to the back burner along with anticipated increases in personal fulfillment, time for outside activities, or increased intimacy with their spouse. This anomaly challenges the life course structure, adding an additional phase labeled by one author as 'trial independence' (Pickhardt, 2011). The parent-child relationship must be renegotiated. Issues in family dynamics must be restructured, from finances and practical household duties, to the roles each person plays in the relationship.

When children return home with children of their own, the phenomenon of boomerang grandparents is created within cultural imperatives. Children bringing children of their own into the parental home has been shown to decrease the level of parental satisfaction in Blacks, and increase satisfaction in Hispanics (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). While it might be expected that boomerang daughters might attribute greater satisfaction to mothers, studies have shown the opposite. Researchers in this field admit more in-depth work needs to be done to help social scientists understand how the empty nest mothers' lives are impacted by the boomerang phenomenon.

Summary and Purpose of Study

Precipitated by the bursting of the internet and real estate bubbles in the ending decades of the Twentieth Century, adult children who left the home to make it on their own began returning home in increasing numbers. Most often the reasons were loss of employment, financial problems, or relationship dissolution. These boomerang children have behaved contrary to the life course model of human development, creating a countertransition phase which impacts the life experience of their empty nest mothers, who have had to regress, rather than progress, along their intended life course. In some cases, these boomerang children return home with children of their own, creating the phenomenon of boomerang grandparents. These phenomena suggest that "the life-course theory needs to be further expanded and revised in order to better appreciate the present socio-historical context associated with the coming of age process" (Mitchell, 1998, p. 40; Mitchell, 2008). These issues have not been widely studied, especially from a multigenerational / multicultural perspective, and more work needs to be done to understand the life experience of empty nest mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The purpose of this study was to explore in depth, using a phenomenological qualitative approach, the life experiences of empty nest mothers whose children have boomeranged home, with or without boomerang grandchildren. Central to this research are perceptions these mothers have about the influence of this countertransitional phase of life events on their life experience, and how they have coped with changes in their family dynamics. This countertransitional phase, for the both the empty nest mother and

her offspring, is an important currently relevant topic for American families today (Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). Another area calling for additional research is how boomerang children and their parents learn to negotiate differences and learn to "disagree amicably" (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008, p. 694), and important determinant in making the renew relationship work. This study found that there were both positive and negative effects on the dynamics, depth and quality of the mother-child relationship as a result of coresidency.

Barbara Mitchell, one of the world leaders in the field life course theory as applied to empty nest mothers (1996, 1998), and family dynamics under the influence of boomerang kids (2006, 2008, 2009), has suggested future research on these subjects should include: "marital quality, stability and change… family members' communication, personality and conflict resolution styles… cultural differences… expectations… lifestyles and personal well-being" (2001, p. 447). My research explored these issues among the many others presented in this chapter with the goal of increasing our understanding of these important life event transitions, and countertransitions, prevalent in American families today. Clearer answers may help guide the formulation of public policy and educational programs designed to address the exigencies of this phenomenon: "… as the transition to adulthood becomes more protracted, the increasing family burden may prove costly to society as a whole" (Furstenberg, 2010, p. 67). And, findings from this research may also have value by influencing therapeutic strategies used

to counsel parents (especially mothers) on how to best deal with the changes a boomerang child brings back into the home.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study was designed to answer research questions related to the mothers' perceptions of living in the empty nest, and subsequently living with a boomerang child. The first research question and subquestions focused on the empty nest experience:

- RQ_1: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living in the empty nest?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their daily life activities?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their marital relationship?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their personal need fulfillment?

The second research question and subquestions elicited the participants' perceptions of having the empty nest phase interrupted by, and living with, one or more boomerang child:

- RQ_2: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?

- SQ: What were previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children expectations about coresidency before their children returned home?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children cope with the boomerang child countertransition?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children renegotiate coresidency exigencies?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the influence of boomerang children on their personal need fulfillment?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the life experience perceptions of empty nest mothers with boomerang children in the United States. The data for this study derived from in-depth personal semistructured interviews conducted in the qualitative phenomenological tradition. This chapter (a) describes my role as the researcher, including any biases; (b) explains the rationale behind the qualitative approach employed; (c) provides a justification for the criterion-based snowballing sample of convenience method; (d) describes the chronology of procedural events; (e) explains the data collection methods; (f) discusses the ways the data were be coded and analyzed; (f) explains how trustworthiness of the data can be assured; and (g) discusses limitations and ethical considerations important to this study.

The term *empty nest mother* refers to women whose last child has left home. Mothers, as opposed to fathers, are the focus of this study as mothers are traditionally the primary caregivers for children. This development precipitates several positive and negative anticipatory constructs attendant in this life stage of personal development. *Boomerang children* are those who have left the parental home to make it on their own in the world, but return home as the most convenient option among available circumstances. This countertransitional life course development affects both the child and the parents who must renegotiate adult roles, work out practical details of coresidency, find ways to get along and solve problems. What works and what does not work to create harmony in

the home ecology to and promote life experience of the mother, was a primary interest in this study.

The research questions for this study were:

- RQ_1: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living in the empty nest?
  - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their daily life activities?
  - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their marital relationship?
  - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their personal need fulfillment?
- RQ_2: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?
  - SQ: What were previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children expectations about coresidency before their children returned home?
  - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children cope with the boomerang child countertransition?
  - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children renegotiate coresidency exigencies?
  - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the influence of boomerang children on their personal need fulfillment?

Qualitative Research Approach

I employed a phenomenological approach to study the shared experiences of empty nest mothers with boomerang children. Phenomenological inquiry asks the question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for the people?" (Patton, 1990, p. 69). The phenomenological approach originated in the work of Edmond Husserl (1859-1938), one of the first to promote this method as rigorous science. Husserl's philosophical stance was rooted in conscious perceptions transmitted from the five physical senses, and meanings derived through understanding and interpretation (Patton). In phenomenology, there is no purely objective experience, rather one's worldview is subjective, relative to how one interprets their life experience. The phenomenological approach has been chosen to study a variety of midlife experiences, including those of Thai women (Arpanantikul, 2004), happy long-term marriages (Bachand, & Caron, 2001), preempty nest parents (Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1972), the satisfaction and regrets of midlife parents (Devries, Kerrick, & Oetlinger, 2008), and economics as an essential component to achieving self-sufficient adulthood status (Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008).

In this study, I assumed that there was a common essence to the shared experiences of empty nest mothers with boomerang children, and that this essence can be described by the participants. It was my intended duty as the researcher to elicit and record these descriptions, then to code, analyze, and synthesize them so conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the participants' experiences. I collected and documented

these experiences to analyze them for themes that may hold true for others in a similar life stage condition, as suggested by Moustakas (1994).

The phenomenological approach was the most appropriate tradition to employ in this study because it transcends past knowledge and captures fresh perceptions of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This approach allowed for rewording and reframing interview questions in response to what the researcher discovers through the data collection process. This enabled me to elicit data and understand the phenomenon at a deeper level than other methods, which can provide new realizations which contribute to the body of knowledge about the study subject. Using Moustakas' (1994) approach, I examined the data for key statements which embody the essence of lived experience, assemble meaningful units of these descriptions, identify themes, and produce a report which contains the "essential invariant structure of the experience" (Creswell, 2007, p. 187). My findings confirmed, augmented, and extended what was known about the phenomena of emoty nest mothers with boomerang children.

Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was to design the qualitative phenomenological study, gain IRB approval, locate and screen participants, conduct the study, analyze the findings, and report the results. My primary data collection tool was in-depth interviews, which I conducted over the phone as most of the participants lived in places far distant from me. Each of my study participants was unknown to me beforehand. I approached the interviews with a spirit of equanimity and established a rapport that we are equals and

colleagues engaged in a discourse of exploration for our mutual benefit and understanding. In no way did I attempt to be perceived as a supervisor, instructor, or a person who may have any kind of control or power over the participants. I assured the participants that their conveyed perceptions could be expressed freely and held in confidence. I also offered the incentive of a $50 gift card to a retail store of their choice for participation.

My familiarity with this topic was grounded in direct personal experience. At thet time of this study, my daughter and granddaughter had lived in our home for a year and a half. My daughter had intitially moved out several years prior, but experienced a relationship dissolution and came home as a last resort. She therefore fit the definition of a boomerang child, and her daughter fits the definition of a boomerang grandchild. She was our youngest daughter to leave home, and her return significantly impacted my wife's normal life course development, as the time, resources, and energy that she had reserved for her own personal growth were redirected to our daughter and our boomerang granddaughter. Living in close proximity to the phenomenon I planned to study gave me the firsthand knowledge necessary to construct focused and informed interview questions to provoke valuable data.

While absolute negation of biases is impossible, I sincerely feel my related experiences did not affect the objectivity of my study, but rather enhanced its trustworthiness. I was interested in what works and what does not work in the coresidency home dynamics to impact the mothers' life experience. Having observed

these kinds of interactions on a daily basis for 18 months, I knew there was a wide range of possibilities in the spectrum of behavior, of both the boomerang child and the empty nest mother, which can have both positive and negative ramifications. I was, and still am, deeply curious about how the dynamics in these relationships work in other families from a variety of diverse ethnic backgrounds, hence the strength of my interest which provided the endurance to conduct this study and see it through to its logical conclusion.

Participants

The phenomenon being studied is the life experience of empty nest mothers with boomerang children. Participants for this study were selected using a purposeful criterion-based sample of convenience (Creswell, 2007). One participant was referred by a previous participant. This method provided information rich cases I was able to study in depth to elicit themes (Patton, 1996). The selection criteria for this study were specific, requiring that participants have had an empty nest for at least six months prior, so that the mothers had direct experience of what being in the empty nest was like. Participants must have allowed a child who had been away at least six months back into the home to live, so as to qualify for the boomerang child role.

Boomerang children return home for a variety of reasons including loss of employment, breaking up with significant other, or financial difficulties that cause a loss of self-sufficiency. In order to participate in this study, the boomerang child must have been living back in the parental home for at least six months at the time of this study, so as to allow sufficient time for the mother participants to have experienced the

negotiations explained in the conceptual model (see Figure 2). Ethnicity and socioeconomic status were significant in the selection process. I wanted to select as wide a range of situations as possible, to obtain maximum variation, as any "common themes or patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value" (Patton, p. 172). I was able to ascertain if prospective participants met the criteria for this study by asking them the series of qualifying questions listed as Appendix A.

Participants who met the selection criteria, who were willing to take part, and were representative of the desired socioeconomic mix were accepted into the study until the point of saturation. In qualitative phenomenological studies, the sample size "depends upon what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry… what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton, 1996, p. 184). Creswell (2007) cites sample sizes for qualitative phenomenological studies can range from 5 to 25 participants. The sample size for this study was 23 participants who collectively had 30 boomerang children and seven boomerang grandchildren. I deemed this sample size sufficient as I had reached saturation. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) conducted 60 in-depth interviews and found saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews "although basic elements for metatheses were present as early as six interviews" (p. 59). Having conducted scores of videotaped interviews and living with persons similar to the study participants, provided me with an advanced understanding of the study subject and methods, further justifying the sample size.

Procedure

Following approval from Walden University's IRB (#10-02-14-0222359, exp. October 2, 2015), my first step was to place recruitment notices on an online classified ad site known as Craigslist, where participants were able to respond via email. In order to obtain a diverse socioeconomic sample, I targeted cities know to have ethnic diversity: Houston, Miami, San Antonio, New York City, and San Francisco. I also found six participants within my home state of Kentucky. This gave my study a good representative sample approximating the ethnic mix of the United States in general. I then asked the participants the qualification questions (Appendix A) to make certain they meet the study participation criteria. I then briefly explained the nature and purpose of the study, including their involvement, and how much time and effort would be required. Once they agreed to the stated parameters, I provided the formal introduction to the study.

Informed Consent. The first step was to present the written informed consent form and go over it with them until complete understanding and agreement were achieved (Appendix B). The informed consent included all elements required by the Walden University IRB and the APA Code of Ethics. Once they electronically signed the informed consent due to the geographical distance, the study was officially underway. The informed consent form became the first piece of paper to be confidentially secured within each participant's file. The participants' real names only appeared once during the course of this study, on the informed consent form, referenced with the participants' code names. Code names are pseudonyms designed to have no conceptual inference to the

participants' real names (Kaiser, 2009). In my study I used colors for pseudonyms, chosen by the 23 participants, ranging from Amber to Yellow. Every document, recording, and ancillary material were referenced using the participants' code names. All documents are secure and protected in a locked file case inside my locked home office.

Data Collection

Interviews. I recorded the interviews using digital audio (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). Audio recordings are near perfect representations of what occurs during the data collection process, making the data highly trustworthy. The recorded interviews produced the core data for this study evidenced through verbatim transcriptions. The interviews began "with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). I should mention that I am a skilled interviewer, videographer and editor, having made over 100 educational documentaries which have been seen by millions of students around the world. I also own my own equipment and am expert at its deployment. I required no additional technical support from anyone during the interview process, and was able to accomplish the tasks myself while maintaining seamless integrity of the materials collected. Subsequently, I did use a confidential transcriber after obtaining permission from the IRB.

All but my first interview (Cerulean) were conducted over the telephone. I conducted the Cerulean interview in a public library close to my home as the participant lived nearby. All the other participants were from distant cities which made face-to-face interviews financially and logistically impractical. I also learned from the first interview

that she responded to nonverbal influences such as the way we looked into each other's eyes, body language, and other nonverbal emblems and cues (Ekman, 1964) I felt might in some way influence her recollections. Nonverbals, except for paralanguage or the intonation of the voice, are absent from telephone interviews, thereby promoting more authentic responses. I opted to conduct all subsequent interviews over the telephone. Interviews ran from 25 to 55 minutes in length, including the initial screening and consent procedures, and extended until the participants had no more information to convey or until I felt previous information was being repeated.

Prior to asking questions which related directly to the research questions, a series of standard questions were asked to establish rapport and gather basic demographic data. These questions, along with anticipated interview questions, are shown in Appendix C. A standard set of interview questions based on the research questions and subquestions was asked of all the participants to maintain consistency. Additional questions emerged spontaneously during the interview process which helped elicit knowledge about issues specific to each participant. The order of the questions was altered in response to the flow of the conversation in a semistructured interview fashion. Upon examination of the recordings and transcripts, three participants were called a second time for more information, or to clarify points that were undeveloped or needed more exploration. The last question I asked was always: "Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of being an empty nest mother living with a boomerang child you have not mentioned previously?" All of the interview questions were open-ended as they related to

the research questions and sub-questions, except for questions interjected during the process to establish rapport.

Exit Procedures. When enough information had been produced by our telephone conversation including the final question cited above, I told the participants the interview was over. I asked them if they felt uneasy about any aspect of our conversation, if they felt they had been harmed in anyway, or if they thought they might need counseling of any kind. Not one of the participants expressed any untoward feelings whatsoever. In fact, the opposite was true in several cases, that the mothers enjoyed talking about their experiences of living in the empty nest and then living again with their boomerang child and/or boomerang grandchild, that it helped clarify their own thoughts and feelings and acted as a kind of catharsis. One mother went so far as to thank me for what she perceived as a therapy session. I then thanked the mothers for their time, and if I had not previously obtained their mailing address did so I could mail them the $50 gift card. I had purchased ten $50 gift cards from Target, and ended up buying another 13 cards, though some of the mothers chose WalMart or Amazon. I closed by asking them if they had any additional thoughts they wanted to convey to send them by email, but they all said they had said it all. No subsequent replies were received with more information. I also asked them if they wanted a printed 1-2 page summary of the findings from this study to email that request. I have not received one request so far. Upon the completion and approval of this study I intend to write articles for submission to professional journals and consumer magazines for publication.

Summaries and Transcriptions. In addition to the notes I made during the interviews, I wrote summaries of each interview after it was over. These summaries were rewritten after review of the verbatim transcriptions and serve as brief textural descriptions of each participant's individual experience (Madison, 2005). Following these textural descriptions I added structural descriptions which reflected on the "setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). These descriptions are provided in Chapter 4.

I initially began transcribing the interviews myself, but found this process to be too time-consuming and interfered with my procedure of placing announcements, responding to emails from prospective participants, calling them and asking screening questions and conducting the interviews. For reasons of expediency, I petitioned the IRB for a modification of the research agreement to allow a confidential transcriber I have worked with for many years assist me. I obtained a signed confidentiality agreement from my transcriber and submitted it along with other required materials. Upon being granted approval, I emailed digital files of the interviews to my transcribed after editing out the qualifying questions and any other segments where the participants may have stated their names or locations. This way my transcriber only knew my participants by their voices and code name colors. None of my participants lived within a 500-mile radius of my transcriber and the chance of her ever meeting any of my participants is so remote it borders on being impossible. All digital audio recordings, transcriptions and other

documents are stored on a dedicated external hard drive reserved for this project. Hard copies are stored in a locked case inside my locked home office.

Data Coding. The verbatim-transcribed interviews in Microsoft manuscript form were copied and pasted into new Word documents with three vertical columns. A separate coding form was produced for each participant, labeled by their code color. The interview text was placed in the left column beneath a brief demographic profile. The transcriptions were read and key words and passages marked in two colors, one color representing answers to research question one and a second color representing answers to research question two. This amounted to about 60-70% of the data, the remainder being questions, rapport comments or other data not directly related to the questions. In the second column under the heading "Focused Coding" summary statements encapsulated the transcript data. A more detailed description of the complete coding process with excerpts appears in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis. Prior to beginning the data analysis phase, I performed an *epoche* on myself (Ihde, 1977; Patton, 1990). This *epoche* is a traditional exercise used by qualitative phenomenological researchers to "remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation" (Patton, 1990, p. 407). I anticipated this exercise to be a cleansing meditation of sorts where I detach from any and all preconceptions or opinions about the data collected, such that I might view it with a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, and in so doing prepare myself to

render as honest and objective a review as possible. This anticipated result proved to be true as a meditation before beginning critical work is always refreshing.

The first data analysis activity was to locate within the transcripts meaningful statements which related to the research questions in the left column. These quotes helped "provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Next I reread the summary descriptions in the center column labeled "Focused Coding." This process of was followed by developing clusters of meaning from these statements and summary sentences which became categories entered into the right column of the (Moustakas, 1994). I made special note of any outliers using negative case analysis and described how certain participants described experiences were different, unique, or irregular, from the group (Wolcott, 1994), using quotes from the transcripts. The goal for this research was to illuminate understanding about the shared lived experiences of the phenomenon described in the title of this study.

Trustworthiness

Study findings must be accurate and valid to have any lasting meaning and relevance to the field of psychology. Unlike a quantitative study where validity and reliability are established within numerical ranges, qualitative findings must be trustworthy (Rudestam, & Newton, 2007). Trustworthiness is assured in this study through five characteristic aspects inherent within the research design: (a) accuracy, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, (d) dependability, and (e) confirmability (Denzin, & Lincoln 1994; Lincoln, & Guba 1984).

Accuracy. In this study, accuracy was substantiated by two methods, precise digital recordings of interviews with the participants and by verbatim transcriptions of the recordings. These transcriptions were printed in hard copy and read while listening to the recordings to make certain they were as accurate as possible. During this stage of the review process, the transcripts were closely examined for any errors in word usage, word order, spelling and punctuation. These errors were noted on the hard copies and corrected in the digital file on the computer. Transcripts were typed in Microsoft Word and saved using the color code names of the participants to protect their anonymity. All names, locations and other identifying information was removed from the original transcripts to produce working transcripts for coding and analysis purposes. These transcripts were then checked for accuracy by looking for repetition of ideas. Similar statements said by a participant in different places in the transcript were compared for accuracy. Any contradictions were handled with a follow-up phone call.

Credibility. This was ensured through three inter-related aspects of this study. First, by defining clear criteria for the participant sample: (a) mothers whose last child has left home and has been able to experience the empty nest phase of life for at least six months, (b) mothers with boomerang children who had left home at least six months and then returned home and lived there for at least six months, and (c) mother from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This provided a sample with many diverse viewpoints into a common shared experience from which rich phenomenological data were derived.

Secondly, a thoughtful set of targeted and unbiased questions facilitated the production of trustworthy data. The questions touched on life experiences that were important and relevant to both the study and to the research participants. They reflected the researcher's knowledge of the subject being studied, and were phrased in such a way as to afford easy understanding by the participants so not to feel uncomfortable or threatened. Good interview questions are free of bias, and promote the free exchange of ideas.

Thirdly, achieving a sample size of sufficient quantity (until saturation) ensured the trustworthiness of data through repetition. Achieving a sample of representative diversity conformed the universality of the data across cultural groups. Prolonged engagement with the participants through a 40-60 minute interviews, with the opportunity to gather more information through follow-up phone calls, helped verify the authenticity and trustworthiness of the participants' information.

Transferability. Transferability in this study refers to how closely the findings of this research are similar to findings in other studies conducted along the same lines involving a comparable sample of participants. The detailed, or thick descriptions, derived from in-depth participant interviews proved thorough enough to be thematically consistent with those derived in similar studies cited in the literature review section. The ethnic and socioeconomic variation of the participant sample provided sufficient breadth, and it is anticipated subsequent like studies in the United States will reveal similar themes, statements and perceptions to this study.

Dependability. The dependability, or reliability, of this study was established by the sanctity of the research data. That is, it was recorded on digital audio, and a complete unedited record will be maintained. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to assure that every word, phrase and nuance was accurately captured. Often, questions were asked several times during the interviews in differently ways when not enough information was provided, or I sensed more information would be forthcoming. Checking these answers against one another helped make the data more dependable within each interview. Common answers among the participants to the same questions further substantiated the data's dependability.

Confirmability. The objectivity of this study began with the researcher's *epoche* and extended through to final data interpretation. The detailed step-by-step progression of data analysis, from verbatim transcribing, through focused coding, establishing themes and interpreting the findings, is described in chapters four and five. The audit trail is thorough, logical and easy to follow as depicted in focused coding sheets that are summarized in figures and tables. These aspects assure that the objectivity of the findings are derived from the data elicited from the participants in this study with little or no subjective influence from the researcher.

Potential Research Bias

I stated earlier that I had been living in a situation with family dynamics similar to what I studied. Our youngest daughter and her daughter stayed with my wife and me for a year and a half after having lived away for a year. This firsthand experience provided me

with a unique perspective and knowledge base to prepare for this study. It also incited a curiosity about what others in this situation are doing, how they handle the day-to-day challenges, how their attitudes toward each other have changed and are changing, what their anticipations and strategies are for the future. Should I have found any bias creeping into the study, or should I have found myself starting to judge if someone's actions or thinking was wrong, I would have made a research note and paused to bring myself back in line. However, I was able to maintain a judgment and bias free attitude throughout the study and had no cause to sanction myself during the interviews. Ultimately, the recordings of my participant interviews are the reality of my study, inherent within them my state of objectivity.

Limitations

Out of my control are limitations due to the number of women in this category who were accessible to me who may have agreed to participate in the study. I planned to select a purposeful criterion-based sample which roughly corresponded to the cultural and socioeconomic percentages of the American population at large. I feel I achieved this within respectable limits. As I financed this study myself, I had to go with what is available to me geographically, respecting the time and costs parameters. It was impractical to travel to various states to interview participants, and thus placing solicitations online in Craigslist proved to be a workable compromise to obtain a good representative sample. Further limitations derive from the accuracy of the perticipants' memory, their ability to articulate their feelings and their willingness to divulge sensitive

information to a stranger. The anonymity of a long distance phone call worked in my favor and facilitated overcoking these inherent limitations.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical requirements of the IRB, and the American Psychological Association (APA), were strictly followed throughout the course and duration of this study, and will be followed through to publication of findings. All participants were briefed about the nature of the study in advance and administered a proper informed consent which became part of the secure research files. Confidentiality of the participants will be protected at all times, and all data derived from the participants was coded to protect their identities. Audio recordings, verbatim transcripts, and other considerations mentioned in the trustworthiness section of this chapter, attest to the authenticity and legitimacy of the data. Participants were informed they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty of any kind, though none of my participants chose to do so.

All notes, transcripts, audio recordings and other written data is secure in a locked file case in my locked home office. These materials will not be shown to anyone, for any reason, without expressed written permission obtained from the participant, as long as this does not violate IRB or APA ethics. Each participant was given a code name by which her materials were organized, coded, analyzed, and will be used in any reports, articles or statements regarding this research. Code names are colors, such as Ms. Magenta or Ms. Cerulean. No one will ever have knowledge of which actual person is connected to which code name, except for myself and the participants. Upon completion,

a one page summary will be sent to all those participants who tender a written request. All records will be retained and kept private under lock and key as long as IRB regulations require, then they will be destroyed.

Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology used to select a sample of participants who shared a common life experience, and described the methods by which data were obtained from this sample to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. A purposeful criterion-based convenience sample has been shown to be the most expedient means of selecting suitable participants. A qualitative phenomenological approach using in-depth personal interviews was the desired method of inquiry. Data collection was accomplished through audio recordings which were verbatim-transcribed. Trustworthiness of data were assured through standard practices of accuracy, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Limitations, biases and ethical considerations relevant to this study have been candidly revealed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the life experience perceptions of empty nest mothers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds with boomerang children. This study was designed to determine how empty nest mothers describe the changing life exigencies imposed upon them by admitting boomerang kids back into their homes, how these exigencies affected the mothers' life experience, and what works and what doesn't work in maintaining a workable relationship between all parties in the home. The participants all had children who had left home to make it on their own, but ultimately failed to do so and had to return home for support. The study was open to mothers of any age, ethnicity or socioeconomic status and sought to obtain a sample of participants which mirrored the ethnic mix of the United States population in general.The goal of this study was to understand the mothers' emotional, psychological and practical considerations before, during and after the onset of the empty nest phase and subsequent boomerang child phase of Life Course Development (Elder, 1998, & 2000; Giele & Elder, 1998).

Data were collected using semistructured interviews which were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded and analyzed. This qualitative phenomenological study was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ_1: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living in the empty nest?

    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their daily life activities?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their marital relationship?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their personal need fulfillment?
- RQ_2: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?
    - SQ: What were previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children expectations about coresidency before their children returned home?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children cope with the boomerang child countertransition?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children renegotiate coresidency exigencies?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the influence of boomerang children on their personal need fulfillment?

This chapter is divided into seven sections which describe the data collection, coding and analysis processes. The first section describes the data collection process, including means of locating, screening and remunerating participants, and the methods of transcribing the recorded interviews. The second section provides socioeconomic and

demographic data for each of the 23 participants and their boomerang kids, including brief summaries of their relevant life experiences to this study drawn from the interview transcripts. The third section presents data coding strategies with examples of focused coding. The fourth section describes categories which emerge from data analysis. The fifth section discusses credibility measures. The sixth section is a presentation of themes which emerged from the data analysis. The final section is a brief summary of the study's findings.

Participant Selection and Data Collection Process

Following IRB approval for this research study on October 2, 2014 (IRB# 10-02-14-0222359; Appendix G), I went to work locating and recruiting a purposeful criterion-based sample of convenience. In order to obtain as geographically and socioeconomically diverse a participant sample as possible, I placed classified advertisements (Appendix H) online on Craigslist in six cities: New York, New York; San Francisco, California; Miami, Florida; Houston, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; and Lexington, Kentucky, where I live. These ad contained qualifying criteria and offered a $50 gift card in compensation for their participation. Interested parties who felt they qualified emailed their contact information to which I responded by email or telephone depending upon the information detail in their email. Several example reply emails with my response are included in Appendix I.

Most of those who felt they qualified would email back again and I would set up a time to call them on the phone. Once I introduced myself and engaged in a moment or

two of casual conversation to establish a rapport, I would make sure the person was qualified for the study by going over the qualifying questions again (Appendix A). Assured the mother's life situation was within acceptable parameters of the study, I would then go over the informed consent (Appendix B) and answer any questions she might have. I then emailed her a digital copy of the consent and asked her to read it and send me a return email where she typed in the words "I agree with the Lary consent form." This served as an electronic signature of consent. I printed hard copies of these emails and added them to each participant's confidential file in my locked file case.

Once this was received, I switched on my digital recorder I had attached to the phone line and began the interview by asking the participant to select a color which would serve as a code for her interview to protect her anonymity. I asked that the color word start with the first letter of her first or last name. I had a list of colors to choose from in case she couldn't think of a color which had not already been used. Once the color was selected, I began to ask the interview questions (Appendix C). My digital recorder captured the audio in Mpeg3 format which enabled easy uploading to my computer and playing using Windows Media Player. The recordings were very clear and easy to understand, especially when using headphones.

The interviews progressed in a semistructured manner which allowed me to deviate from the list of questions to explore ideas and issues which materialized out of our conversation as they occurred. Occasionally I would stop to relate a personal experience to help further our rapport when I felt the participant wanted some kind of

feedback. This usually resulted in the participant revealing more candid information. If I ever felt the participant was starting to feel uncomfortable, I would reiterate the provision that she could stop any time and could skip any question she didn't want to answer. The interviews ranged in length from about 25–50 minutes.

As I progressed through the series of interviews, I developed sensitivity to the nature of the participants' responses and was able to be more exacting in the questions I asked. Patterns began to emerge in my perception of the participants' recollections of their life experiences. I made note of these along with other impressions I felt might be relevant during data analysis. Many of these impressions derived from paralanguage, or nuances of verbal expression which contained emotional content such as pain, joy, frustration, anger, exhaustion, or so forth, especially as they related to the participants' interactions with their boomerang kids.

It should be mentioned that I only conducted one interview face-to-face (Cerulean) in a public library and that all the other interviews were conducted over the phone. This was not only because it was financially unfeasible to travel to distant cities, but because I noticed the data derived from the one in-person interview had a tendency to be discolored by the proximity of my physical presence. Just as brick-and-mortar classrooms are rife with potentially biasing influences, such as the way people look and dress, the way they walk, sit and interact with others, I feel the anonymity of the phone call is able to produce more candid responses from the interview participants than face-to-face interviews with their attending nonverbal elements. This is verified by research.

Mehrabian (1980), for example, found that in face-to-face encounters only 7% of the message content was conveyed through the words used, while 38% was based in paralanguage and 55% through facial expressions, gestures, symbolic movements, appearance and other nonverbal elements. Ekman (1964) found similar influences of nonverbal in communication. Conducting interviews over the phone eliminated potential biasing agents of the researcher except for the paralanguage, thus promoting trustworthiness in data collection.

I concluded each interview when I felt the participant had given me all the information she could, was willing to convey, or when the answers to my questions became repetitive. I thanked them for their time and asked them if they had any questions, or if my questions had raised any kind of emotional or psychological concerns which might need to be addressed by a professional counselor. Most of the mothers had no questions or concerns about the interview or its effect on their well-being. I told them I might call them again to ask some follow-up questions if I needed to explore a topic in more detail. Five women were contacted for follow-up questions. I then asked for their mailing address so I could mail them the $50 Target gift card. Most of the women were pleased with the Target card, though two wanted other gift cards I obtained and mailed to them. All the women received their gift cards and subsequently had no complaints.

I had initially planned to interview 12 participants, but expanded the number to 23 as I did not feel I had achieved saturation. I also was accumulating an increasingly diverse sample of participants which exceeded my anticipations based on what I had read

in reports of previous research. I had thought achieving a representative demographic mix of ethnicity, marital status and socioeconomic level would satisfy my study objectives, but soon found there were more unusual situations which needed inclusion. For example, there was one mother in Houston who had never married and had four children by three different men. In Oakland, California, I found a lesbian mother with three children propagated via artificial insemination who was just legally able to marry her long time cohabitating girlfriend as laws had changed. In Kentucky there is a widowed mother with six children, one who boomeranged back and has been living there for seven years. Seven of the participants also had boomerang grandchildren living with them. Expanding my study to include these unusual cases added richness and depth to my data analysis, and increased the understanding derived from the research questions.

The audio recorded files, transcriptions, notes, correspondence with the participants, delivery slips from the United States Post Office for remuneration gift cards, and all other documents and materials associated with this study are securely maintained on my password protected computers and/or in a locked file case in my home office. My home office door is kept locked within my house which is also lock protected. No one has seen any of the data associated with this study other than my dissertation committee members or my transcriber, who signed a confidentiality statement and was approved by the IRB.

Participant Socioeconomic and Demographic Data

One of the original aspects of this research is the heterogeneous scope of the participants' ethnicity, geographical and socioeconomic living circumstances. Previous research has focused on homogeneous participant samples curtailed by convenience. For example, Deutscher (1963) explored a sample of 49 urban upper middle class spouses in Kansas City, Missouri. Lowenthal and Chiriboga (1972) drew data from a sample of 54 middle and lower-middle class men and women in San Francisco. Chima and Nnodum (2008) interviewed 46 retired empty nesters in Owerri, Africa. Participants in the Liu and Guo (2007) study all came from remote rural areas of China. Harkins (1978) administered his mail survey to 318 women in Durham County, North Carolina. Howell (2001) utilized a homogenous sample of Caucasian women, then later partnered with Beth (2002) to study 11 culturally diverse women in Manhattan, precipitating the sagacity of a heterogeneous sample.

My intention was to explore the life experience of empty nest mothers across a more diverse spectrum of ethnicity, resulting in mothers who were White (9), Black (3), Latino (4), Asian (5), with a Native American (1) and an Israeli (1). These participants came from many levels of family income: $0-25K (3), $25-50K (6), $50-75K (4), $75-100K (7), and $100K+ (3). Obtaining a mix of mothers with varying marital status within my participant sample was also a desirable attribute, realized in these figures: married (10), divorced (7), widowed (3), and single never married (3). This data is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Coded Name	Age	Income	Ethnicity	Marital	Residence
1. Amber	38	$75-100K	Latino	Single	New York
2. Aqua	46	$25-50K	Latino	Divorced	New York
3. Black	48	$25-50K	White	Married	Kentucky
4. Blue	56	$100K+	Asian	Married	California
5. Cerulean	53	$100K+	White	Married	Kentucky
6. Citron	45	$75-100K	Black	Married	Kentucky
7. Coral	40	$50-75K	Asian	Married	California
8. Gray	67	$100K+	Israeli	Widowed	Kentucky
9. Jade	50	$75-100K	Asian	Married	California
10. Jasmine	56	$50-75K	Asian	Married	California
11. Khaki	53	$75-100K	White	Married	Kentucky
12. Lavender	59	$75-100K	White	Widowed	Texas
13. Lilac	59	$75-100K	White	Divorced	New York
14. Lime	52	$50-75K	White	Married	Kentucky
15. Magenta	44	$25-50K	White	Divorced	Texas
16. Mint	44	$75-100K	Asian	Married	New York
17. Purple	51	$50-75K	White	Divorced	Kentucky
18. Rose	37	$25-50K	Latino	Divorced	Florida
19. Sienna	49	$0-25K	Black	Single	Texas
20. Silver	63	$25-50K	Native Am.	Divorced	Texas
21. Turquoise	47	$25-50K	Black	Single	Texas
22. Violet	55	$0-25K	White	Widowed	Florida
23. Yellow	53	$0-25K	Latino	Divorced	New York

This study is also concerned with the mothers' children who left home to make it on their own, but had to return for a number of reasons, including relationship break-up, unable to meet financial responsibilities, loss of job, legal problems, or who just needed to regroup and take a break from self-reliant responsibilities. There were 30 boomerang kids (18 male and 12 female) mentioned by the 23 mothers in this study, with seven mothers reporting two kids back under their roofs at the same time. This data is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' Boomerang Children and Their Reasons for Returning Home

Coded Name	Age / Gender	Child's Reasons for Returning Home
1. Amber	20 / male	Discharged from military, looking for work
2. Aqua	20 / female	Relationship break-up, financial difficulties
3. Black	30 / female	Divorce, loss of employment financial and health problems
4. Blue	29 / female	Relationship break-up, with young child
5. Cerulean	22 / male	Job ended, girlfriend break-up
	24 / male	Damaging relationship with mentor, depression, regrouping
6. Citron	30 / male	Relationship break-up, regroup between jobs
7. Coral	20 / male	Financial difficulties, trouble with the law
8. Gray	38 / female	Escape from abusive husband, with young daughter
9. Jade	30 / male	Financial hard times, with girlfriend and young son
10. Jasmine	30 / female	Between jobs, to save money to move out
11. Khaki	22 / female	Father stopped paying apartment, help disabled mother
12. Lavender	25 / male	Financial problems, saving money, regrouping
	27 / male	Financial problems, saving money, regrouping
13. Lilac	29 / male	Between jobs, laid off looking for work
	24 / male	Completed college, job hunting
14. Lime	21 / male	Roommate difficulties, finances, job changes

15. Magenta	22 / female	Save money from commute, share expenses
16. Mint	21 / male	Lost job, apartment, regroup
17. Purple	31 / male	Laid off from work, regroup
	24 / female	New job, traveling, not ready for own place
18. Rose	22 / male	Dead end job, back to college for more education
19. Sienna	25 / female	Relationship break-up, regroup
	30 / male	Lost job, finances, regroup
20. Silver	25 / male	Injured in Iraq War, healing up, regrouping
21. Turquoise	22 / female	Unable to find sustainable work
	27 / female	Entry level job low pay, with 7-year-old daughter
22. Violet	22 / female	Divorce, escape from abusive ex, with young daughter
	24 / male	Rescued from rough crowd, regroup, low paying work
23. Yellow	28 / male	Divorced, regroup, shared custody of young son
	25 / male	Trying to find self; in and out of mother's home

Participant Profiles

The following participant profiles contain key socioeconomic data and provide brief summaries of the verbatim transcription data derived directly from the 23 mothers interviewed for this study. Each mother was designated a color code name which served to protect their anonymity. These interviews took place between October 10, 2014 (Cerulean) and December 14, 2014 (Aqua).

Participant 1 – *Amber*

Amber was a 38-year-old single, never married, Latino mother, born in the Dominican Republic. At the time of this study, she had lived the United States for 20 years, was a naturalized citizen, and was employed full-time as an executive assistant. She lived in the Bronx, New York. Family income before taxes is in the $75-100,000

range. She had two sons (18, 20), the oldest of whom came to live back home after serving in the military in the Middle East and was looking for work.

Amber stated that she was looking forward to her last child leaving home, had made plans to take up physical exercise and signed up for swimming lessons. She also wanted to start dating again, but felt out of place as the dating scene was not as she remembered it 20 years ago. Her motivation to do new things waned as she experienced sadness and depression with her children gone and tried to fill the void with activities which were not satisfying. She began to feel lonely and experienced a loss of purpose, as her life had been based on being a mom. She realized that self-centered activities were not as personally satisfying as raising children and looked forward to having her son back in the home, encouraging him to boomerang when times got tough, as much for her comfort as his.

Amber welcomed her son back into the home and enjoyed cooking meals and sharing conversation. Having an ex-soldier in the house made her feel secure. She noticed his time in the military had instilled basic discipline, manifested in the way he kept his living quarters tidy and cleaned up after himself. It also made him more truthful and honest in his communication with her. Amber stated that she was happy her son is back home as she worried about him overseas serving in a war zone. At the time of the study, she was working with him to help build his confidence and make him more independent so his next launch into the world will be successful. However, she also realized that her

son may have taken the easy way out and dodged adult responsibilities, and that her mothering may have stifled his maturity and life course progress.

Participant 2 – *Aqua*

Aqua is a 46-year-old divorced Latino mother, half Spanish and half Puerto Rican. She works full time running errands, housekeeping, walking dogs, and doing odd jobs for several clients. Aqua lives in Port Chester, New York, and family income before taxes is in the $25-50,000 range. She has one daughter (20) and one son (18). Her daughter boomeranged home after a relationship break up and financial difficulties.

The thought of being in the empty nest at first scared her. She tried to convince herself that kids leaving the nest was a normal transition, but she continued to worry about the mistakes her children would make. She became depressed and stayed away from family events. She took tablets to help her sleep. Her work gave her focus and kept her going, though she felt she lost her main purpose of being a mom. She filled her extra time running errands for busy people and earned extra income. She bought a dog to help ease the loneliness and to provide companionship after she hurt her leg doing kickboxing. She tried dating online but it didn't work out. She was able to save money and redecorated her house.

Her daughter called and confided that her relationship was breaking up and needed to come back home. Aqua was sympathetic and compassionate, but stipulated her daughter would have to go back to college or start a career, and that the home move would be temporary. She also imposed a curfew except for Friday and Saturday nights.

Aqua was initially excited to have her daughter home as it renewed her purpose, but found her daughter had changed and they began to argue more than before. Her daughter felt she was an adult and didn't have to listen to her mother's rules. Aqua had to assert her authority as the breadwinner as the daughter tried to slip back into the conceptual womb of insecurity and avoiding responsibility. They clash over household duties and expenses. Aqua is aggravated that she constantly has to remind her daughter to clean up after herself and share the chores, but accepts the situation as she wants her daughter to finish college when her prospects for relaunch will be greater. Aqua regrets her marriage break-up and wishes she could have done something to keep it together, as she views a two-parent household as being more beneficial to the children growing up.

Participant 3 – *Black*

Black was a 48-year-old remarried, once divorced, White mother cohabitating with a divorced man. Black was unemployed and taking college courses towards an Associate's Degree in *Bible* studies. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the $25-50,000 range. She has two sons from a former marriage (20, 23), and two step children (27M, 30F). Black found the empty nest phase to be invigorating as she and her husband could do what they wanted for the first time without having to consider their kids' needs. They dreamed about getting a camper and exploring America, but didn't do it. They both enrolled in a junior college and enjoy a simple home life together in their apartment.

Black's 30-year-old step-daughter needed to come home due to relationship break-up, loss of job and health problems. She had no place to go and is physically unable to work due to a history of substance abuse problems. The family dynamics sometimes precipitate extraneous drama over petty things like leaving out an unwashed coffee cup. A couple of the other kids had boomeranged home several times for short periods and the family did what they had to so everyone had a place to sleep and food on the table. Black spends a lot of time in prayer, her faith a vehicle to help them make it through life. Most of the time the family works together to handle daily chores. Black realizes her mothering efforts may have gone on too long, thus hampering the kids' personal growth. She regrets having not started school sooner and not doing more things for herself. She feels her children would have become more self-reliant quicker if she did not overprotect them. Black sees no difference in how she views and treats her biological children from her step children.

Participant 4 – *Blue*

Blue was a 56-year-old Asian mother of Chinese ancestry married to a Latino with two daughters (29, 32). She is employed full-time as a service rep for a major phone company. She lives in Pacifica, California. Family income before taxes is in the over $100,000 range. Blue was sad and depressed when her last daughtered moved away, especially when she came home from work to an empty house. Sometimes she would wander aimlessly around the mall or go to the library to fill the void. Her 29-year-old daughter came to live back home with her young child after a relationship breakup. Blue

knew her daughter wasn't mature enough to handle life on her own and tried to counsel her. Blue saw her purpose and identity as a mother. Blue and her husband are homebodies and don't like to do a lot outside the home.

When Blue's 29-year-old boomeranged home, pregnant and unmarried, Blue helped her daughter through the birth and get her life together. The daughter went back to school to become a medical assistant. Blue found her mother role renewed as a grandmother, which filled and rejuvenated her life purpose. She prefers the noise and chaos of having a grandchild around to quiet and being alone with her husband. She helped her daughter become more responsible and feels her daughter's situation reflects today's shifting societal mores. Blue's daughter's baby daddy is troublemaker and they had to get a restraining order against him for protection. Blue insists her daughter accept responsibility for her child and enforces rules which help guide her daughter's behavior and lead her to becoming self-sufficient.

Participant 5 – *Cerulean*

Cerulean was a 53-year-old married White mother with two sons (22, 24). She is employed part time as a tutor / mentor for university students. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the over $100,000 range. Both sons had boomeranged home several times, with her 22-year-old son currently living at home.

Cerulean faced the empty-nest stage with depression, exacerbated by a job loss she felt was unfair. Losing her personal identity as a hands-on mother created a void in her life she filled by buying a dog and doing community service. Feelings of dread

overcame her in the quiet solitude of her empty house and she began to question the strength and affinity of her marital relationship. She challenged her bookish lawyer husband and they rekindled their romance. She began to redecorate the house and made a nice guest room in anticipation of selling the house and downsizing, doing most of the work herself. She fulfilled a travel wish with a trip to Europe on her 50th birthday. She was able to spend more time with her sister, take care of her aging mother and volunteer at the Humane Society and brought home another dog. She found work as a child's librarian and became a tutor and a mentor for university students.

Cerulean's older son (24) boomeranged home after college, having been psychologically demoralized by his mentor in architecture. She allowed him to indulge in his funk hoping he would work his way out of it and tried to help build his confidence. She encouraged him to get any kind of job he could to get back on his feet. He was neat, quiet and caused little trouble. Through a friend, Cerulean facilitated her son getting work with a local architect which effected remarkable changes in his demeanor. After several months he had enough money to move out and get an apartment.

Cerulean was excited when she found out her younger son was coming home to stay, but after having him in her space for a short time wished he was gone. He brought his girlfriend with him and, while Cerulean wanted to be supportive and demonstrate modern liberal views, it riled her religious upbringing. Having another woman in the house became a tricky situation. There were problems with the kids leaving messes. Cerulean didn't want to get angry, so she would often clean up herself. She felt she had to

choose her battles and maintaining a good relationship with her son was more important. She questioned her parenting skills and felt she could have done better. She realized the boomerang period would not be forever and wanted to enjoy it without imposing too many constraints. Her husband avoided the conflict and retreated into his work as a lawyer. Sometimes Cerulean felt like she was walking on eggshells around her younger son's girlfriend while her son was at work. Eventually her younger son and girlfriend found employment and moved out of parents' house into the apartment with the older son. Cerulean found the empty nest revisited less stressful as her sons were engaged in worthwhile pursuits and her husband is happier her sons have become self-reliant with the relaunch.

Participant 6 – *Citron*

Citron was a 45-year-old married Black mother with three sons (24, 27, 30) and one daughter (26) born out of wedlock. She has been married for 14 years to a man who is not the father of her children. Citron is employed full-time as a grants manager. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the $75-100,000 range. Her children have moved back several times. Her 30-year-old son is living with her currently after a relationship break-up. After all the children had left Citron and her husband carried on as if the kids were still there for several months before they began to experience a sense of freedom. Citron's life had revolved around her kids and her self-identity was primarily as a mother. Her life had been dedicated to getting her kids to achieve adult status and she hadn't thought beyond that point. She experienced a loss of

identity which coincided with an oncoming midlife crisis. Citron had been a mother since she was 15-years-old and had never really had a chance to experience adult life free of parental responsibilities. She no longer remembered the goals of her youth and had to reformulate what she wanted to do. She had taken a job in accounting to provide a living for her children which did not fulfill her.

All of her kids graduated college and she booted them out of the house, feeling for them to linger would lessen their resolve to become self-reliant. Even after her kids had left home to make it in their own, they still needed things Citron felt responsible to provide. She always wanted to write a book and still harbors thoughts of doing so. She reorganized her home and created a guest room, a home office and a room for their future grandkids. The couple was able to enjoy all the rooms in the house that had before been the domain of the kids. They questioned and reassessed their relationship, realizing they really did like each other and wanted to be together. They began to experience more things together, going out and traveling.

Her kids had boomeranged back home for a month or so when they were between jobs or situations. Her 30-year-old son showed up with his bags for the fourth time and asked to stay. Citron was ambivalent between her love for her son and what was best for him. She could not turn him away, but felt coddling him was disempowering. He moved into the guest room and Citron fought the impulse to pick up after him. He was too old to impose a curfew, but did pay his own expenses as he had a job working as a UPS delivery driver. The son was respectful and not difficult to manage. Citron's husband

imposed pressure for the son to stand on his own. Citron enjoys having her granddaughter visit and acknowledges benefits of grandchildren over children. In hindsight, Citron feels she overcompensated her children for not having their biological father in the home by spoiling them with things and loose discipline. She feels she mothered her kids too long and that it handicapped their drive to become self-reliant. Her relationship with her kids evolved into more of a friendship and less of a parent which helped them become more adult like. She stopped judging her kids and became more accepting of their choices. She advises other parents to set boundaries when children boomerang home and not to make things too comfortable as it curtails self-reliance.

Participant 7 – *Coral*

Coral was a 40-year-old married Asian mother of Filipino ancestry with one son (20) who moved back home after financial difficulties and getting in trouble with the law. She is employed full time as a receptionist. She lives in Oakland, California. Family income before taxes is in the over $50-75,000 range. Coral feels when her son left home the first time he wasn't ready. The son wanted to go to work and earn money, but Coral wanted him to stay in school and get a better education to improve his work prospects. She found the empty nest to be a lonely experience and was disappointed more than depressed. She wanted to travel and took several trips with her husband around the United States. She joined a gym, took Pilates classes and yoga. She spent more time cooking, entertaining and spending quality time with her spouse. Her husband enjoyed his son being away as he could spend more intimate times with Coral. Their lives were

freer, they had more space in the home and could do things unfettered without concerns of their son. Her daily work schedule did not change with the exception of added free time and more disposable income. She describes her identity as a hard-working busy mother with a good relationship with her son.

Coral's son provided several months' notice about his impending return home due to financial difficulties. His low-end job was unable to produce adequate income and he wanted to go back to school as his mother had advised. He also had developed a substance abuse problem, had gotten in trouble with the law and wanted to disengage with associates who were bad influences. When he moved back in, Coral fell back into her mothering ways and felt the situation was the opportunity to complete the unfinished business of child raising. She saw the boomeranging to be emblematic of an extended adolescence, a transitional phase of growing up. Her son enrolled in an auto mechanics course and moved back into his old room, reconverted back from being a guest room. He took a part time job in a warehouse so he could pay his own bills. Coral imposed no curfew as long as her son maintains his school and work schedule. She allows him to have friends over, but keeps an eye on him. Coral loves her identity as a mother and likes having her son home, seeing him every day alleviates her worries about him and who his friends are. She views her son as her responsibility and sees her influence as being essential to a successful relaunch.

Participant 8 – *Gray*

Gray was a 67-year-old widowed mother of Israeli ancestry with five natural born daughters (35, 38, 40, 40, 46) and one son (44). They all had boomeranged back home at one time or another after college and between work and relationship changes, using the home as a stop-over point. Her 38-year-old daughter came back home ten years ago with a granddaughter under dramatic circumstances. Gray used to work as an international art dealer but now manages her property and investments. She lives in Paris, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the over $100,000 range. As she worked a full schedule and had a high-profile, high-achiever husband, Gray had little time to spend worrying about her children when they left home as they were also high achievers in responsible positions who lived all over the country and overseas. She is very logical about controlling her emotions and views depression and anxiety as being based in genetics, not so much experiences. She is a survivor and accepts hardships as part of living. She views her family not so much Americans, but citizens of the world. Gray is willing to able to accept her children back into the home any time they want to come for as long as they want to stay. She does not acknowledge any discomfort, emotionally or psychology, from being in an empty nest as she lives a full dynamic life.

About ten years ago it came to light that her 38-year-old daughter's husband was a crook who had taken unethical and illegal liberties with financial resources which did not belong to him. He became abusive and Gray's daughter had to flee with her daughter from where they were living in the Middle East, literally escaping in the middle of the

night. Gray welcomed them back into her home and gave them her bedroom to live in where they have remained for the past ten years. Gray's daughter has a high-profile job which requires constant travel and Gray has settled into the near full-time role as a caretaker for her granddaughter. Though she is emotionally high-strung and difficult at times, Gray is proud of her daughter and enjoys her granddaughter since her husband passed away. She has little time to indulge in negativity, or emotions such as worry and fear. If a problem comes up, she confronts it and handles it. She takes pride that she is the leader of a large successful family for which she assumes a responsible role now that her husband is no longer the figurehead. She sees herself as a living example of how a human being can be at the height of their powers, handling good times and bad with equal aplomb. She is always there for her kids no matter what may occur.

Participant 9 – *Jade*

Jade was a 50-year-old Asian lesbian mother with three sons (27, 29, 30) and one daughter (32) derived through artificial insemination acquired from a sperm bank. Her 30-year-old son returned home with his pregnant girlfriend due to hard times. Jade now has a young grandson and works full time as a register nurse. She married her long-time live-in girlfriend when the laws changed in California making same sex marriages legal. She lives in Oakland, and her income before taxes is in the $75-100,000 range.

Jade views her role as a mother to be as a typical mother to her children. She perceived the empty nest phase as a time of freedom with less responsibility and stress. She was able to go out more with her partner, take vacations as she had more disposable

income. Perceptions of freedom in the empty nest were short lived and Jade did go through a period of loneliness, emptiness and some depression as her perceived role as a mom ended. The stress-free freedom became empty when the house was quiet and there was no one to appreciate her cooking. She also missed the liveliness and company of her kids' with their friends. She transitioned into becoming her own person as the empty nest phase allowed her simple pleasures like watching the TV shows she wanted and going to new places she had denied herself in favor of her children's' needs and wants. She explored new outside activities like bingo and tennis and was able to spend more quality time with her spouse.

Jade's 30-year-old son boomeranged home when he lost his job and his girlfriend was seven months pregnant and had unwelcoming parents. She matter-of-factly accepted the kids into her home and gave them a nest so the baby could be born in comfort and safety. The new mother had a good job which helped with the bills. Jade's initial enthusiasm about her son and girlfriend filling the void diminished over time as they stayed longer. She was worried they would be there forever and have more children. They have been there two years and the best part is Jade gets to spend time with her grandson who is a real joy. Many things Jade wasn't able to do with her children, she is able to do with her grandson. Jade sees her grandson as an extension of her family.

Her son found another job and Jade is hopeful they can afford to move out soon. Jade has to remind them to keep their living area clean, but acquiesces and does the cleaning and laundry. Jade's partner, a half Japanese and half Black police officer, is not

as accepting of the boomerangers and is anxious about being abused in the situation. She was physically unable to have children, hence the artificial insemination. As Jade carried the children inside her through to birth, she feels she is closer to them than her partner, thus more accepting and lenient when it comes to discipline. Jade's spouse's home office was turned into a nursery and the couple has occasional arguments about the length of the boomerangers' stay. She researched 'boomerang kids' on line and found that experts recommended giving the kids a relaunch date, but Jade is not willing to enforce it. Jade has a special place in her heart for her boomerang son, due to his past history of having difficulty coping with life. Her son is a dreamer and had lofty goals but doesn't always back them up with action. Jade feels she may have been too lenient on her son which may have curtailed his progress toward self-reliance. Regardless of what her children do, Jade is committed to them and acknowledges they will always be welcome as long as she lives.

Participant 10 – *Jasmine*

Jasmine was a 56-year-old married Asian mother of Japanese ancestry with two girls (29, 30) and one son (31) from another Black man who is deceased. Her current husband is Black and disabled. Her 30-year-old daughter returned home to save money when she was between jobs. Jasmine works full time as a customer service rep. She lives in Oakland, California. Family income before taxes is in the $50-75,000 range.

Jasmine's kids left home right after her first husband passed away which compounded the loneliness and emptiness, causing her to hate the empty nest phase. She

fell into a depression, didn't eat and lost 100 pounds. She had made plans with her first husband to travel the country which never happened. She counted on her kids for companionship, but did not want to impose on their lives by confiding how much she needed them. She didn't want them to feel guilty and withheld her true feelings. She went to work each day and felt lost, in a fog. Her identity was based on her role as a mother. She tried to raise her kids as she was raised where they would go to school, graduate, save money and become self-reliant. They maintained good communication with her which sustained her. She looked forward to the holidays when her kids would come home and she would cook big meals and they would all be together. Raising kids was the best time of her life and she lives vicariously through her kids. To fill the void she married one of the first men to come along, but later felt she should have waited.

Jasmine was eager to have her 30-year-old daughter back home when she fell on hard times, was between jobs and needed to save money. Her life was invigorated by her daughter's communication and companionship. She got her old room back, no renegotiation was necessary and Jasmine was enthusiastic about refilling her role as a mother and a friend. Jasmine imposed no rules on her except to call if she would not be home late so she wouldn't worry. Jasmine enjoys hanging out with her daughter, going shopping and talking about life. She looks forward to coming home and having her daughter there, more than her husband as he is disabled and stays home all the time. The new husband clashes at times with Jasmine about the boomeranger and he feels she impinges on his time and relationship with Jasmine, though he is more tolerant of his step

daughter being there than he would a step son. He is moody and doesn't like to go out as he complains about the traffic. He was abused as a child and has PTSD. Jasmine doesn't want her daughter to struggle and feels closer to her than does her husband due to blood ties. Her daughter serves as a kind of buffer and has many gay girlfriends who come to the house. Having a gay daughter is somewhat confusing to Jasmine. Holidays are not the same since her first husband died. Jasmine still relates her love for him through their children.

Participant 11 – *Khaki*

Khaki was a 53-year-old married White mother with three daughters (22, 24, 25). She is disabled and not employed. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the 75-$100,000 range. Her 22-year-old daughter returned home to save money as her husband did not want to pay for an apartment across town and also needed help with his wife.

When her last daughter left home, Khaki was looking forward to having peace and quiet, but that desire quickly diminished in favor of having her kids around for companionship and to help out. As Khaki is mostly disabled from an aneurysm which mostly paralyzed her left side, she hadn't made any plans to do much outside the home when she entered the empty nest phase. She isn't able to drive herself, has difficulty walking and is generally in a weak impaired condition. She graduated from a wheelchair to walking with a cane. Her husband works at home but spends most of his time in his home office, leaving Khaki quiet and lonely. She occupies her time by watching TV,

reading and managing a few minor household chores. She has very low self-reliance and high dependence on others. Her husband used to have to shower and dress her, but now she can manage that herself. Her personal identity is basically that of an invalid.

Khaki's youngest daughter was in college across town, her grades were falling off and she was having trouble with her roommates and having difficulty meeting her bills even with her father's support. Her father decided it was best she move home to save money and help out around the house. Khaki was more excited by the thought of her daughter moving back home than her daughter was. She was very accepting of her daughter's schedule and activities and imposed few constraints excepting a curfew. Khaki began to treat her like she was in high school again which caused some friction and required adjustment in Khaki's attitude. The daughter took over household chores of cooking and cleaning she felt was an imposition and hides her frustration by going in her room and staying alone. Khaki also calls upon her daughter to get driven around town shopping and to doctor's appointments. No financial demands are made on her daughter as her helping out is compensatory for lodging and food, and they have an agreement for her to study and make good grades so she can graduate.

Khaki takes pride in her daughter's accomplishments and appreciates her help. She enjoys being able to talk to someone. Disagreements usually flare then quickly dissipate. Khaki's husband sometimes pushes their daughter to her limits of tolerance which causes her to retreat in her room. Khaki wishes her daughter would live at home forever, but realizes this desire is a selfish one and knows her daughter will enjoy moving

out on her own when she is ready. Khaki also utilizes this situation to complete her unfinished mother duties in raising a child. She acknowledges too many constraints on a boomeranger can be counterproductive.

Participant 12 – *Lavender*

Lavender was a 59-year-old widowed White mother with two sons (25, 27). Both sons have moved back home and left several times. Her 27-year-old had been living at home for about 2 years, and her 25-year-old for about 10 months. Both sons are employed and are saving money so they can move out. She is employed full-time as a practice manager for a physician. She lives in Sugarland, Texas. Family income before taxes is in the $75-100,000 range.

Lavender's husband died when her sons were 7 and 9 and she raised them by herself. They were very close and when the youngest son left home, Lavender was devastated as she had spent 24/7 caring for them. Her identity was rooted in being a mother to her boys and their activities, both in and out of school, emotionally and financially. She thought when her kids left home she would have time to pursue education or other jobs, just spend time and resources on herself. She filled the void of their absence by getting involved with animals through the local rescue shelter. The animals occupied her time and provided surcease from her lack of loving companionship. She then became involved with Rainbow Bridge, an organization dedicated to uniting pets and their owners in the afterlife. Lavender slowly began to realize that her real crisis

was in the past, when she had to meet the needs of her kids, and that the empty nest was a phase she could deal with.

After being away for quite a while, the job market tightened up and both her sons had to move back home. They assumed control of their old bedrooms and pitched in to help out around the house. The transition was easy and welcome for Lavender who, once again, created a loving welcoming home for her sons and their friends. She assumed responsibility for basic home chores as long as sons were respectful and helped with the major household expenses, such as the mortgage, electricity and their meals. Lavender feels the success of her working relationship with her boomerang kids is based on the good work ethics and self-reliance she instilled in her sins at an early age. She allowed them to take responsibility early, fostering a healthy autonomy. Lavender recognizes boomeranging would not have been an option in her family when she was growing up, that coming back home would have been an impractical painful experience. Her desire was to do the opposite for her kids, to create a lifelong loving environment. The strength and workability of her relationship with her sons is evidence her approach worked.

Participant 13 – *Lilac*

Lilac was a 59-year-old divorced White mother with three sons (24, 27, 29). Her 29-year-old son just left home after finishing an internship with a Major League baseball team. Her 24-year-old son returned home after college while job hunting. She is employed full time as a designer / sales rep. She lives in Rochester, New York. Family income before taxes is in the 75-$100,000 range.

Being a divorced mother, prospects of living in the empty nest were initially devastating for Lilac. It scared her, brought on feelings of sadness and loneliness. She would break down when a friend would see her at the supermarket and ask about one of her sons. Work helped to focus her energies and she soon came to enjoy her newfound freedom and extra time to do what she wanted. She enjoyed her home being neat and orderly and joined a health club to work out more, and joined a book club to explore her literary interests, went boating. She no longer had to plan and cook meals, became open to a social life and took vacations. On the downside she had to hire young men to help do things around the house as her strapping sons were away. Lilac feels she prepared her sons adequately to succeed in life and made sure they all graduated from college. She is proud of their accomplishments and their abilities. She kept her sons on her health insurance and pays their cell phone bills. Lilac transitioned her identity from a caregiver to a mom with personal needs.

Her oldest son boomeranged home first as he had trouble finding suitable work. Lilac blames it partially on the economic conditions which exist in America today, that the job market is much tougher than when she graduated decades ago. He earned a degree in physical education, and won an internship with a Major League baseball team. But it didn't work out and he boomeranged home again and fell into a depression. Lilac was worried about her son and got him counseling to improve his confidence and self-reliance. Lilac became frustrated her son was not living up to his potential, taking jobs like bartending where he would leave for work at 10 p.m. and come home at four in the

morning. This created clashes as Lilac was conscious of life course development and where kids should be along the career path at certain ages. Lilac worked at home and her hours conflicted with those of a nighttime bartender. Loud music during the day was continually a problem. There were arguments about space and privacy and Lilac sought counseling to help her resolve inner conflict and identity issues. Lilac no longer had to hire outside help to manage their large property, mow the lawn and do other chores as her son pitched in. She paid all the household bills as she had a good income and allowed her son to keep the money he earned from his low end jobs while he looked for more promising work. He finally got a job through a friend working in a hotel in Phoenix and moved away.

The youngest son also felt his older brother was not living up to his potential as the family upbringing encouraged success and achievement. He boomeranged home after graduating with a degree in wellness management and was unable to find work. He helps out around the house, does grocery shopping for Lilac and working as a bar back at night. Lilac is closest to her youngest son and they hang out together to assuage their mutual loneliness after he broke up with his girlfriend, thus extending her parental role while developing a friendship. Lilac feels she may have overcompensated for her sons not having a father in the home by giving them too much attention and material things. Lilac resents her ex-husband's lack of participation in helping her sons become self-sufficient men, though he did make the effort to be there for holidays. He was closer to her older sons, the youngest son doesn't know him and his resentful. The divorce was exacerbated

by her husband's job loss due to his company going bankrupt. Lilac has maintained a relationship with another man for eight years who has been more of a father to the youngest son than his biological father. Lilac would like to downsize her property, but maintains it as s safety net for her sons until they finally find themselves and become permanently self-sufficient. She remains fearful of today's tumultuous world and its effect on her son's futures.

Participant 14 – *Lime*

Lime was a 52-year-old married White mother with one son (21) and one daughter (25). Her 21-year-old son returned due to roommate difficulties, work and bills. She is employed full time as an administrative specialist. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the $50-75,000 range.

Lime was eager to see her youngest child leave home. She redecorated his room into a guest room and was looking forward to getting back into creating art and traveling, activities she could not manage with children depending on her. Her parents had passed away and she spent time going through their things. Her husband works in a shop her daughter manages which sells model airplanes. Lime was looking forward to spending more time with her husband, especially going camping with a group of friends. She did experience an emotional void when her kids were gone and bought a dog. Her personal identity shifted away from being a mom to being a person who could satisfy her own needs without having to look after someone else first.

After a year trying to make it on his own, Lime's son experienced roommate problems and had a hard time meeting his bills working as a night time grocery store stocker. He asked to come back home and regroup and Lime agreed if he would go back to school and further his education. He moved back into his own room, curtailing Lime's guest room plans. All the guest room stuff went into her studio which stopped her from pursuing her painting. Instead of jumping right into college, Lime's son began to loaf around the house, occupying himself playing video games. Lime goes easy on her son, glad to have him out of a bad situation, but feels ambivalent about his lack of progress toward getting the education they had agreed upon.

Lime feels she prepared her kids to succeed as best she could, but feels there is only so much you can say to a child before they tune out. Lime acknowledges the tough job market and the value of education, and is frustrated her son is not more ambitious. She imposed a $200 a month rent bill on her son which he pays without argument. They argue about him keeping his room neat, but he helps out when asked and doesn't cause any problems. He lives a quiet life, goes to work, and then retreats to his room to his computer or video games. Lime wants more communication with him and is frustrated her hasn't yet gotten the paperwork together to enroll in college. She finally gave her son an ultimatum, if he doesn't get in school within one year he has to move out. She says her son is a hard worker stocking milk at the grocery store, but allows him to slack off at home. She doesn't push him as she likes having him around.

Participant 15 – *Magenta*

Magenta was a 44-year-old divorced White mother who grew up in a Texas Hispanic / Swedish family. She has one 14-year-old autistic son who lives with her ex-husband, and a 22-year-old daughter who moved back in with her to save money from her long work commute to her work at a hospital 100 miles away. She is employed full time as a salon manager. She lives in San Antonio, Texas. Family income before taxes is in the $25-50,000 range.

The effects of Magenta's entrance into the empty nest phase were compounded by a series of major life changing events as her daughter got her driver's license, first job, first car, first apartment and moved away from home all in one month. This was followed shortly by Magenta's autistic son moving away to live with her ex-husband where the son could receive better care as Magenta worked full time and she no longer had the help of her daughter. Magenta's major stress was worrying about her daughter who lived 100 miles away with an older man twice her age. She also experienced a void created by her children leaving that was filled with a rush of free time. Her loneliness was magnified during the holidays when her children were with her ex-husband and his family. She has a low opinion of him, a former history teacher turned Hippy, and never accepted alimony or child support out of personal pride, having turned her bitterness into self-reliance. Magenta soon got used to the newfound freedom and channeled her creative energies into jewelry making and photography she developed into a side business. She also became more physically active, began exploring places she always wanted to go and could eat

when and what she desired. During this period she became aware of the sacrifices she had made for her children, including turning down promising job opportunities she could not accept due to her caregiver role and responsibilities. Magenta's identity evolved from being a working mother into a self-reliant person who was artistic and independent.

Magenta's daughter eased back home to save money as she was never at her apartment, preferring to stay with her boyfriend when working as a nurse 100 miles away. She would visit her mother on weekends and they arrived at arrangement to move back in with her mother and share the rent and bills. This was economically advantageous for Magenta and gave her more disposable income. But, after having lived away for a year, her daughter's identity had changed from being her daughter to an independent young woman with her own ideas about how to run her life which produced upsets and arguments. Magenta does not her daughter's friends who stay late, drink, make noise, and mess up her neat apartment. They invaded her home office and got into her computer. Magenta views her daughter's friends as losers and objects to them being in her home. She also found fault with her daughter who left lights on, didn't clean up the common area, kept her room a mess, didn't contribute her share of groceries and didn't take proper car of her automobile when she lent it to her. She also ignored her mother's request to notify her if she wasn't coming home at night so she wouldn't worry.

These aggravations are exacerbated by the fact her daughter earned more money than she did. Magenta's sense of personal freedom suffered as did her artwork production. Magenta feels trapped in an abusive situation and allows grievances to

accumulate to the point when she emotionally blows up, thus damaging their affinity. Magenta finds conflict between her strict upbringing and her resulting good work ethic and that of her daughter who she regards as being spoiled. She wishes she would have set concrete rules before allowing her daughter to move back in, primarily by assuming a landlord role over her daughter rather that a parent. She also realizes her initial leniency was due to loneliness.

Participant 16 – *Mint*

Mint was a 44-year-old married Asian mother of Chinese and Hispanic ancestry. She has a 23-year-old daughter and a 21-year-old son who moved back home after he lost his job. She is employed full time as an administrative assistant. She lives in New York, New York. Family income before taxes is in the $75-100,000 range.

Mint experienced loneliness with her children gone, emphasized by the quiet house devoid of the sounds and energy of familial companionship while preparing meals in the kitchen and dining together. To Mint, it was like a piece of her was missing. It took a year and a half to let go and realize leaving home was a normal evolutionary event, and considers this stage as the hardest part of parenting. She still worried about her children away from home and being on their own, not sure they were fully ready for launch. She found it harder to let go of her younger son than her older daughter, though her husband found it harder to launch their daughter. She missed having to chide her son about picking up his things and keeping his room clean, and after he left she maintained a sentimental attachment to straightening up his room even though he was gone.

Mint began to enjoy more time with her husband as they rediscovered each other, going out to restaurants and events, traveling to London, Paris, and other places they always wanted to go. She became used to having more freedom and personal space and filled the void with stamp collecting and going to the gym. She kept emotionally attached to her son by reading books he liked and looking at old family photos. Mint insisted her kids call her at least once a week for chats about life and how they were doing. Her identity of a working mother evolved into more a mother and a friend to her kids.

Her son lost his job, ran out of money and boomeranged home to regroup after a week's notice. Initially Mint was glad to see him. Her attitude is that her home is always open to her children. But when his stay extended past his proposed 2-3 months, Mint began to regard her son as a burden upon her personal freedom and her relationship with her husband, as he slipped back into the cocoon of the parental home. His laziness promotes her nagging at him. Mint imposed minor rules on his son such as helping with household chores, not staying out past midnight, and going out to find work. Mint works at boosting her son's confidence so the relaunch will succeed, though she feels she prepared him to succeed the best she could. The upside is Mint doesn't have to worry about him getting enough rest or eating right as he is at home under her care. She feels the imposition is just part of being a parent and that she will always love and be there for her kids no matter what.

Participant 17 – *Purple*

Purple was a 51-year-old twice divorced White mother with two daughters (22, 24) and one son (31). Purple is employed full time as an administrative assistant and lives in Versailles, Kentucky. Family income before taxes is in the $50-75,000 range. Her son from her first husband, came home after a job loss and stayed 8 months. Her 24-year-old daughter moved back home after college and does part time marketing work.

When she entered the empty nest phase, Purple had the dual experience of being sad and lonely with the anticipation of having more personal freedom. She felt she lost her purpose as a caregiver. Her identity was based on being a single mother and everything she did was focused on her kids' well-being. Her feelings of loneliness were magnified by the death of her dog. Purple grappled with the emotional pain of loss and grieving, resulting in her becoming more self-sufficient. She was able to go out with friends after work and didn't have to worry about getting home to fix meals for her children. She could work over time if she wanted to and earn extra money. She had more time to spend with people she knew from church and could take trips. She was able to focus on herself and her career. Purple was divorced when her kids were in high school and basically raised them herself through to maturity. She had to sue her ex-husband for child support. She feels she did her best under the circumstances but regrets not teaching her kids to be better at budgeting, finances and credit cards. She tried to protect her kids from the hardships imposed by the divorce and if she had it to do over again she would have fought with him less to avoid the stress it caused.

Purple's 31-year-old son was living out of state when he lost his job and asked to come home to regroup. After a couple months, Purple asked for remuneration for household expenses and food and her son agreed to pay a flat fee plus food. He developed an internet sales business so he could work from home and began to earn money. Having him at home all the time resulted in occasional flareups as he had been gone a long time and had developed his own lifestyle which conflicted with his mother's lifestyle. Purple didn't like his stuff laying around, or when he didn't clean up after himself, regarding these issues as an invasion of privacy. She imposed no curfew on him and allowed friends over, but not to spend the night. He successfully relaunched and lives on his own out of state.

Purple's 24-year-old daughter boomeranged home when she took a job in marketing which requires a lot of travel and uses her mother's home as a base. She started paying rent and sharing expenses after three months. Purple gets along better with her daughter than she did her son. They do things together like going to the gym. Purple enjoys their conversations and seeing the evolution from the mother role to a friend role. Purple makes the same demands on her daughter as she did her son regarding keeping the house neat, having friends over and communicating if not coming home. Though her daughter gets in the way of her personal freedom, she realizes the situation is temporary and enjoys it for what it is. Purple knows when her daughter leaves again she will experience the typical loneliness and void, but has learned to accept it and is better equipped to deal with it than the first time she was in the empty nest.

Participant 18 – *Rose*

Rose was a 37-year-old divorced Latino mother with two sons (20, 22). She is employed full time as a teacher. She lives in Miami, Florida. Family income before taxes is in the $25-50,000 range. Her 22-year-old moved back home after living on his own, works some and is going to a local college studying accounting.

When she entered the empty nest phase, Rose was fearful of the change in family dynamics and coped with it by staying busy. She filled the void and compensated for her loneliness by taking classes, being with friends as she adjusted to her newfound freedom. She took a course in wine tasting and traveled to Spain with a friend. Though she worried about her kids and missed them being under her roof, she realized she was still young and that life had a lot to offer. She became closer with her husband for a while, but later had an amicable divorce as they grew apart. The combined life changes of the empty nest and divorce within a short period of time were challenging. As she had had her children early in life she realized she too needed time to spend on herself and mature. She rearranged rooms and painted her house. Then, just as she was beginning to blossom in her new life, her son boomeranged home.

Rose's 22-year-old son moved back to the security of the parental home to regroup for a relaunch into independence. Rose set down the rules early about keeping his living area neat, having friends over, staying out late, working and going back to school. They began to have more adult conversations and Rose could see her son had grown and taken on more responsibility. She was unsettled again about the change in

dynamics, but adjusted to it and felt glad to have her son back. He provided company and she enjoyed cooking for him. He is not able to help with the household expenses. The boomerang experience is not as bad as she thought it would be having talked to others and what she had seen in the media. Rose's work as a teacher of small children provides balance and grounding which helps her deal with her son. She is fine with the situation as long as her son is learning, working and doing positive things. She realizes boomeranging home might not be her son's first choice either. Rose feels patience, establishing rules and being compassionate is what makes it work.

Participant 19 – *Sienna*

Sienna was a 49-year-old single, never married, Black mother with three sons (17, 30, 35) and one daughter (25) by three different men. She is employed part time as an entry level events specialist. She lives in Houston, Texas. Family income before taxes is in the $0-25,000 range. Two of her children (25F, 30M) are currently living with her, the daughter from a relationship break-up, and the son from a job lay-off.

Sienna was in the empty nest phase for two years before one of her children boomeranged back home. She characterizes that time by being worried about their safety and well-being. When her kids were home she felt she could protect them, be responsible for their welfare and be their security blanket. When they left that veil of security was taken from her. But, initially Sienna couldn't wait for them to leave so she could start a relationship with a man, travel and do things she always wanted. She joined a gym and started going out with friends to nightclubs. She was able to sleep more, had time for

personal needs, look stuff up on the computer, go out to eat rather than cook at home. Her personal identity was based on being a mother as she had her first child when she was 14. It was more stressful for her to be alone, with the kids gone, than to have them there with her. Raising kids and looking after their well-being was her purpose. She had a hard time letting go of the parental role and seeing her children as grown adults.

Sienna's 25-year-old daughter first boomeranged home due to a relationship break-up Sienna saw coming months ahead of time. Three months later her 35-year-old son boomeranged home due to a job lay-off. It was no problem having the kids back in the home as Sienna's attitude is that her door is always open for them. Boomeranging to Sienna is expected as children go out into the world, get knocked around, come back home to regroup, then go back out again. Her nurturing role kicked in as soon as her children took up residence under her roof. Having two kids home felt more normal to Sienna than having them away as she had gotten adjusted to them being there and the daily routine of being a mother which reinforces her identity. Her role as a mother and protector is help get their minds back into a positive state.

Sienna instilled basic rules in her kids about cleaning up, calling if staying out late, no friends spending the night, and asked for contributions to the household expenses, which they provided when they found jobs. She realizes adulthood is the time to cut the cord, but has ambivalent feelings about letting them go and being a lifelong protector. She cooks the meals and handles motherly duties of cleaning the common areas as she always has. She advises her own children not to have kids until they are ready, but she

would like to have a grandchild. The brother and sister get along well and there is little conflict. When conflict or relationship drama occurs between her children and their friends, Sienna is ready to step in and play counselor. She is not shy about expressing how she feels and stresses good communication as a solution to conflict. She realizes kids will go out into the world and grapple with life's exigencies until they get it right, and her job is to prepare them the best she can using her knowledge and experience as a single working mother. Sienna's kids are her family which sustain her in spite of many failed relationships in her past. She has learned that her kids come first before all else, including a personal relationship with a man.

Participant 20 – *Silver*

Silver was a 63-year-old divorced Native American mother with one son (25). Her son moved back home after being injured during the Iraq War. She is a retired social worker. She lives in Houston, Texas. Family income before taxes is in the $25-50,000 range.

When her only son left to go into military service and got shipped overseas, Silver was fearful she would never see him again. This fear was exacerbated by previous experiences she had with her son's associates she considered mischievous and naïve. Her worries led to restlessness, sleepless nights and physical anxiety. It was hard for her to focus on her work preparing seminars to help troubled juveniles in residence facilities. She infused her talks with things she wanted to tell her son, the juveniles serving as a vicarious audience. Her son loved to play on the computer and she felt safe when she

could hear him tapping on the keyboard. She would sit her in son's room and relate to him through the odors she could perceive, his lingering scent providing a measure of comfort. She would call his friends when she didn't hear from her son and ask if he was all right, ever fearful of losing him and what she might do if that occurred. She would call her son's cell phone and listen to his voice message to be close to him. When her son left messages on her phone, she would keep them and listen to them over and over, especially after he deployed to Iraq.

Silver experienced no feelings of freedom when she entered the empty nest, had no desires of being able to expand into her own personal space without her son. She had once been in a car wreck resulting in severe internal injuries and was told she would never be able to conceive, thus regards her child as a miracle. Divorced when her son was in day care, she had difficulty in letting him go, the bonds of attachment were so strong. Silvers recalls how her son would try to run off any man who courted her, the protective instincts towards his mother were so mutually strong. Then, over time, she gradually got used to the benefits of her son not being home, such as less work around the house, not having to cook, eating what and when she wanted. She bought a dog to help fill the void. Silver feels she has extrasensory perceptions about her son's feelings across space and time, could sense when he was upset. She worried she would never see him again every time he walked out the door, and shared these notions of abandonment with other mothers who had similar feelings.

Unable to find work, her son joined the military, was sent to Iraq and was driving a Hummer when it was blown up by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device). He was flown to a military hospital in the United States for surgery. Silver went to see him and begged him not to redeploy, even if it meant giving back his signing bonus. The injury was accompanied by PTSD and Silver brought him home to heal. Silver imposed simple rules of keeping room clean, no women over and no alcohol. She enjoyed cooking for her son and made meals they shared together. She asked him to contribute grocery money. She nurtured him back to health without making any demands, feeling somewhat helpless. Her son's war experience resonates within Silver as her cross to bear and caused her to develop strong opinions about armed conflict and sons being in harm's way. He eventually got a job, met a woman, they married and he moved out. Silver looks forward to becoming a grandmother.

Participant 21 – *Turquoise*

Turquoise was a 47-year-old single never married Black mother with three daughters (21, 22, 27) by three different men born out of wedlock. All three girls have college degrees. Turquoise is employed part time as a community liaison for the homeless. She lives in Houston, Texas. Family income before taxes is in the $25-50,000 range. The 27-year-old is currently home with her 7-year-old daughter, and was initially unemployed but found work as a prison guard.

Turquoise was looking forward to the empty nest phase, the ensuing peace and quiet and the ability to cut back to part-time work so she would have time for herself.

Being a single mother who managed to raise three girls and get them through college, she felt she had prepared them for success in the world best as she could. She was proud her accomplishments and when her kids left home she experienced a sense of relief. Turquoise started going out with friends and enjoying life. She filled her time with meeting people, dating, going to clubs, crocheting and entering Scrabble tournaments. She had the money and time to paint her house and started a little home marketing business. Having her girls home for the holidays sustained her need for having kids around.

One day Turquoise's oldest daughter showed up at her door with her bags with her young daughter, seeking refuge from a broken relationship and not being able to find a job which matched her career goals. Her daughter had never been formally married like her mother, as legal marriages are not that significant to them. Turquoise accepted her back into the home but imposed stipulations that she look for work, take care of her laundry, buy her own food and keep her living area clean. She also had to ask permission before bringing friends over. She feels her daughter was spoiled, had unrealistic expectations about where she belonged in the work hierarchy, and schooled her about starting at the bottom and working your way up. Turquoise half expected her daughter to come home from what she had seen in the media about the poor job market and in conversations with friends whose children had also boomeranged home.

Turquoise was not surprised when her youngest daughter (22) also boomeranged home, unable to find sustainable work. She feels boomeranging is a generational

phenomenon characterized by lack of self-sufficiency and imposed a one-year limitation on her boomerangers' stay under her roof. She is lenient as long as her daughters continually demonstrate ambition. Turquoise's greatest joy is her granddaughter as she is not the primary caregiver and can just have fun with her. She feels her children satisfy her relationship needs in lieu of a male companion and sees her identity as a mother and grandmother. She likes having her family close and doesn't worry about her daughters as much when they are under her protective umbrella. When they are away, she prays for them to be safe and free of harm.

Participant 22 – *Violet*

Violet was a 55-year-old widowed White mother with two sons (24, 31) and one daughter (24). She works as a flag woman directing road traffic on construction sites. She lives in Martin County, Florida. Family income before taxes is in the $0-25,000 range. Her daughter, granddaughter, 24-year-old son and his girlfriend all live together in the mother's mobile home. When her last son left home, Violet thought she would have more money, more free time, more privacy and be able to spend time with her parents. She also felt her kids would be happier on their own as they had found work and her daughter got married and had a child. She downsized by leaving a larger home and moving into an adult community and started making friends and enjoying life. She felt like she was 20-years-old again, found the empty nest to be liberating, invigorating. Violet started dating and planning the rest of her life when her daughter's marriage broke up and she needed to get away from an abusive relationship.

Unable to have younger people in the adult community, Violet moved out into a trailer home where she could accept her daughter and 5-month-old granddaughter, causing her emotional stress and financial difficulties. Violet's primary concern was for her granddaughter's welfare as her daughter's husband became a stalker, necessitating the police getting involved. Violet had to take a job to keep things going. A year and a half after the daughter moved in, the middle son moved in to regroup and get back on his feet. He brought his girlfriend with him and slept in the living room. This necessitated making a third bedroom out of the laundry room. The son got a job washing dishes and his girlfriend became an assistant manager of a discount store.

After a while things became abusive for Violet as her daughter commanded her to watch her grandson during her off hours while she went out. The kids became increasingly rude to Violet and she endures it only out of concern for her granddaughter. She pays all the bills and does all the cleaning and keeps threatening to move out and stick her kids with the bills. Her personal life has been relegated to the back burner. Her personal identity as a mother predominates. Once, the police were called in due to an altercation in the home and warned the kids about their behavior. Violet maintains a Christian caring and forgiving attitude, thinking she can slowly persuade her kids onto the right path by living as an example. She is concerned her kids do not perceive the eventual consequences of their attitudes and actions. She has learned to choose her battles with her kids, and steps in when she feels there is a teachable moment. She feels

motherhood does not end when a mother thinks it does or wants it to, it is an ongoing lifelong process a mother needs to accept.

Participant 23 – *Yellow*

Yellow was a 53-year-old divorced Latino mother with two sons (25, 28). Both her sons have boomeranged back and forth, the youngest one living with her now. She is on disability due to diabetes and has been out of work for three years. She lives in the Bronx, New York. Family income before taxes is in the $0-25,000 range.

Yellow was looking forward to some peace and quiet when her youngest son left home. Several relatives wanted to come live with her as they thought she was sad and needed company, but Yellow kept them away. Her sons were also concerned about her and kept in close communication until she assured them she was all right. Then her oldest son joined the Army. Yellow experienced loneliness, but enjoyed her peaceful house free of arguments and not having to chide her kids about coming home late or respecting boundaries. She was working with people who had disabilities, but had to become disabled herself when her diabetes set in. She struggled to control it with diet and exercise and was living quietly, working and going to school. She redecorated her home to look more feminine. She wanted to travel nut was unable and found another use for the money she had saved.

Yellow's oldest son got out of the military got married, had a son, got divorced and boomeranged back home to live with mom, humbled by life. After serving in Iraq, he was lonely and suffering from PTSD. His depression sought refuge in a relationship and

in having a child he really wasn't ready for. He stayed about 3 years, sharing custody of the boy with his ex-wife. He admitted he should have listened to his mother's advice about women, and that he should have been less macho and compromised more, cared more for the other person. He continued his military service in the Army reserves and went back to school under the G. I. Bill to study premed. It took him a while to accept responsibility for household chores and contributing to the bills, expecting his mother to do it all like when he was a kid.

Yellow had to readjust her life to accommodate her son and grandson, upsetting her quiet home and new schedule. She experienced new worries about her son and grandson and had problems with her son being neat and tidy around the house. He felt since his mother was not paying him, he didn't have to comply like he did in the military, not recognizing as remuneration his free living situation. Yellow imposed no curfew, insisted on respect and no friends over, and calling if he would not be home when he planned to be. Yellow takes great delight in caring for and spoiling her grandson, even after her older son moved away.

Yellow's second son boomeranged back home after a break-up with his girlfriend who had a child from another relationship. The girlfriend was not willing to work to earn money and Yellow's son got fed up with working in a hospital and carrying the load. He needed a safe place to regroup, but comes and goes, staying with friends or maybe his old girlfriend who calls the house, hangs up and harasses him. Her younger son is naïve about women and love and falls in and out of depression. Yellow coaches and nurtures

him, reinforcing her identity of a strong independent women and good mother. She can help him emotionally, but not financially. She has trouble with him keeping to a schedule as he is emotionally torn by his ex-girlfriend. Yellow tries to get him to step into manhood, by doing such things as putting a more masculine shower curtain in the bathroom she had redecorated. Yellow's attachment to her son's well-being causes her pain when it is not working out. She has a hard time letting go, and forces her son to stand on his own and be independent. She feels she may have mothered her sons too much out of compensation for not having a father. She hates to let her sons go off on their own, especially during the holidays when things get lonely. Yellow is a religious person and prays to ask God's guidance in helping her sons. She regrets not drawing a line and giving them a date when they had to move out. She feels she sacrificed herself for her sons, and wishes she had taken more time for herself and her needs.

Data Analysis

The audio interviews were exported from my digital recording device into my computer by means of a USB cable. The Mpeg3 audio files were stored in a password protected folder and labeled by the participants' color code names. One by one the audio files were opened in Windows Media Player which enabled easy stopping and starting of the recording. Each audio file was transcribed verbatim into an individual Word document with all personal identifying information omitted from the transcription. The participants' names were replaced with their color code names. If the mothers mentioned their boomerang child by name, these names were replaced with "son" or "daughter." If

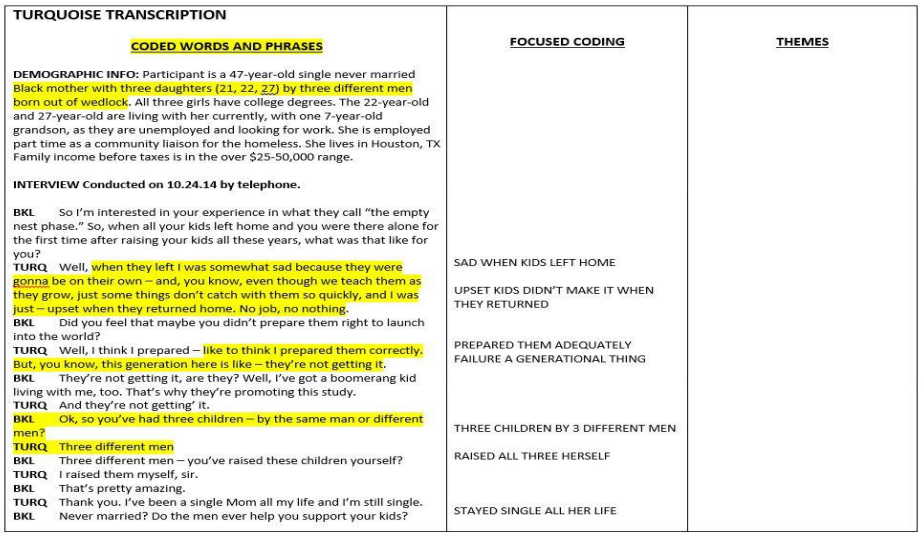
anyone were to read the transcripts they would have no way to identify who the participant was outside of the basic demographic information of city, age, ethnicity, marital status, employment, or income. Printed hard copies of the transcriptions are stored with other documents from this study in a locked file case in my locked home office.

After transcribing three interviews, I realized the process was becoming too time consuming and sought permission from the IRB to allow a professional transcriber I have worked with for years to assist me on a confidential basis. I obtained a signed confidentiality agreement from my transcriber and submitted it to the IRB along with the requisite other documents. Upon approval from the IRB, I sent via priority mail the raw digital files on a DVD to my transcriber in Midland, Texas, with instructions on how to transcribe the recordings using codes to protect the participants' anonymity. She emailed the verbatim transcriptions to me without any identifying words or names. To the best of my knowledge my transcriber does not know, has never known, nor will she ever have instance to meet or contact my participants for any reason. Upon completion of her transcription work and receipt of payment, I had my transcript return the DVD to me and destroy all of her files. She assured me this has been done.

I first read each transcription to affirm its contents and correct any typos, misspellings, or punctuation errors. I then wrote brief demographic summaries at the beginning of each transcript as an introduction. I then constructed a three-column master Word document into which the adjusted transcripts were copied in the left column,

leaving space for focused coding in the middle column and themes in the right column. Sections of transcribed text I found to be particularly significant I highlighted in yellow (Figure 4) to make them easy to find during the review process.

Figure 4. Transcription coding format



TURQUOISE TRANSCRIPTION CODED WORDS AND PHRASES	FOCUSED CODING	THEMES
DEMOGRAPHIC INFO: Participant is a 47-year-old single never married Black mother with three daughters (21, 22, 27) by three different men born out of wedlock. All three girls have college degrees. The 22-year-old and 27-year-old are living with her currently, with one 7-year-old grandson, as they are unemployed and looking for work. She is employed part time as a community liaison for the homeless. She lives in Houston, TX Family income before taxes is in the over $25-50,000 range. **INTERVIEW Conducted on 10.24.14 by telephone.** **BKL** So I'm interested in your experience in what they call "the empty nest phase." So, when all your kids left home and you were there alone for the first time after raising your kids all these years, what was that like for you? **TURQ** Well, when they left I was somewhat sad because they were gonna be on their own – and, you know, even though we teach them as they grow, just some things don't catch with them so quickly, and I was just – upset when they returned home. No job, no nothing. **BKL** Did you feel that maybe you didn't prepare them right to launch into the world? **TURQ** Well, I think I prepared – like to think I prepared them correctly. But, you know, this generation here is like – they're not getting it. **BKL** They're not getting it, are they? Well, I've got a boomerang kid living with me, too. That's why they're promoting this study. **TURQ** And they're not getting' it. **BKL** Ok, so you've had three children – by the same man or different men? **TURQ** Three different men **BKL** Three different men – you've raised these children yourself? **TURQ** I raised them myself, sir. **BKL** That's pretty amazing. **TURQ** Thank you. I've been a single Mom all my life and I'm still single. **BKL** Never married? Do the men ever help you support your kids?	SAD WHEN KIDS LEFT HOME UPSET KIDS DIDN'T MAKE IT WHEN THEY RETURNED PREPARED THEM ADEQUATELY FAILURE A GENERATIONAL THING THREE CHILDREN BY 3 DIFFERENT MEN RAISED ALL THREE HERSELF STAYED SINGLE ALL HER LIFE	

Saldana (2008) suggests the primary goal of coding is to find repetitive patterns which occur in documented data, though all coding is a "judgment call" since we bring "our subjectives, our personalities, and predispositions [and] our quirks" into the coding process (p. 7). Consistencies in coding were facilitated by asking participants a standard slate of questions which provoked answers that can be compared and contrasted to obtain

relative meanings. In a qualitative interview, a code can be a word or a phrase which symbolically represents and encapsulates larger sections of dialogue in a transcription, and in this sense is an "interpretive art" (p. 4).

In my data analysis, I employed the codes-categories-emergent themes model for qualitative analysis (Saldana, 2013). As I reread the transcripts in the left column of the Word documents, I listened to the recordings a second time to benefit from the paralanguage meanings imparted by the participants. This combination of written and audio data stimulated words and phrases of focused coding I entered in the second column. Often I would stop and reconsider what I had written and edit it for increased clarity.

The interview basically contained two sections relating the participants' perceptions about being in the empty nest, and their perceptions of living in the house with boomerang children, although answers to the questions about these sections were most often interspersed throughout the interview. Every mother expressed both positive and negative perceptions about each section. Table 3 shows a selection of interview excerpts regarding participants' positive and negative perceptions about the empty nest, symbolically represented in focused coding.

Table 3. Interview Excerpts About Perceptions of Empty Nest With Focused Coding

Interview Excerpts	Focused Coding
Cerulean said:	
"Oh, extremely depressed. Especially when my youngest one left, because I had just lost my job. And, I have always been very involved with my children, and so it was really hard when my youngest one left. We got another dog. "	EMPTY NEST BROUGHT ON DEPRESSION – COMPOUNDED BY JOB LOSS; IDENTITY AS MOTHER. DOG HELPED FILL VOID.
Jasmine said:	
"I was kind of like still mourning my husband, 'cause when he passed away, it was I was alone for 2 years before I met my current husband. So I was still not myself, so you know I counted on my kids for companionship. So when they started to leave, I was alone. I didn't really want to tell them 'because I didn't want them to feel guilty – and I wanted them to be adults and be happy. But they did want to stay with me, but I said, "No, if you want to go – go on your own, now's the time.'"	EMPTY NEST LONELINESS EXACERBATED BY MOURNING KIDS PROVIDED COMPANIONSHIP WITHHELD FEELINGS TO PROTECT KIDS
Coral said:	
"Extra room in the house, more quiet, more alone time, more quality time with my husband, more free time – like I could do things I enjoy to do."	MORE ROOM, MORE QUIET TIME WITH HUSBAND DO WHAT SHE WANTS
Lilac said:	
"I started traveling to – just taking vacations like you should take and getting to spend more time on things that I like… I am a water lover, so I would spend a lot of time at the local Finger Lakes, with friends and I actually bought a boat."	TRAVELING, VACATIONS TIME WITH FRIENDS, OUTDOORS, BOATING

Participants also expressed positive and negative perceptions about having boomerang kids back in the house. A selection of these interview excerpts is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Interview Excerpts About Boomernag Kids with Focused Coding

Interview Excerpts	Focused Coding
Sienna said:	
"…it was like no problem. My doors are always open for my kids, you know. If for some reason… it wasn't a problem. I just wanted to make sure that she was okay, you know. Getting her mind back in a positive state."	IDENTITY AS MOTHER NURTURING, COUNSELING
Aqua said:	
"I was more happy that she was coming home because I would have purpose again."	RENEWED SENSE OF PURPOSE
Mint said:	
"He lost his job – and he was about to lose his apartment. He said he wasn't getting anywhere. He said, "Mom, I want to come home and get my feet back together and before you know you, I'll be out the door soon." He didn't plan on staying this long, he planned to stay no more than 2 or 3 months. Now it's going on 7 months."	JOB LOSS WAS REASON MOTHER AGREED TO SHORT TERM SON OVERSTAYED WELCOME
Purple said:	
"The upside, I guess, having the company and, you know, getting to know them on an adult level. The down side, I guess, is just the lack of privacy. Really, I'd say the downside is more like, you know, their stuff laying around the house and stuff like that."	MOTHER ENJOYS COMMUNICATING WITH KID ON ADULT LEVEL LACK OF PRIVACY MESSINESS

Once all the transcripts were focus coded, I copied all the coding into another document organized by participant color alias which consumed 36 pages of 11-point type. During this process I immersed myself even deeper reading the codes, and made notes about possible categories into which they would be arranged. I edited some of the codes to make their meanings clearer and more focused. I then went back through the

pages and added a number at the end of each code corresponding to the participant number, so when I moved the codes into categories I would know which interview they came from (Figure 5). This helped keep me organized and find key quotation segments I used when describing the rationale for themes which emerged from the interviews

Table 5. Focused Coding with Participant Number

Rose Interview Excerpts	Interviewee number
IN EMPTY NEST PHASE FOR FOUR YEARS BEFORE KID CAME BACK	18
MOTHER WAS LONELY	18
MOTHER ALSO FELT FREER	18
HOUSE DYNAMICS CHANGED, TOOK SOME GETTING USED TO	18
ALSO EXPERIENCED FEAR	18
FEAR OF CHANGE	18
COPED WITH FEAR BY STAYING BUSY	18
HAD VOID	18
FILLED VOID BY TAKING CLASSES, BEING WITH FRIENDS, WINE CLASS, TRAVEL	18

Coding and Categories

In the first cycle, I organized the focused codes in the interview transcripts into clusters according to their similarity and frequency within each of the two major sections: mothers' empty nest perceptions and perceptions living with a boomerang child. These clusters precipitated categories, within which the coded phrases were organized. One of the most repeated perceptions dealt with the experience of loneliness which became a major category. The state of loneliness is characterized by feelings of being lonely or alone, which can lead to depression, sadness, feeling isolated or cut off from others, being

without company or companionship, (Webster, 2015). An example of the coding structure branching out from the category of loneliness is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Category Section With Coding Structure

Category	Subcategory	Focused codes
LONELINESS	Feeling lonely	Empty nest is lonely 1
		Got a dog in compensation 2
		Empty nest a lonely period 4
		Not as busy 7
		Saw loneliness as a life transition 9
		Extra lonely time for a widow 10
		Loneliness exacerbated by mourning 10
		Looked forward to the holidays 10
		Missed daughter's company and help 11
		Dreads being alone during holidays 15
		Fears the loneliness of holidays 23
	Feeling empty	Dog helped fill void 5
		Volunteer work filled void 5
		Got involved with animals to fill void 12
		Bought a dog to fill void 14
		Left void in household activities 15
		Empty feeling, missing part of self 16
		Filled void with hobbies 16
		Longed for weekly chats with kids 16
		Filled void by getting a dog 17
		Filled void by taking classes 18
		Empty nest more stressful than being with kids 19
		Feelings of loss and abandonment 20
		Void filled with activities, meeting people 21
		Tempted to take boarder to fill void 22
	Feeling sad	Melancholy about kids being gone 1
		Sad about focusing on work 2
		Sad and melancholy 4
		Felt sorry for self 11
		Empty nest overwhelming 12
		Sadness was devastating 13
		Feelings magnified by concurrent divorce 17
		Very sad when kids left home 21

Feeling depressed	Depressed in empty nest 1
	Depression 2
	Handled by using drugs and sleep 2
	Empty nest brought on depression 5
	Lived in a fog when kids left 6
	Depression based in genetics 8
	Husband's death with empty nest depression 10
	Feels lost, work hold her together 10
	Emotional pain caused by sense of loss 17
	Stress and depression increased by death in family 23
Feeling afraid	Being alone was scary 13
	Fear of change 18
	Coped with fear by staying busy 18
	Worried about kids' well-being 19
	Afraid for son's welfare, never see him again 20
	Worry keeps her from sleeping 20

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data and analysis in this study is assured through several credibility procedures including: sample selection criteria; a thorough screening of participants; verbatim transcriptions of the interviews; data saturation; thick descriptive language; peer comparison; subjective reflexivity; and, immersion in the data. I had initially intended to build trustworthiness measures of member checking and triangulation into my study, but these tools were deleted by the IRB for reasons of cost, practicality and intrusion, and thus removed from the study.

I employed a purposeful, criterion-based, sample of convenience, a highly targeted model for obtaining information-rich data from participants who have shared a distinct phenomenological experience (Patton, 1980). I placed solicitations designed to

attract potentially qualified participants in disparate regions of the country to assure as well-rounded a demographic participant sample as possible with practical limits. Potential participants went through three levels of screening to assure they met the criteria for inclusion in the study: 1) the initial wording in the online posted advertisement; 2) the follow-up qualifying email sent in response to their reply; and, 3) the consent form which was delivered orally over the phone then verified through electronic signature by return email. These measures taken together assured participant eligibility, and that the data they would provide would be directly relevant to the study.

Verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interviews used as source data avoid the intrusion of a researcher's subjectivity, as the participants' personal perceptions of the common shared experience are rendered by them in their own words. I asked open-ended questions which guided our discussions, such as "What was it like being in the empty nest?" or "What was it like having your child moving back in with you?" Dependability of the data achieved from participant responses was made stronger through repetition, leading to the point of data saturation, or the point of redundancy, when the data is producing no new information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Adequacy of data was further assured by interviewing 23 participants who represented every major ethnic and socioeconomic group, and were married, remarried, divorced, single, widowed, in a same-sex partnership. My participants had natural born children, step-children, even children born through artificial insemination. These factors produced thick data, "detailed

rich descriptions not only of the participants' experiences of phenomena but also of the contexts in which those experiences occur" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252).

My topic of research is a relatively new social phenomenon, and it was impractical to locate anyone who had previously done parallel or similar research and ask them to listen to the recordings, read and comment on the veracity of the transcripts, or to review my analysis. Thus, I relied on a *de facto* type of peer review by comparing my findings with published research. These comparisons of published peer reviewed research by respected others validates the essence of my data and methodology and adds trustworthiness through its transferability (Gasson, 2004). For example, The Pew Research Center's report on boomerang children (Parker 2012), probably the most comprehension recent study ever done on multigenerational households (N = 2,048), stated that:

> Employment status is correlated with living arrangements among young adults. Nearly half (48%) of adults ages 18 to 34 who are not employed either live with their parents or moved in with them temporarily because of economic conditions. (p. 7)

My study found that 56% of the 30 boomerang children were motivated to move back home due to job loss and/or economic conditions (see Table 2). Another similar finding addresses the nonissue of family annual income, as "There is no clear socio-economic pattern to this. Parents with annual household incomes of $100,000 or more are just as likely as those with incomes under $30,000 to say their adult child has moved

back home because of economic conditions" (Parker, p. 8). In my study, collected data showed that boomerang kids came from all levels of annual income as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Annual Household Income Reported by Participants

Annual income range	Frequency (out of 23)
0 - $25,000	3
$25,000 to $50,000	6
$50,000 to $75,000	4
$75,000 to $100,000	7
$100,000 +	3

Similar correlations between the findings of the Pew Study and my study include descriptions of handling coresidency exigencies, such as sharing household chores and expenses.

Logical transferability of my findings can also be ascertained by comparing key perceptions described by my participants about their shared empty nest experiences with those from previous published studies. For example, the seven married participants said the empty nest allowed them to reconnect or spend more time with their spouses, as did the participants in the Clay (2003) study. Twelve of my participants described feelings of freedom and relief, correlating with findings by Lowenthal and Chiriboga (1972) and (Tallmer, 1986). Common descriptions of the empty nest experience by my participants agree with and extend the reports of studies of empty nest mothers cited in Chapter One, such as those regarding: (a) separation anxiety or attachment (Hock, Eberly, Bartle-

Haring, Ellwanger & Widamen, 2001; Hill, Fonagy, Safier & Sargent, 2003; and Kins, Soenes & Beyers, 2011); (b) depression (Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009); (c) perception of martial satisfaction (Campbell, Devries, Fikkert % Ruiz, 2007); and, (d) perceived identity (Adelmann, Antonnucci, Crohan & Coleman, 1989).

The universality of my findings extends beyond my multi-cultural and multi-leveled socioeconomic sample and correlates with the Chima and Nnodum African study (2008), which found the empty nest to be more difficult for widowed or divorced mothers. In my study the most dramatic descriptions of loneliness and depression came from widowed or divorced mothers as quoted later in in this chapter. There are many similar other correlations about exigencies of living with boomerang children between the mothers in this study and previous studies cited in Chapter One.

Regarding my subjective reflexivity, I undertook this research in the spirit of objectivity with "no axe to grind, no theory to prove, no predetermined results to support" (Patton, 1990, p. 55). For two years I had lived with a boomerang child and grandchild, but feel this did not prejudice my efforts in any way, rather it provided a basis for understanding of the phenomena under inquiry and equipped me with a first-hand base of experiential knowledge with which to design this study, form selection criteria, and develop questions which resonated with my participants to produced honest, rich and focused data. My immersion in the data began with participant selection, through screening, doing the interviews, listening to the recordings during transcribing and coding, proofreading, reading the transcripts to organize codes and develop themes, all

the while maintaining my objectivity in the spirit of pure scientific inquiry, thus assuring confirmability. I never once found myself guided by subjective nuances before, during or after an interview. Neutrality of my demeanor was sustained through an objective curiosity to elicit truthful responses from my participants and by submitting myself to the *Epoche* phase of personal examination (Patton, 1990) during data collection and data analysis.

Negative Case Analysis

Trustworthiness of findings in qualitative inquiry can be strengthened through the application of negative or deviant case analysis where certain data contradicts or deviates from the norm and affords new perspectives (Chongwon, & Lee, 2010; Giele, & Elder, 1998), or causes expansion of the understanding of the phenomena under study (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 2008). Patton (1990) further elucidates the value of exceptions or outliers: "Where patterns and trends have been identified, our understanding of those patterns and trends is increased by considering the instances and cases that do not fit within the pattern (p. 463). In this study, there are several indicative examples, the first being the responses of Gray, the international art dealer married to an foreign government ambassador with six children who lived all over the world. While all the other mothers expressed emotional distress in the empty ranging from sheer terror (Silver) to loneliness (Rose) to depression (Aqua), Gray stated depression and anxiety had been a problem all her life and felt it was based in the genetic code, so being in and out of the empty was no big deal, it was just an attribute to her daily life, and "as far as

me sitting around the house twiddling my thumbs, no." Her life is so full and busy, she had no time to experience the emotions other mothers felt. Gray is the exception to the rule, and from her deportment we can learn that staying active and busy can be an effective antidote against the negative effects of being in the empty nest. Or, it may simply be one's chosen attitude which can be described as being brave, resilient or as being in full control of one's emotions. Either way, the extent to which circumstances are interpreted as being negative or positive is relative to the individual's level of self-reliance.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Gray are the expressions of Khaki, the disabled mother whose self-reliance has been greatly diminished due to a stroke which rendered her dependent on her husband, and her daughter who boomeranged home. Being in the empty nest was a lonely debilitating time for Khaki, who longed to have her daughter back to take care of her, spend time with her, and provide her with a connection outside herself. Unlike the other mothers in the study, Khaki needed her daughter more than her daughter needed her. In a sense, the mother became the child of the daughter due to her physical incapacity. Khaki's personal needs find purchase in her desire to hold onto her daughter, thus possibly retarding her daughter's life course development: "I always tell her she can't leave, she has to stay and take care of me forever." From this scenario the imports of this study can be expanded to include the parental need for the support of the children, a notion which relates back to tribal societies where the old

warriors and aging grandmothers are accepted back into the home of their children to live out their lives, having paid for this privilege in advance.

A third instance of negative case analysis comes from the phenomenological expressions of Jade, a lesbian mother who had four children through artificial insemination. Jade is unique to this study of mothers who were impregnated by male partners known to them. Jade's children would not know of their biological fathers, nor would they have a male figure in their lives who served a parental role. As different as the birth and parental circumstances are to those of the other participants, the attitude of Jade toward her children is strikingly familiar, as are Jade's experiences of being in the empty nest and her attitudes about accepting boomerang children back into the home. Jade's expressions of her experiences coincide with those of the majority of the other mothers. Recognition of the mother/child bond can thus be seen to supersede a genetic origin, giving strength to the idea of nurture over nature in a child's life course development.

These factors, taken together, establish the trustworthiness of the data and its analyses. Though I was aware of previous research, and of my own related boomerang child experiences during the process of data collection and analysis, I maintained a careful vigilance over trying to impose any preconceptions on the findings. In fact, I was often surprised by new things the data revealed as I went through categorizing and developing themes from the coding. For example, when formulating the theme about the mothers' attachment with their children and the difficulty some of them had in letting

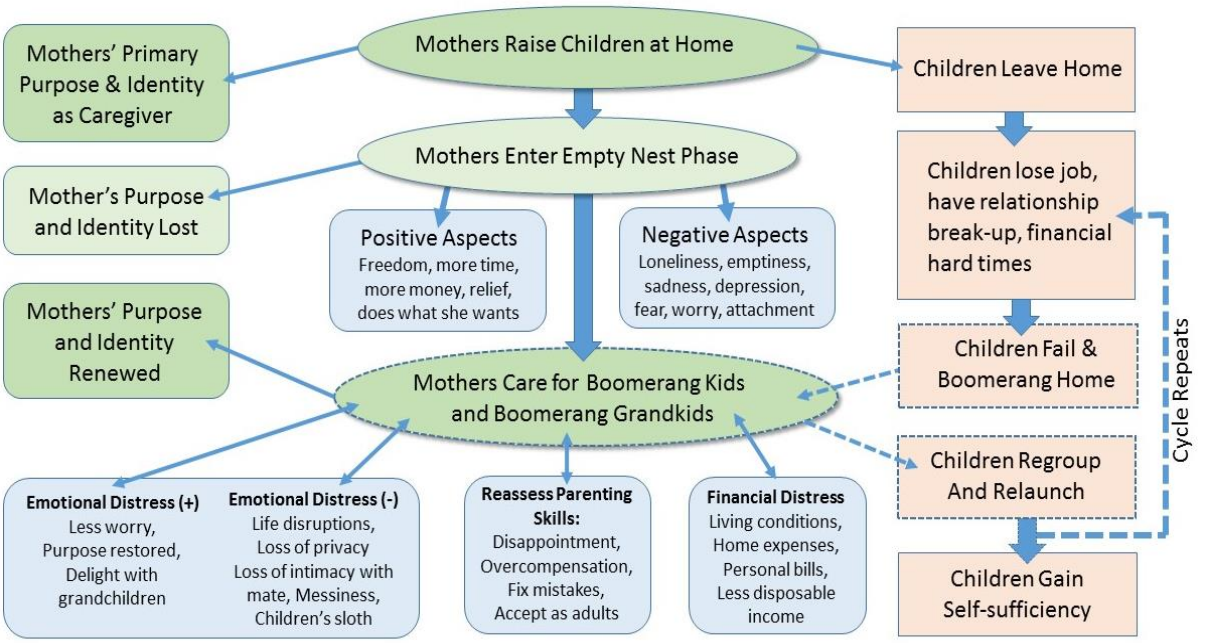
their children go, I came across the description by Silver who would sit in her son's room and smell his clothes, or listen to messages he left on her cell phone over and over to feel close to him. Or, the extreme example of the low-income White mother (Violet) who allowed her daughter with small child, and her son and his girlfriend, to live with her in her small mobile home, and how the kids abused her generosity. Or, the wealthy widowed mother with six high-achiever children who flow in and out of her life, and stays too busy to be bothered by attendant vicissitudes of boomerang children and the emptiness which upsets less worldly mothers. These are but a few examples of the data which exceeded the norm as revealed in previous studies. The candidness and honesty of my participants in revealing intimate details about their personal lives, resulted in a rich and vital snapshot of the shared phenomena being studied further dissected in this chapter.

Themes Derived from Research Questions

The essence of this study is depicted in Figure 5. According to the Life Course Paradigm, children traditionally live in the parental home until they reach the level of maturity when they leave and never come back. This exit would be caused by the child securing employment, going to college and then finding employment, or to get married. A key defining characteristic of adulthood accepted across cultural and socioeconomic lines is self-sufficiency, the ability of a person to financially support oneself and one's dependents. It was, until several decades ago, considered anathema for a child to return home after launch, and to do so would subject both the child and their family to

psychological and emotional sanctions imposed by their social group. Today, in the face of tough economic times and shifting societal and moral values, it has become more acceptable for a child to boomerang home, whereby the first launch is considered a transitional phase between childhood and maturity.

Figure 5. Boomerang Kids: New transitional phase in life course development



In this new model, the child leaves home either prematurely, or thinking he or she can make the leap to self-sufficiency, and fails, usually due to job loss, relationship break-up or financial hard times. This causes both positive and negative emotional distress on the mother, with or without mate, due to loss of privacy and spousal intimacy, intrusion into personal space, messiness and other impositions the child's mother was beginning to enjoy living without. This also causes financial distress on the household as

bills increase and the parents have less disposable income. On the positive side, mothers who worried about their children not being ready have the revisited opportunity to reassess her parenting skills and finish the job, or to experience a transitional phase of detachment.

In this study, mothers across the socioeconomic sample are willing to accept boomerang children back, but vary as to rules placed on their activities, financial contributions to household expenses and length of time before relaunch. Often children will boomerang home and relaunch several times before attaining a workable level of self-sufficiency. Central to this study is anchoring aspect of the mothers' identity and her purpose as caregiver which she loses when the kids leave home and she enters the empty nest face, then regains when they boomerang back. When boomerang grandchildren accompany the boomerang kids, the mothers' purpose is restored in a new way, as if she has a second chance to do things she missed out on. In today's hypersensitive over reactive world, the abrupt shock of breaking the mother/child bond is softened by the transitional phases of the boomerang paradigm, each relaunch less stressful than the one before.

There were two phenomena of interest to this study as articulated in the primary research questions which guided this research. First were the perceptions of mothers concerning their shared experience of entering the empty nest phase of life course development. Second were the mothers' perceptions of having the empty nest phased interrupted by children who boomeranged back into the parental home. Coding and

analysis of first-person data from the verbatim transcriptions led to the identification of six emergent themes repeated by the participants regarding the phenomena being studied. According to Saldana (2008), a theme is "an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection." Themes include (a) mothers' identity as children's caregiver predominates other roles, (b) the empty nest phase causes mothers' emotional upheaval, (c) mothers have difficulty letting go of children, (d) boomerang children cause emotional and financial distress, (e) boomerang children cause mothers to reassess their parenting skills, and (f) boomerang grandchildren reinvigorate mother's caregiver purpose. The first three themes answer the first research question, "How do the participants describe the experience of living in the empty nest?"

Theme 1: Mothers' Identity as Children's Caregiver Predominates Other Roles

A mother may have many roles during her lifetime defined by her biological lineage such as daughter, sister, aunt, grandmother, by choice such as wife, spouse, worker, employee, or defined by what she likes to do such as boater, skydiver, reader, moviegoer and so forth. Data analysis of participants' perceptions revealed the majority of mothers regard their nurturing role as caregiver to their children supersedes all other roles. Phrases which illustrate this theme include: "once a mother, always a mother" (Amber); "your whole life is your children" (Aqua); "I'm a mother, I am not a friend" (Blue); "I have always been involved with my children" (Cerulean); "I love being a mom" (Coral); "My personal identity is my children" (Gray); "as long as I'm alive, they're not gonna struggle" (Jasmine); "everything that I could\ do physically and

financially was dedicated to my kids" (Lavender); "You are always a mom" (Lilac); "My door is always open (Mint); and "I will be here" (Yellow).

The caregiver role predominated in most all the participants, regardless of their ethnicity, marital, or socioeconomic status. One participant, referred to as Black, was a remarried White mother of low middle socioeconomic status supporting two biological children and two-step children. Black described her role, saying, "I always felt like my kids were my responsibility and it was up to me, even tho' they were adults, that it was up to me to make sure they were taken care of." Another Black mother, Sienna, stated that her caregiver role has never stopped, even when children become adults and live outside the home on their own, saying:

> And, when they're gone, it's like, well I wish they were around, because that way I could make sure that everything would be all right. I could protect them. I felt like I could protect them, you know, if any situation was to come up, then I could step in.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Silver, a divorced Native American mother with one son who came back injured from the Iraq War and suffered from PTSD. Silver summarized the strength of the mother/child bond this way:

> You have this bond, you have this incredible maternal bond that's just never broken. And I don't care if you're adopted, I don't care if you're raising a child that you adopted away, I don't care – you cannot break a bond like that. Between a mother and a child.

The closeness of the caregiver / nurturer role was found to apply irrespective of whether or not the children were genetic derivatives of their mother. In one unusual case where all four children were conceived through artificial insemination, the lesbian mother (Jade) describes the only difference she perceived between her partner's mother role, and her as the birth mother:

> If there's any difference, it's probably within herself because she wasn't able to feel what it was like to be pregnant – later we talked about, you know, having kids – and the whole experience we had, after the first one. She did tell me that she never got to feel what it's like, you know, feel the baby kick – but closeness, no. They're just as close.

Participants who once had a spouse to share their lives with, but lost them due to divorce or becoming a widow, developed strong identities based upon their role as caregiver to their children:

> *Aqua*. … without my kids I felt like no one. Like I felt like I'd lost my identity, I lost my purpose, I lost my reason. And that's because I don't have a partner, 'cause my daughter tells me all the time, 'Mom, you should meet somebody, you should find someone.'

One notable exception to the imports of this theme, is the mother (Khaki), who became an invalid after she suffered a stroke and depends upon her daughter more than

her daughter depends on her. Her infirmity has essentially diminished her caretaker role identity to one of continual dependency. She conveys her sentiments, not looking forward to the day when he daughter becomes self-sufficient and is able to leave home and make it on her own:

> *Khaki.* I would be sad. I always tell her she can't leave, she has to stay home and take care of me forever. She would do it if she had to. But it's not something at the top of her list of things to do.

Reading these sorrowful words, one gets the impression she still longs to be the full-fledged nurturing mother who would sacrifice herself for her child if she were able, clinging onto the nurturing role despite her infirmity.

Theme 2: The Empty Nest Phase Causes Mothers' Emotional Upheaval

Analysis of the participants' transcripts indicates a wide range of emotions associated with children leaving home to make it on their own. These emotions can be positive, such as a sense of relief, excitement for newfound freedom or pride in having launched a child into self-sufficiency. Emotions can more often be negative such as loneliness, sadness, worry, fear, depression, or loss, even to the point of disorientation as described by a white married mother of three sons:

> *Cerulean.* I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life. Like most people I like to be needed, I need to be needed. And so, I felt that nobody needed me at that point in time.

The effects of the empty nest can begin with anticipation of the day when their last child launches, and can linger for a long period of time after the child is gone. One hundred percent of the participants expressed perceiving one or more strong emotions associated with the empty nest phase.

Often, what the mother had anticipated the empty nest would be like did not equate with their expectations, "I was sad – I'm sad just thinking about it now. It was not what I thought it was going to be" (Amber). Sadness was an emotion perceived by eight of the participants:

> *Blue.* It's just a sad situation… I didn't come home right away, I would go walk around the stores or shopping centers – kind of just look around. I wouldn't come home as it'd just be me in the house 'cause my husband wasn't home from work yet.

Depression was an emotion mentioned by nine of the mothers interviewed: "…at first I was very depressed, I had a lack of motivation, getting started on the day took me a lot longer" (Amber). One mother was so depressed she withdrew from other family activities, "I hardly did any family events, I would just exempt myself out of everything" (Aqua). The lesbian mother with four children derived from artificial insemination, relates a more complete perception:

> *Jade.* I would say it's awful lonely and depressed, well some people call it depressed, but I would actually say lonely, though. But then it phases out and you get to enjoy, you know – you enjoy the quietness,

> you get to enjoy the hard work that you put in for the quietness, I guess. Sometimes I just go out on my balcony and I just look at the view, and I say 'this is what I work for, it's this quietness.' I raised my kids, they're all doing good – they're not any trouble and I just enjoy it.

Loneliness was another main emotion experienced by the study sample, with nine of the mothers describing feelings of being lonely, especially when looking ahead to the holidays, as Yellow conveyed: "But it can be lonely – like the holidays are coming. That's when it becomes lonely." The feeling of being lonely was magnified by ancillary factors, such as being divorced or widowed. An Asian mother of three children, who married her second husband on the rebound and found later she didn't really love him, expressed her loneliness this way:

> *Jasmine.* I knew I was gonna be lonely, I was going to miss them, I didn't want them to go because I was alone at the time. My [first] husband had passed away, so I depended on them for companionship. They didn't physically have to do anything for me 'cause I was well, but I just missed the closeness and I hated the emptiness.

The emotion of loneliness includes emptiness, or feeling like something is missing like you have a void which needs filling. This voidness was experienced by 11 of the 23 mothers interviewed, with descriptions such as: "for about a year I felt like I had a

void. I didn't have nobody around to harass about you know – picking up things, keeping the house clean or keeping my kids' rooms clean" (Mint). The participants proactively tried to fill the void by engaging in hobbies, volunteer work, taking classes, or getting a dog: "this little white dog is the love of my life, kind of. Gets in under your skin like a child does and she's looking at me now. Says, 'you're talking about me, Mom'" (Lime). Caring for dog can fill the caregiver's needs almost as much as caring for a child: "… you still have to come home to feed your dog, it's a puppy, so I was rushing home to feed her and watch her and take care of her and, yea, they say a dog can become your baby" (Aqua) And, when a dog passes on, it is almost like a child leaving home: "The dog died last year, and it's almost like I went through it again 'cause now I really, really, had an empty nest. Before, at least I had this dog" (Purple).

Being afraid was another strong emotion mentioned by several single mothers, including Silver whose fears were based on her son's welfare, "I was afraid I was never going to see him again. I was afraid he would be hurt or harmed or I'd lose him somehow." Another divorced single mom whose recollection is a good composite summary of the full range of emotions brought on from being in the empty nest:

> *Lilac.* Well, initial feelings were I was actually very sad and kind of at a loss because I was so used to being a caretaker for all my life, even though I worked full time – it was kind of devastating for me to have all my kids gone. Initially it was hard for me – because I am a single parent, so then I was alone. So then I had to face that whole

> reality of being alone and initially I didn't like it at all, to the point of not liking being scared at night and thinking about putting in a security system and – you know, silly things like that. But then I obviously got over that and began enjoying the freedoms of not having somebody that you were helping take care of or just being there or might be hopefully that you might cook dinner for them or that you might buy groceries for them or that – you know – keep things stocked. And obviously the house didn't get dirty like it used to and I joined an athletic club worked out more, joined a book group – just definitely was able to do more of some things I'd hoped to do.

Other mothers were able to initially experience negative emotions, but then later accept things the way they were as a matter of life course:

> *Aqua.* At first I was scared, thinking I did a lot of crank crying. I had to shut their room doors. I think it got overwhelming, and then I went through a stage where I accepted that, you know, a mom raises a kid – but they have to seek their own lives.

More than half the participants recalled experiencing positive emotions when asked to describe the experience of entering the empty nest. Jade found the experience to be a time of "Freedom and less responsibilities" which meant "less stress." Freedom to one divorced mother meant getting out of the house, exercising and exploring her creative nature:

Magenta. I started walking a lot, five miles three days a week downtown with my camera. That's kind of why I took up photography besides enjoying it and wanting to be artistic and take pictures of the things I've seen.

Table 8. What Mothers Planned to do with Extra Free Time and Money

Plans for Free Time and Money (multiple ideas)	Frequency (out of 23)
1. Cultural, artistic, educational	12
2. Travel, vacations	11
3. Friends, family, social, entertaining	10
4. Physical exercise, sports, outdoors	8
5. Remodel or fix up house	7
6. Relationship with spouse, dating	7
7. More free time, other	11

Participants were very similar in what they had planned to do with their extra time and money. These ideas and their frequency of occurrence are summarized in Table 8. One of the favorite notions was making the home more to their liking by painting or redecorating. For example, Aqua, Aqua 46-year-old divorced Latino mother, half Spanish and half Puerto Rican living in New York, stated, "I did redecorate my living room, I bought a new sofa and I painted myself. And I went to Home Goods and purchased some really pretty things and we did the whole living room, completely." The participants expressed thoughts about how they would spend their extra personal time and money

when free of the responsibility of raising children. Often, the plans the empty nest mothers made fell by the wayside when other problems arose to fill the void, or they reappraised their finances and found their dreams exceeded their resources,

Married heterosexual mothers saw the opportunity to spend more time with their spouses:

> *Black*. It was the only time that there was no kids in the house and it was just me and my husband. And it was like a new, exciting time for me and my husband, and we're like newlyweds. We could do what we want, we didn't have to worry somebody being home and not having something to eat or, you know. We just had a lot of freedom, it was really nice.

Mothers who spent years devoted to raising their children often grew apart from their husbands as mother roles became more demanding and the breadwinners concentrated on working to pay the bills. In some cases, the participants were uncertain about how the emotional content of their relationships with their spouses would change when the kids were gone and left the two of them with more time and more space:

> *Cerulean*. I wasn't sure how that was going to go. I think a lot of us are in that boat. When the kids leave they think, 'gosh, here's this person I've got to spend all my time with him; do we still have stuff we want to talk about? Do we have things in common?' Thankfully, we sort of rekindled a little romance.

A similar recollection comes from a mother of four children born out of wedlock, married to a man who is not her children's biological father:

> Citron. We had to make a decision – like, okay, for so long it was just routine life stuff – work, work, work, take care of the kids. And then at some point all of that changed, and so it was, 'oh, do we really like each other anymore? Do we really want to be together anymore?' So we spent a lot of time with that, and we came up with we DID like each other, we did want to be together.

Theme 3: Mothers Have Difficulty Letting Go of Children

The end of child rearing is a natural phase in the development of a family as "separation of adolescents from their parents is imminent and represents a major life transition" (Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, & Widaman, 2001, p. 284). Separation anxiety can begin to occur with anticipation of the separation and the perception of what the future will be like, "The hardest part about being a parent is when your child grows up and you have to realize that he's free and let him go out and make his own living" (Mint). Concerns about a child's safety away from the protective home will always form a thread of attachment between the mother and child, "I wish they were around, that way I could make sure everything would be all right" (Sienna).

Mothers who carried children through to term, gave birth and raised them to an age where they left home and struck out on their own, have invested years of emotional and psychological capital to which they are attached. This attachment, when broken, can

create a void, a sense of lost purpose, emotional or psychological pain. Avoiding mistakes was a prime reason mothers did not want the children to leave, especially when they choose to leave home prematurely:

> *Aqua.* "I felt like she was going to end up making a mistake. I kept telling her, 'You're too young, you should just think this through.' And, I kept calling her, trying to talk to her, but they still went ahead and got married and everything.

Mothers try to avoid the personal pain caused by their children's mistakes by keeping them home until they feel their child is ready for a successful launch, whereby attachment serves as a self-protective mechanism. Potential pain is commensurate with the type of life a child chooses when he or she leaves home, enlisting in the military to be sent into a war zone being one of the most potentially devastating: "I was very worried that something would happen to him overseas, so I was very, very scared. But I needed to let him go. It was very important to let him go" (Amber).

A mother's attachment to her child can be born out of selfish reasons, such as to avoid being alone and having companionship, or to handle personal needs as in the case Khaki who is disabled and at a loss without her daughter's care: "I always tell her she can't leave, she has to stay home and take care of me forever. She would do it if she had to. But it's not at the top of her list of things to do."

The mother's instinct to hold onto a child and keep him or her around does not fully diminish, even after the young adult has launched into the world. One participant's

son took an early release from the military and found regressive comfort back under his mother's wing where she does his laundry, cooks his meals and struggles with letting him go:

> *Amber.* I think I'm mothering him a lot less because I realize that he has to learn to be on his own and he needs to be responsible. He needs to learn responsibility because I realize that I can't always be there for him. He doesn't have good relationships with girls, so I realize that might be partly my fault, because I've always done everything for him.

Several mothers realized at a certain point that allowing their children to stick around the family home when they should be out on their own was hurting them more than helping them, and forced them to move out:

Citron. "I had to kick him out because. I could see he wasn't gonna leave and second off, I could see that by me allowing him to stay, it was gonna end up being more of a handicap, more of a hindrance to his development than me trying to help him. And it's actually been the best thing for him."

Another participant realized kids leaving home was necessary, and that she had to curtail her desires to hold him as it was in his own best interest to leave when he felt he was ready:

> *Mint.* And he was getting his own apartment and he was trying to get his life together. He said, 'Mom, you know like it's time for me to leave

> the nest, leave the home, I want to go out there on my own and build my own life.' And, you know, I had to let go – you know the hardest part about being a parent is when your child grows up and you have to realize that he's free and let him go out and make his own living.

Attachment to one's child can emotionally reach the point of obsession as described by the Native American divorced mother, whose son initially left home to run with a rough crowd, then later left again to go into military service overseas, who found solace in olfactory and auditory artifacts :

> *Silver*. I'd go in his room sometimes and just kind of sit there, because you could still smell him and you know that perfume that teenagers that could kill all the things between, you know – between the department store where they buy it and home 'cause they'd put too much of it on. ... I could smell him. I could smell his scent on everything. You know, on the comforter that was on his bed because he didn't take his furniture when he first moved in with his friends – he didn't take his furniture. He slept on their couch and he still had a lot of his clothes in there.... he had a message on his cell phone. And I would listen to his voice and then that would kind of get me going, you know. Just to hear his voice – and then once in a while he would call and he would leave a message for me on the answering machine here. And I kept all those messages – I kept all of them. Especially

> when he went to Iraq, you know, I just kept every one of the messages that he left me so I could just hear his voice.

The transition of a young person from adolescence into adult self-sufficiency can be hampered when a mother holds on too long, not wanting the child to grow up and leave her. Treating a child like a child can retard life course development, while accepting this inevitable transition and letting go at the right time can facilitate maturity and self-reliance:

> *Citron.* It was very challenging for me to negotiate from mother/child to adult/adult, and once I was able to do that, you know, the relationship between me and each child benefited and they started showing more independence and more responsibility. Had I done it sooner, they all – everybody would have benefited.

Theme 4: Boomerang Children Cause Emotional and Financial Distress

Themes 4, 5 and 6 answer the second research question, "How do the participants describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?" Once a child has left home and the mother has gone through the emotional and psychological changes associated with anticipating, entering into and residing in the empty nest phase, they gradually adjust to living without children, with or without a significant other to share their life. I have discussed how the participants coped with these changes, what they have done to compensate for the void created by their launched children and how they have changed the design of their lives as they enter this next phase of life course development. All this,

however, can get interrupted by the countertransitional boomerang child who comes home, often as their only option.

> *Mint.* I started to welcome the idea that my kids were finally grown up and moved on with their lives and you know, my husband and I are fairly happy right now. Up until the point of, you know, recently, because my son had moved back, because now I feel like our life has been interrupted because we have to take care of him and it's like, I feel like I'm in the middle of that responsibility again, although he's an adult. And he's not working right now – he's in between jobs, he's looking for work, and I feel – sometimes I feel like my space is being invaded.

While some of the participants welcomed their children back to alleviate fears or provide personal comfort, more than half the participants felt boomerang kids upset their lives by bringing some kind of disharmony into the home or disrupting plans mothers had made after entering the empty nest. Major complaints listed in Table 9 include messiness of living condition, increased expenses, invasion of privacy or personal space, laziness or lack of motivation, petty arguing or unnecessary drama, increased stress, encroaching on spousal relationship or dating, and curtailing of mother's outside interests to socialize, travel or engage in educational or cultural pursuits.

Table 9. Mothers' Major Complaints with Their Boomerang Kids

Complaint (multiple complaints possible)	Frequency (out of 23)
1. Messiness, cleaning issues, household duties	14
2. Increased expenses, financial pressure	10
3. Invasion of privacy, personal space	10
4. Laziness, lack of motivation	9
5. Unable to do outside activities	8
6. Adult status conflicts	6
7. Encroachment on spousal relationship	5
8. Petty arguments, drama	5

Cleaning up in the kitchen and messiness, especially in the boomeranger's bedroom was the main complaint as the children would often slip back into their old patterns of having their mother be housekeeper. This sense of entitlement could precipitate petty arguments, as the boomeranger thinks they have somehow achieved equal status with their mothers through being in the world on their own, even though the self-reliant experience was short-lived:

> *Aqua.* We are arguing more than when she was here before. And I'm doing more because now there's two women in the household, she comes and her personality has changed and she doesn't work rules, because she feels she's an adult now and she doesn't need rules. She's been married, 'I don't need rules, you give me too many rules.'

While some mothers were willing to continue paying all the household expenses, others began to feel abused by the increased cost of necessities such as food, electricity, rent or mortgage, and asked the boomeranger to contribute, especially if he or she had found work and were earning money. This usually required a negotiation to establish a reasonable workable situation: "there was a lot of things I had to renegotiate like, you know, cleaning up your own room, and handling your own bills. Taking some responsibility as far as 'the bills'" (Sienna). Or, "Well, I gave him the choice – either he could pay a flat fee and call it "rent" or whatever, or he could pay like a percentage. Something. And he had to help pay for food, too" (Purple); and, "it took him a while to understand that 'cause I'm Mom, I'm not supposed to do everything for free. And then he realized, 'OK, let me help my Mom out'" (Yellow). One mother tested the maturity of her boomerangers by allowing them to decide upon an equitable arrangement for the bills:

> *Lavender.* I didn't put a dollar amount on it. I told them 'this is the mortgage payment, this is the electric, this is how much it's gone up since you came home and you brought big screen TV's and this that and the other thing – you two decide what you want to cover.'

If the boomeranger was not working, or was going to school, some mothers were willing to carry the load: "…he doesn't make any money now. No, he's not paying anything yet" (Amber); "he pays for his own stuff but he doesn't contribute, he just pays for it. Like clothes, gas, car payment – that kind of thing" (Coral); or:

> *Jasmine.* She came home and, she's working, so we really didn't have to negotiate anything. She just got her old room back and I didn't set any laws, she's 30 years old. She doesn't cook or anything, but I just tell her, 'You go to work, keep your money and if you need help – I'll help you.'

When a boomerang grandchild was involved, constraints upon the mother's time and resources were even greater and required more assistance: "… most of the time she'll just put in with the groceries and stuff, a couple of times – 'cause I'm the one taking her to work up at the office, then picking up the baby from day care. Sometimes she'll put gas in my car once a week" (Blue); or, Even when the boomerangers relaunch, participants were willing to provide financial assistance: "I'm still paying all their cell bills, all three of 'em – I'm still paying all their car insurances" (Lilac).

Participants were also disappointed when their boomerangers displayed a lack of motivation or ambition, traits indicative of a maturing self-reliant person mothers hoped their sons and daughters would become.

Invasion of privacy or personal space was a common complaint shared by ten of the participants who had gotten their homes in shape for themselves to enjoy. Allowing a child to live back in the home creates an intrusion of not only physical space, but mental and emotional space where quiet and harmony were prized possessions, as described by a distraught mother whose daughter violated agreed upon house rules:

> *Magenta*. One of the rules is nobody comes in when I'm not here. 'You don't bring anybody over, you ask me first.' And, I come home and she's got three or four people sitting in my room: 'They're just my friends and I'm paying you rent.' And, I'm like 'yeah, but there's rules.' I don't like strangers walking through the house and seeing what I have, or being on my computer.

To a work-at-home mother, personal space also meant business space, with ramifications of earning income to support the household. Discourteous invasions during business hours were regarded to be particularly disruptive, as described by a mother whose son worked as a night time bartender:

> *Lilac*. That was extremely difficult for me because his life was upside down [from] my time cycle… he would go to work at ten p.m. and come home at four in the morning. And, I'd be getting up at six, so it was frustrating in many ways, and of course, I didn't think he was living up to his ability.

When a child lags behind and does not keep up the developmental pace with one's peers as indicated by the life course perspective, it put additional pressure on a mother and can make her question her preparation acumen. Attempting to make it in the world as a self-reliant individual and failing can be accepted by a mother as long as her son or daughter is motivated to succeed. But when the child boomerangs home and becomes lazy or self-indulgent, tries to dodge household responsibilities, or doesn't follow through

with the work or education plans they espoused upon reentering the parental home, the mother can become anxious that her child will ever be ready to successfully relaunch. Giving the boomeranger a time limit on his or stay is often a last resort effort at instilling initiative, if it's supported by the mother's resolve: "That's why I kind of put a time limit on him, 'cause if he thinks he could just move home, and then stay there 'until I'm ready to move,' that's not teaching him to plan ahead" (Lime).

Perhaps the most annoying attribute of a boomeranger is lack of respect or consideration toward the mother who has taken them in and is providing a safe nurturing environment for them to recover themselves. The old adage 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child' (Shakespeare, 1564) aptly expresses the sentiments of Magenta: "She stays out late and doesn't bother to call and say 'I'm not coming,' and I lock the door… and I end up staying up and waiting on her and I text her, and she ignores me." In a most extreme situation of boomeranger emotional and financial abuse, one participant who had welcomed her daughter, granddaughter, 24-year-old son and his girlfriend in the mother's mobile home while she lived in poverty, working as a flag woman directing traffic on construction sites, was driven to the point of despair:

> *Violet*. I've tried to speak to them about the money and they get very arrogant, rude, hateful – so it's not worth it to me to go through that. It's too stressful and it makes my metabolism change – and I don't like the baby to hear anything bad – so I just let it go 'til the right time. 'Cause I'm saving up and I'm moving.

Theme 5: Boomerang Children Cause Reassessment of Parenting Skills

When children boomerang home after failing to make it on their own, some mothers will blame themselves for the failure and call their parenting skills into question. Being overprotective, or solving problems children could have figured out for themselves while developing self-reliance in the process, was a perceived parenting mistake realized by fourteen of the participants (61%), such as:

> *Black*. I didn't realize until just maybe the past 6 months – that me taking care of them and making sure that their life is easy, is not really helping them…. It's not preparing them to deal with, you know, problems on their own. And it, you know, it took me a long time to realize that.

Another participant felt her child-raising efforts mirrored a popular model of intense parental support which can smother and curtail self-sufficient tendencies, creating the phenomenon of 'helicopter moms' with 'landing pad kids' (Fingerman et al, 2012):

> *Aqua.* I was one of those moms that overwound their children, helicopter parenting? Because I don't trust this way, so I think that what I did do wrong, now that I reflect back, is that I helicoptered my children, I was always on top of them to go play. Maybe it did more damage than good. Maybe they needed that freedom more. If I had given them more freedom, I think they would have stayed home more, and learned to cope with things.

Participants who are single, widowed or divorced, and had to raise their children without the stabilizing influences of a father or mate, found they often overcompensated for this void by giving them things they did not have when growing up, realizing in hindsight this worked contrary to helping them establish self-sufficiency:

> *Citron.* Me and their dad [sic] separated after almost ten years. When that happened I think I overcompensated for that, because I felt bad about it. So, I think I gave them too much, and I didn't give them enough responsibility.

Another participant with a spoiled boomeranger, wishes she had the opportunity to raise her child like she was raised, on a farm in Texas, where traditional values and work ethics helped mold her into the strong self-reliant person she is today:

> *Magenta*. I was raised in such a strict background. My household was what you'd call a 1950s household. My dad wore the pants, and what he said went, and that was it. And, you didn't question what he said to do and that's the way it was and that was it. If there was food put in front of you ate it whether you liked it or not. You could express an opinion, 'hey, I really don't like this,' so maybe my mom wouldn't make it. But I damn sure didn't sit there and try to get her to make a whole other meal for me. And that's what, that's where I screwed up as a parent. I shouldn't have been so accommodating. I should have been more stern about it. And I wasn't.

Children, as it is often said in jest, "do not come with an instruction manual," indicating that parenting is an inexact art and science with infinite possibilities for failure or success. One mother of two sons who boomeranged home several times and are still in the process of finding themselves and establishing self-sufficiency described how she has come to peace with her child raising efforts:

> *Cerulean*. That ship has already sailed. There are a few things that I can see in my children now that I would have done differently if I could raise them all over again but that's the nature of life. We all have things we've done in the past that we wish we'd done differently, but there aren't very many of them that we can go back and change. I regret that my shortcomings might have caused my children to be imperfect, but that's just the nature of parenting. No one is perfect, and no child is born to perfect parents. I try very hard to forgive myself for my mistakes and in the past I had more of a hard time doing that. You can't go through life constantly beating yourself up – you'd never survive if you did.

One participant gives voice to a workable attitude a mother should have when the child, battered and worn, boomerangs home to rest up and regroup before going out and taking on the world again. She doesn't place blame on herself or her child for past mistakes, as the world in which the mistakes were made was a different world in which the mistakes are tried to be rectified:

> *Amber*. You need to start with a clean slate. You cannot bring back what happened in the past, you have to let them be… listen to your kids, communicate, be positive, don't bring back negativity, don't punish them – they're growing, they're learning… [he's] a different person. It's not the same baby that was home.

Theme 6: Boomerang Grandchildren Reinvigorate Mother's Caregiver Purpose

Seven out of the 23 mothers interviewed were boomerang grandmothers (30%), where their son or more likely their daughter brought a young child with them back into the parental home. Boomerang grandchildren found a special place in their grandmothers' hearts, renewing their experience of being a mother when their children were firstborn before the vicissitudes of growing up diminished the initial rush of joy. One mother described it this way: "when my grandson came along, it changed… while I was always a mother to my son, but everything that we didn't do when they were kids, I'm doing with him" (Jade).

While mothers might feel ambivalent about their boomerang children, the thought of having a boomerang grandchild around can assuage loneliness, fill the void, and open up a whole new area of emotional acceptance:

> *Blue.* At first totally depressed like so quiet, what're gonna do, you can hear a pin drop. And then to her coming back and she's pregnant, anticipating the arrival of the baby, then the baby's here – and it's like there is no silence any more whatsoever in my house… I

> love my grandson, altho' I don't what I'm gonna' do were they to move out – that would be another crazy, totally different situation all together. I don't even want to think about it right now, anyway.

Boomerang grandkids can bring the freshness of the mother/child experience back into their grandmothers' lives, a welcome relief from having to deal with the struggles their moms are going through. Grandkids who live with other children outside the home, or with grandma as boomerang grandkids, bring the same unequivocal respite:

> *Turquoise.* My grandkids, they're the life of the party. They all have their own personality and for each one we have our own thing. Like my oldest granddaughter. I go get her, we got to MacDonald's, Burger King or whatever, come home. I've got a whole bunch of movies for them like Scooby Do, Sponge Bob. I've got some learning DVDs for them and things like that, and we sit up in the bed, we eat our popcorn, and we just watch movies.

Admitting a boomerang grandchild into the home is not all fun and games, but extends the role of the responsible caregiver to the grandmother, renewing her fulfilling purpose as described by Blue: "Who's gonna watch him? Who's gonna be here? What're gonna do with him? Basically you can't just get up and go – you have to make sure who's gonna pick him up from day care?"

Grandmothers who may have had enough of their kids, having raised them and handled their problems for decades, get a fresh start with their boomerang grandkids as

Citron candidly confided: “I have a friend who told me, ‘You’re gonna love your grandchild way more than you loved your children.’ And, I thought, you know, ‘That’s a cruel thing to say.” But it’s almost true.” One participant (Gray) enjoyed having her boomerang granddaughter around so much she allowed her to stay for ten years and have served as the primary caregiver as her boomerang daughter’s work requires extensive travel away from the home. Another participant likes to spend money on her boomerang grandson because it gives her pleasure (Yellow). And, one mother willingly submits to an abusive situation about living conditions and expenses, sacrificing her own needs and wants to protect her boomerang granddaughter as long as she can:

> *Violet.* I’ve tried to speak to them about the money and they get very arrogant, rude, hateful – so it’s not worth it to me to go through that. It’s too stressful and it makes my metabolism change. And, I don’t like the baby to hear anything bad – so I just let it go ‘til the right time.

Summary

Chapter four describes the data collection methods, coding and data analysis procedures used to elicit the findings, patterns and emergent themes presented in this qualitative phenomenological research study. I used semistructured interviews via recorded telephone conversations with 23 participants selected using a purposeful criterion-based, sample of convenience. Proper IRB procedure was followed throughout the interface with participants from initial contact, through delivering the consent, too debriefing and delivering the remunerative stipend. All the participants were satisfied

with the process and there were no complaints. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, proofread, manually focus coded and organized into categories. Throughout this process, I worked back and forth between the documents to condense and focus the coding to more accurately reflect the interview data.

Six main themes emerged from data analysis, the first three from the first research question, and the second three from the second research question: (a) mothers' identity as children's caregiver predominates other roles, (b) the empty nest phase causes mothers' emotional upheaval (c) mothers have difficulty letting go of children (d) boomerang children cause emotional and financial distress (e) boomerang children cause mothers to reassess their parenting skills, (f) boomerang grandchildren reinvigorate mother's caregiver purpose, and (g) boomerang children represent a new life course development phase.

Findings from this study suggest that mothers perceive the empty nest experience and the boomerang child experience in basically the same way, irrespective of their ethnic background or socioeconomic status. Most of the participants see the caregiver / nurturing function to their children as paramount and are willing to sacrifice themselves and their well-being for their children's welfare. Many of the mothers felt they over mothered their children due to ignorance about the effects on self-reliance, or as overcompensation for something they felt their children were deprived of, such as a father in the case of a single, divorced or widowed mother. They felt this over mothering

was partially responsible for their children's inability to survive outside the home as self-sufficient individuals.

The participant mothers welcomed their boomerang children back into the home to fulfill personal needs of loneliness, to complete their duties in child raising, or to help them regroup from the rigors of the real world. In many cases the boomerang children became a disruptive influence in the lives of the participant mothers and their spouses, who grappled with ways to make the situation more equitable and livable. It was found that when boomerang grandchildren entered the equation, the participants were more willing to extend themselves and their resources. And, the increasing prevalence of the boomerang phenomena is seen as a new countertransitional phase of human development which reflects the uncertainty of today's changing social and economic exigencies.

Study research began following IRB approval. All requisite requirements of the IRB were followed to protect the anonymity of the participants from our initial contact through posted solicitations, through the screening and consent procedure, conducting the interview and post-interview handing of the data. All of the data from this study is secure inside my password protected computer or locked file case in my locked home office. Upon final approval by my professors, Walden University, the URR results from this study will be submitted for publication in professional peer review journals. Findings from this study will also be rewritten to address a more popular lay audience and submitted for publication in consumer magazines and to book publishers. An executive summary of the findings will be made available for all the participants upon request.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of empty nest mothers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who had boomerang children who had returned to live in the parental home after failing to achieve self-sufficiency in the outside world. This boomerang phenomenon is a current and growing social trend in the United States; affects nearly 20% of the American population, giving the phenomenon strong implications for U.S. society. The number of young adults (25–34) living in multigenerational households has doubled since the 1980s, from 11% to 21.6% (Parker, 2012, p. 14). For the expanded 18–34 age bracket, 38% of all young women and 40% of young men have boomeranged home for an extended stay of more than a year, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. The primary causes for this retrograde life course developmental phase include children's experiencing a loss of job, relationship break-up, or falling on financial hard times for a variety of reasons.

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to gather participant perceptions of mothers with respect to two crucial life courses experiences: (a) entering into and existing in the empty nest phase, and (b) having the exigencies of the empty nest phase interrupted by the return of boomerang children. This empty nest phase consists of a period when the last child leaves home to make it on their own, creating a life course transitional phase for the mother from being a caregiver to being alone with or without a

spouse (Hawkins, 1978). The perceptions from the 23 participants who volunteered for this study yielded valuable insights on four facets:

- the nature of the mother/child bond,
- the mothers' identity struggles,
- the mothers' ability to cope with life's shifting exigencies when their children returned home, and
- the addition of this new countertransitional phase of the life course perspective of human development.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the participant sample, the data collection method and restatement of the research questions which guided this study. The next section presents the interpretation of the findings organized by themes and a discussion of how these findings compare to those in the literature discussed in chapter two. Next, I discuss limitations to this study, followed by implications for positive social change. Recommendations for action and further study precede my reflections on the research experience followed by a summary of conclusions.

Research Questions

Using a semistructured interview approach, I recorded and verbatim-transcribed interviews with mothers from five different states who represented an approximate ethnic and socioeconomic mix of the general population of the United States. The participating mothers in total had 30 boomerang children and 7 boomerang grandchildren. They were selected using a criterion-based sample of convenience. A detailed description of the

participant recruitment process and research methodology can be found in the previous chapter. Two primary research questions guided our dialogue exchange, each with subquestions. Appendix C describes the screening procedure and interview questions which were designed to elicit responses of greater depth. The first research question dealt with the first crucial life course experience under study, followed by three subquestions:

- RQ_1: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living in the empty nest?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their daily life activities?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their marital relationship?
    - SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe their personal need fulfillment?

The second research question and subquestions elicited the participants' perceptions of having the empty nest phase interrupted by, and living with, one or more boomerang child:

- RQ_2: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?
    - SQ: What were previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children expectations about coresidency before their children returned home?

- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children cope with the boomerang child countertransition?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children renegotiate coresidency exigencies?
- SQ: How do previously empty nest mothers with boomerang children describe the influence of boomerang children on their personal need fulfillment?

A common feeling expressed by all the mothers was the willingness to accept their children back into the home regardless of the reason that brought them there. All of the participants stated that they were willing to give up the positive aspects of being in the empty nest to help out their children; those who felt that they were suffering from loss and anguish over their children's departure stated that they welcomed their children's return. However, the initial thrill of having their offspring back home dissipated over time for most of the mothers and brought a new set of issues into their relationship.

Those mothers who were enjoying their new found freedom, quiet and spacious living conditions stated that they began to resent the intrusion of young adults to whom they had given everything for decades. Married and cohabitating mothers stated that they found the intrusion on their privacy to be detrimental to their desires to reaffirm or enjoy their relationships with their spouses. In some cases, the strain on household finances caused friction and living agreements had to be renegotiated to bring things into balance. Mothers recounted questioned their own child raising competence and efforts to properly

prepare their children to succeed in life. These findings aligned with previous research findings, although no previous studies has so thoroughly explored these issues across this a wide variety of ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Interpretation of Findings

The common shared experiences surrounding the empty nest phase of life course development were described by the participants in relation to two primary phenomenological occurrences: (a) after their last child left home, and (b) when a child returned home after failing to attain self-sufficiency. I used the transcripts of my interviews with mothers who represented an ethnic and socioeconomic cross section of the United States to identify and extract six major themes. These themes embodied the essence of the mothers' shared experiences and confirm or augment findings from earlier related studies published in the literature.

Theme 1: Mothers' Identity as Children's Caregiver Predominates

The first identified theme was that mothers' identity as their children's caregiver predominated. While employed mothers achieved partial identity from their work, and married mothers described themselves in the role of being a spouse, all the mothers resonated most completely with the role of being a nurturer to their children. Mothers could lose their jobs, break up with their mates, or become widows, and still retain a good idea of who they were as long as they had their children to nurture. After childbirth, the type of incident that affected many of the mothers most deeply, and threw their personal identities into turmoil, was their last child leaving home. This change was often viewed

by the participants as an abrupt end of a mother's primary purpose in life: to raise and care for her children. Losing this purpose was most often accompanied by a loss of personal identity. This experience was consistent with findings by Adelmann, Antonnucci, Crohan, and Coleman (1989).

A major component of a mother's identity as caregiver found in the expressions of the mothers interviewed was self-sacrifice, that mothers were most always willing to subordinate their own wants, needs and desires for those of her children. Even when the mothers did not agree with what their children were doing, they still gave time, money, possessions, space, and whatever else was needed to their children. They described this action as the right thing to do to promote their children's well-being and survival. These tendencies are congruent with basic biological survival mechanisms inherent within the genes, as described by Darwin (1859). Almost all of the mothers stated that they loved being mothers and spoke fondly about their experiences caring for their children. They did not mind cooking and cleaning and performing traditional functions expected of a mother. They enjoyed having their children around and experienced a void when their children left home. While they tried to fill the void with outside activities, hobbies, going out, meeting people, and so forth, the participants stated that if their children needed them, they would drop these new activities in favor of regaining their role as a caregiver.

The mothers' identity as caregiver, in every case, superseded her identity as a spouse, especially when the spouse was not the biological father to her children. Several of the mothers had children by men they never married primarily because of the attitudes

of the men. This caused the mothers to work extra hard to try and fulfill both the mother and father roles with varying degrees of success. The mother role was often more need fulfilling and satisfying than that of a spouse. Several mothers used their children's' needs as a reason to not spend time with their spouse. They were willing to cause financial or emotional hardships on their spouse to ease the children's life struggles. The one lesbian mother who had four children through artificial insemination, expressed views about her identity role as a caregiver with equal vigor to all the other mothers with their own biological children, relegating her spousal role to second place. Even the notion of the feminine mystique as popularized by Friedan (1963) paled in comparison to the mothers' need to be caregiver to her children. The mother's role as caregiver was paramount.

Personal identity struggles expressed by the mothers when entering the empty nest are similar to those confronted by women who experience what is commonly referred to as a 'midlife crisis' (Deutscher, 1964), a key aspect being the need to rediscover one's lost or fragmented personal identity. This is often accomplished by shedding the caregiver role in favor of engaging in other activities as mentioned by the mothers. Several mothers attempted to transfer the caregiver role onto a dog which served as a surrogate recipient of the mothers' caregiving efforts. This helped maintain her caregiver identity while the mothers adjusted to the new household dynamic, keeping the nurturing spirit alive to blossom anew when the children returned home as boomerangers.

The mothers' identities as their children's' caregivers expressed by the participants are lifelong and unwavering. Knowing where their children are and what they are doing after they left home was common need expressed by the mothers who maintained their caregiver identity through offering advice and lending a sympathetic or encouraging ear. Constant communication after launch was maintained mostly through phone calls and cyber encounters, such as texting, chat messages and email. Personal visits were experiences anticipated with much joy. And, when their children found life outside the home too difficult to maintain, not one mother failed to admit their child back into the home, even though the situation later turned sour. In most cases the mothers said their lives revolved around the needs of their children, and they saw themselves not as detached individuals, but rather as their child's mom. In short, the mothers in this study, regardless of the ethnic background or socioeconomic status, were dedicated to their children and found primary fulfillment in the efforts they expended toward giving their children a better life. Nothing in life is more important to the mothers in this study than the formation and continuation of the participants' personal identities as their children's' caregivers.

Theme 2: Empty Nest Phase Causes Mothers' Emotional Upheaval

A panoply of emotions accompanied the exit of the mothers' last child from the parental home, ranging from fear and depression to a sense of freedom and even elation. Expressions of these emotions by the mothers in this study paralleled those in the literature (Axelson, 1960; Borland, 1982; Glenn, 1975; Harkins, 1978; Mitchell &

Lovegreen, 2009; Tallmer, 1986) and can be classified as either positive or negative depending on how they affect the mothers' well-being. As indicated in Figure 1, anticipated positive constructs born from this emotional upheaval were a sense of relief, freedom and personal fulfillment for a job well done, while negative constructs were loss of purpose, separation anxiety, trepidation, and a sense of unfinished business. These constructs were evident in the data provided by the mothers in this study.

Freud's melancholia (1917), rooted in the loss of a loved one, was expressed by many of the participants who lost their children to the outside world. This melancholia was described by the mothers as loneliness, emptiness, a sense of void, missing a part of oneself, sadness, or depression. This is consistent with the literature where the maternal role is central to a mother's well-being. When the last child leaves home, psychological and even physiological problems can be psychosomatically generated (Mitchell, & Lovegreen, 2009). These feelings resulted in behavioral changes such as withdrawal from people or activities to the point of being fearful, escaping into books or TV where they can fill the void through vicarious experience, or even numbing these sensations with alcohol or drugs. Other mothers had trouble sleeping due to worrying about their children's' welfare away from home where they were powerless to step in, help solve problems and provide solace. These fears were especially prevalent in the mothers whose sons joined the military and were sent overseas into harm's way in war zones.

However, the range of these negative constructs was not consistent among the participants, nor was the intensity they experienced. Mothers who were divorced with an

only child seemed to suffer the worst (Silver), while mothers with many children suffered the least (Gray, Sienna, Jade). This leads to the assumption that mothers who are able to spread their attention among multiple siblings receive ancillary support not available to mothers with a single child. Or, by law of averages, if two children are doing well and one is not, the 1/3 negative is diminished by the 2/3s positive. Mothers who obtained dogs or other pets also experienced a lessening of the negative effects of being in the empty nest (Aqua, Cerulean, Lime, Purple). Negative emotional and psychological symptoms were found to be exacerbated by other stressful life events such as death of spouse (Jasmine), or job loss (Cerulean). Emotional pain was also caused when the mothers heard about their children's' troubles after they moved away, the geographical distance preventing them from providing any kind of immediate face-to-face comfort or support.

Positive emotional and psychological constructs were conveyed by more than half of the mothers in this study who experienced elevated states of well-being which is consistent with the literature (Glenn, 1975; Tallmer, 1986). In some cases the enhanced well-being was immediate, as soon as their children left home, as the mothers felt their children were ready to launch and they had done everything possible to help make their lives a success, their childrearing viewed as job well done. Other mothers had to first go through a phase of depression, loss, or loneliness they had to work their way out of through becoming engaged in other activities such as physical exercise, sports, hobbies, or social encounters. And, several others simply felt they had enough and deserved a

break, as they had done their part and were being taken advantage of by their lingering offspring.

Once the mothers tasted the freedom of getting their lives back, many said they began to blossom and rediscover themselves. Rearranging the house living environment, redecorating, buying new furniture, turning the children's' rooms into guest rooms, home offices or art studios were common first activities. Several mothers expressed joy about getting into photography, painting or otherwise exercising their creative talents which had been suppressed or transmuted during the child rearing years. Others rekindled their relationships with their spouses, resulting in more romance, fewer arguments, going out to events together, or traveling to distant locales they had always wanted to visit. Mothers of modest financial resources got involved in local activities such as joining craft groups or game clubs, visiting relatives, or just sleeping, watching more TV, or playing on the internet. Single mothers attempted dating or going to nightclubs with mixed results, as what they remembered of the dating scene two decades past was different than what they experienced at their advanced age and appearance. Several of the mothers began to work more hours or start side businesses with their extra time to earn more money. Most all the mothers found things to do to keep them from thinking about their gone children and to use up the extra time.

However, in many cases, the thrill of newfound freedom, having more space and extra money, quickly wore off as the mothers found these attributes to be less fulfilling than being involved with their children. The mothers who kept in close touch with their

children fared better than those whose children did not regularly communicate. Mothers whose children were doing well before they left, were able to maintain their positive moods better than those whose children were not doing so well when their children later found themselves in trouble with work, finances or personal relationships after they moved away. This is consistent with previous findings (Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1994).

The participants who were married or cohabitating experienced a dimension of emotional uncertainty not present in the expressions of single, divorced or widowed mothers. While living at home the children had served as a kind of buffer between the mothers and their spouses, and when the buffer was removed the couple had to grapple with the emotions of getting reacquainted, often after the intimacy had lain dormant for many years. The participants expressed both excitement and reticence at the prospect of rediscovering what remained, or what could be rekindled, from a relationship that produced the children who now had grown to maturity and left them again alone together. Several of the couples separated or divorced, revealing the unspoken intention of staying together just for the sake of the kids growing up in a dual parent home. The Asian couples seemed to have an easier time than the Caucasian or Hispanic couples at settling their emotions and coming together to enjoy their intimacy and time together. This was a non-issue for the unmarried Black mothers, who seemed to get along well without a mate, emotional fulfillment coming from the children.

Theme 3: Mothers Have Difficulty Breaking the Bonds of Attachment

Findings from this study reveal that mothers from every ethnic and socioeconomic profile all had difficulty with attachment to the caregiver role and associated emotional and psychological issues. Adolescent hormonal changes have been found to lessen the strong attachment bond between mother and child which was largely responsible for guiding and protecting the child up to puberty (Bowlby, 1982), yet the attachment bond endures through the lifespan (Ainsworth, 1989). This bond is what makes it so difficult for mothers to let go of their children, unlike creatures in wild, such as birds who push their offspring from the nest, or lions who run their cubs off from the den. When the children leave home, or detach from their mothers' care, a separation anxiety is produced in both the mother and the child. From the life course perspective, this event is a natural and normal occurrence which represents a major mutual life transition (Hock, Eberly, Bartle-Haring, Ellwanger, & Widaman, 2001). Though mothers expressed the desire to see their sons and daughters leave home and achieve self-sufficiency, they simultaneously had difficulty in letting their children go.

All mothers in this study had difficulty detaching, but in varying degrees and for different reasons. Some expressed difficulty in detaching from their children out of concerns for their children's' safety and security. Absent and distant from the proximity of the home, children were outside the protective veil their mother had provided since birth, thus causing frustration born from a helplessness to solve their children's' problems, or be there in a time of need. These concerns were often exacerbated by fears

derived by believing their children were not yet ready to leave home, or though fearing their offspring's' associates might influence them in the wrong direction. The mothers felt helpless to prevent mistakes their children would inevitably make which would result in pain, for both the child and the mother. It was the desire to avoid this pain which made letting go so difficult.

The participants also expressed selfish reasons for not wanting their children to leave home. Several mothers liked having their children home for their own personal enjoyment, as they were better company than their workaholic husbands. The children also gave the mothers an excuse to avoid contact with their cohabitating mates with whom they might not be getting along with at the time, or from whom they had grown apart. The attachment was particularly difficult to break when one mother used her relationship with her son to fill the void left from her recently deceased husband (Jasmine), even though she had remarried on the rebound to a man she quickly realized was a mistake. Other mothers reported they selfishly prolonged the attachment in trepidation of losing fulfillment of their personal needs or losing their life's purpose. One mother who was adopted had a particularly hard time letting go, her early life undoubtedly influencing the strength of the attachment bonds (Cerulean). Another mother who is disabled and relies heavily on her daughter to care for her needs (Khaki), expressed reluctance to ever let her daughter go, even though she knew staying home was not in her daughter's best interest.

Eventually, most all the mothers came to accept the fact their children had left home and that their lives entered a new life course phase they had to deal with. They realized once their children were launched, most of their immediate caregiving duties had permanently diminished and they had to find ways to cope and fill the void with something else. There seemed to be no appreciable differences in the attachments bonds between ethnicities or due to socioeconomic inequality. One mother (Silver) was so attached to her son, who was serving in the military overseas, she would linger in his room and smell his clothes, or listen to his phone messages over and over again to maintain the attachment bond. Mothers with multiple children reported they had an easier time detaching from the second child than from their first. One mother with four children knew it was normal for kids to go out and "bump their heads" (Sienna) and expected them to boomerang home several times before they achieved permanent self-reliance.

Theme 4: Boomerang Children Cause Emotional and Financial Distress

After spending decades raising a child with all the attendant struggles, tribulations and successes, mothers often are relieved when the child leaves home and frees them from caregiver responsibilities. However, this relief is short-lived when the child boomerangs home and interrupts the adjustments underway between the mother, her new identity, her revitalized relationship with her spouse, and her enjoyment of freedom in the empty nest. As indicated in the literature, children fail to attain self-sufficiency and boomerang home for three main reasons: (a) loss of job, (b) relationship break-up, and/or (c) financial difficulties (Mitchell, 2008; Parker, 2012). Reports from the mothers in this

study confirm these previous studies, often adding such contributing factors as tough job market, slow growth economy, high costs of housing, and low wages (Clay, 2003).

Participant mothers in this study reported a main source of conflict with boomerangers is their regressive attitude and expectation of being mothered. Exhausted and battered from the exigent adult responsibilities of self-sufficiency in the outer world, these countertransitional children slip back into the comforts of home and expect their mothers to pick up after them, fix their meals and pay their bills. Mothers who were still experiencing loneliness or worry with their children gone, expressed being too eager to receive them back into the home and resume their caregiver roles. For a while these mothers didn't mind doing their kids' laundry, buying extra groceries and allowing their offspring to languish and regroup, thinking once they recovered themselves and got back on their feet, the next launch would be successful. But, all too often the comforts of home were too alluring, and after several months without any positive progress finding work or producing the requisite income to move out, the mothers began to turn resentful. Their loneliness and worry assuaged by the children's' presence, they found renewed appreciation for the advantages of the empty nest, and began to regret the ease with which they allowed their kids back into the home. This is when the conflicts began to materialize.

Conflicts between the participant mothers and their boomerangers were centered in three primary areas: (a) the imposition on the mothers' time and personal activities, (b) the infringement of the mothers' living space, especially as it related to cleanliness, and

(c) finances. Mothers who had begun to get involved with new activities, or single mothers who began to seek out relationships, found these avenues of personal growth and enjoyment abruptly curtailed, their time and energy being usurped by their boomerangers. Most mothers expressed the joy or pleasure of revitalizing their living environment, the peace and quiet, the order and cleanliness, before the boomerangers arrived. They were noisy and loud, they left their clothes everywhere, left dishes on the table or in the sink, kept their bedrooms a mess and generally behaved as slobs. The contrast between the empty nest home was strikingly evident, and riled the emotional feathers of the overgenerous and accepting mothers. Boomerangers had to be fed which meant more groceries. They had to borrow the car which meant more gas and upkeep. They used more electricity, TV cable, they needed clothes and supplies and required other resources. In short, they were expensive, and the financial reprieve the mothers were enjoying was suddenly gone.

How the mothers dealt with these issues varied widely. Some mothers acquiesced, glad that their children were home so they didn't have to worry about them, and continued with their selfless pampering. Others established conditions on how long boomeranger(s) could stay and what portion of the bills they would pay. Several mothers tried to establish rules which were not respected, or asked for respect and common courtesy and didn't get it. This resulted in resentment which continued to build throughout the course of transgressions until the mother exploded (Magenta), later regretting her emotional outburst which diminished her personal power over her abusive

daughter. In the most flagrant instance, one mother planned to leave her kids and their friends in her mobile home to pay the bills while she moved out, knowing the only way to regain her peace was after they were evicted. Then, there were those boomerangers who respected the home and their mothers' kindness and pitched in to help out with housecleaning and expenses. Mothers who gave in were abused. Those who set rules and demanded life progress helped foster the self-reliance necessary for survival.

Theme 5: Boomerang Children Cause Mothers to Reassess Their Parenting Skills

When a child fails to launch successfully into the world and become self-sufficient, many of the mothers in this study questioned their child-raising skills, whether they did all they could to prepare their children for success. This self-analysis produced a full range of conclusions ranging from guilt to pride. Some mothers felt they had not done enough, done the wrong things out of ignorance or due to lack of time or resources, and blamed themselves for their children not being able to make it on their own. Many wished they had taught their children more about personal finances. Other mothers felt they had done the best they could and any shortcomings exhibited by their children was their own fault due to their own lack of initiative, perseverance or failure to accept responsibility. But, in nearly every case, the mothers were initially gentle on their children and themselves while they sought positive solutions to whatever problems their children brought home with them.

A major benefit of having the boomeranger back home cited by several of the mothers, was the opportunity to complete the unfinished business of child rearing. Alone

in the empty nest, mothers were able to step back and reassess how they raised their children, if they had given them too much of this or that, if they had employed enough discipline or too much, if they had overcompensated in some areas to make up for what was lacking in others. A typical example was giving too many toys or possessions to make up for time they didn't spend with their children as they were occupied with work or other activities. Or, giving their children things they did not have growing up thinking it would eliminate the void they felt in their own lives. Single parents tried to overcompensate with material possessions for absent fathers. Mothers with multiple children felt there was always one in the bunch who was different, or special, who required additional attention to get on the right track. Many mothers felt they had coddled their children too much, which lessened their resolve and ability to survive in a world which was far less accommodating than was their home.

Most of the mothers discussed the notion of rediscovering their boomerangers, not as the children who left home, but as partially mature adults or burgeoning peers they could address as friends or colleagues on life's mutual journey. Many wanted to drop the mother role and relate as friends and found this approach helped their children grow into their new roles as adults who could face the world and become self-sufficient. But, often the relationship wavered between being mother or a friend in response to the boomerangers' acceptance of responsibility around the home. The more the boomerangers tried to find or maintain employment, the more diligent they were about going to school and getting more education which would prepare them for success, the

more their mothers treated them like adults. Those who picked up after themselves, helped out around the home, or contributed to the household bills were also viewed by the mothers more as equals than children. These responsible activities helped affirm the efficacy of the mothers' child raising skills. The mothers all expressed their whole-hearted support as long as their boomerangers held up their end of the bargain.

In several cases the children turned abusive after they were readmitted back into the home, though they had initially come back humble and played on their mothers' sympathy and compassion. Mothers later regretted their kindness and leniency and felt like they had been taken advantage of, and wished they had set more astringent conditions at the onset. This sneakiness was seen by the mothers as an indication of their own shortcomings in the parental role. It was something they had not anticipated and had to rectify. But this was not easy as the pattern was hard to break. Even the three young men who had joined the military and served time in war zones overseas, had to regress into childlike ways before they could get it together enough to again venture forth in the world. In most cases, these problems worked themselves out or were in the process of being resolved one way or another at the time of the participant interviews.

Theme 6: Boomerang Grandchildren Reinvigorate Mother's Caregiver Purpose

Seven of participants provided data about their experiences as being caregivers to boomerang grandchildren, who accompanied the boomerang children back into the parental home, most often without a spouse. Boomerang grandchildren were found to reignite the caregiver spirit in the participant mothers. Here were innocent newborns

without known lifelong histories full of the problems of growing up. Grandmothers could reexperience the fresh younger years when child raising was more joy than the anguish associated with adolescence. Boomerang grandchildren gave the participants a chance to be parents again, but without full responsibility. They could select the activities they wanted to experience and avoid the ones they didn't, releasing those to their grandchildren's parents.

All the participant grandmothers spoke fondly of their experiences with their grandchildren, from the enjoyment of buying them things and taking them places, to spending quiet time at home with them while their mothers worked. Activities the participant mothers had untaken to fill the void when their children left home were quickly abandoned when grandchildren arrived on the scene. The mothers expressed being invigorated by being around their grandchildren, as if they had rediscovered their younger selves rife with the anticipation of being mothers for the first time. The mothers expressed being more confident in caring for their grandchildren as their thoughts and actions were not guesses at what to do, but were guided by experience.

Having their children and grandchildren in the home also gave the mothers the opportunity to teach their children about child raising and thus recover some of the respect they had lost when their children declared their independence through adolescent behaviors. As their most favored identity role was caregiver, being able to revisit that role renewed the mothers' sense of purpose, resulting in greater personal fulfillment. In several situations, the attention the mothers lavished on the grandchildren was taken from

the attention they afforded their spouses. This caused some misplaced resentment by the grandfathers who were just getting to know their wives again, but most acquiesced out of an unspoken genetic survival need or a desire to maintain harmony. Though many of the mothers began to feel their children were becoming an unfair impediment to their own happiness, these feelings were held at bay when boomerang children were also in the home.

Limitations

A limitation to this study was the means of locating participants to produce a representative sample that mirrored the ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of the United States in general. Living in Lexington, Kentucky, it was financially and logistically impractical for me to travel across America to achieve a perfectly representative sample. Nor was it possible to make fine distinctions within cultural or ethnic groups, such as finding and interviewing within the Hispanic category mothers who were from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico and of other Latin lineages. By placing online solicitation notices in major cities with heavy known concentrations of ethnic groups, a sample was obtained which roughly meets the desired mix of diversity, thus satisfying the sample design of this study. Another limitation is that all the interviews were conducted with participants who spoke English.

The perceptions of the participants was another limitation, as they derived from memories which were undoubtedly incomplete, biased, or distorted by emotions during the events they described or felt during the interview itself. The world in which the

perceptions were formed was a different world in which the perceptions were recalled and expressed. Interview data can also be affected by the participants' perceptions of the interviewer, and the level of comfort or candidness the interview situation promoted. And, the expressions of the participants in response to the interview questions may have been clouded by self-serving attempts to come across as being something other than they are (Patton, 1990). As previously discussed, nonverbal communication can carry more information than the words themselves, and by using telephone interviews the extraneous nonverbal influences of the interviewer were kept to a minimum.

This study was intended to accomplish what phenomenological qualitative studies are meant to do, to answer the question as described by Patton (1990): "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (p. 69) After having conducted this study, transcribed the interviews, teased out codes, developed themes and interpreted the findings, it is clear that this study has achieved what it was designed to accomplish.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The phenomenon of boomerang children moving back home and interrupting their mothers' life course development is not going away, and by many accounts is only going to increase due to social and economic conditions in the United States (Parker, 2012). The findings from this study, rewritten for a popular audience, can be helpful to empty nest mothers and couples in understanding how their thoughts and feelings are common with many others who have gone through this experience before them. The findings also

can help guide their behavior toward their children with the goal of helping them achieve self-sufficiency, both during initial parenting and later when their children boomerang home. These findings, when disseminated through the popular media, can help mothers understand their own psychological and emotional reactions to the empty nest and boomerang phenomena and thereby achieve a more balanced and less anxious life experience which, in turn, will help promote better and more productive relationships with their boomerangers. The information in this study, when disseminated through scholarly journals will help guide the research of others interested in exploring this growing phenomenon with all its attendant ramifications. Mental health professionals who counsel mothers about these issues will become more proficient and able to help by assimilating the results of this study.

The most important implication for positive social change resulting from this study derives from the recognition that the boomeranger child phenomenon represents a shift in cultural expectations. The underlying theoretical foundation for this study is the life course perspective, a paradigm for studying and explaining human lives within biological, sociological and psychological contexts. It defines a person's life course as "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that an individual enacts over time" (Giele and Elder, 1998). Traditionally, mothers have expected that one day their children will grow up, leave home, secure self-sustaining employment, find a mate, settle down and start a family of their own, become success, enter gracefully into the middle or later stages of their life. Parker (2012) and other studies have shown this model is generally no

longer valid today as it once was. In the present study, the typical life course of empty nest mothers was interrupted by the readmission of boomerang children back into the parental home. But, rather than considered it an anomaly, this countertransitional event has emerged as a significant alteration to the life course model, a post adolescent retrograde phase which represents a shift in cultural expectations. Positive social change can occur when families and social groups learn to accept the boomerang child as being representative of a new phase of life course transition.

Recommendations for Further Research

Findings from this study suggest several modes of future research. First, additional quantitative studies comprised of more participants over a larger area could be surveyed using online data collection methods to corroborate these findings to a greater scale. Surveys could be designed using the findings in this study where both mothers and boomerangers could answer Likert-type questionnaires which, when tabulated, produce statistical data from a larger sample than employed by this would present study. This would produce reliable statistical data which could be used to influence public policy, especially in areas of education and public assistance. It also could be used to direct professionals in the counseling services who have empty nest mothers and/or boomerangers as clients, to help them understand and better cope with this critical transitional phase of life course development.

Future studies can also be done to study the mother-boomerang child experience from the boomerang child's perspective. Qualitative phenomenological studies which

uncover boomerang children's' perceptions, thoughts and emotions about leaving home and trying to make it in the world, could yield much data about which patterns of thinking and activity worked and didn't worked. Understanding the difference between what a boomeranger thought was going to happen when they left home, and what really happened, could help develop educational strategies that could be used to prepare both the parents and the children to make better decisions, thereby resulting in more successful launches and less returns.

Joint qualitative studies could also be done using the mother / boomerang child dyad as study units. These studies could be conducted as in depth case studies of each unit, or multiple units where data could be compared and contrasted. Phenomenological studies could be done where the mother and child were interviewed separately and answers to the same questions compared. Or, the mother and boomerang child could be interviewed at the same time, and given the option to hear and respond to each other's answers to questions, thereby achieving a more composite understanding. A study such as the latter could also help the mother and child gain a fuller and deeper understanding of their relationship, and thus help promote action which would result in a more satisfying life experience for both of them. No qualitative phenomenological studies have been done which examine mother / boomerang child dyads from diverse ethnic backgrounds with respect to understanding the common shared experiences with the wide range of ramifications brought out by this study.

This countertransitional stage of young adult development amounts to a composite failure of the child, the family, the educational system and the society in which the child lives. However, this failure can be addressed by a composite interaction between the family and the schools, where a realistic appraisal of a young person's intelligence, talents and interests can be focused towards preparing the student for a self-sustaining career. Attaining financial self-sufficiency is one common denominator among all the ethnic groups studied which defines adulthood (Arnett, 2003). Being able to earn enough money to support oneself and one's family is generally a function of one's knowledge and skill obtained through education. It has been shown that young adults with a college degree are half as likely to boomerang back home than those without a degree (Parker, 2012). Figure 6 shows the benefits of education where more education a person has, the more likely they will be employed and the more money they will earn per month, thus enabling self-sufficiency.

However, many young people cannot afford college, or do not enroll in study areas which adequately provide them to find jobs when they graduate. People with degrees in engineering, for example, have a much easier time in today's job market finding secure and well-paying employment than do recent graduates with a liberal arts degree in teaching. Petroleum engineers, for example, can expect a starting salary of $102, 300, while those with a child development degree who work in daycare or as preschool teachers can only expect a $32,200 annual salary (Smith, 2015).

Figure 6. Weekly Earnings and Unemployment Rate per Educational Level (2014)

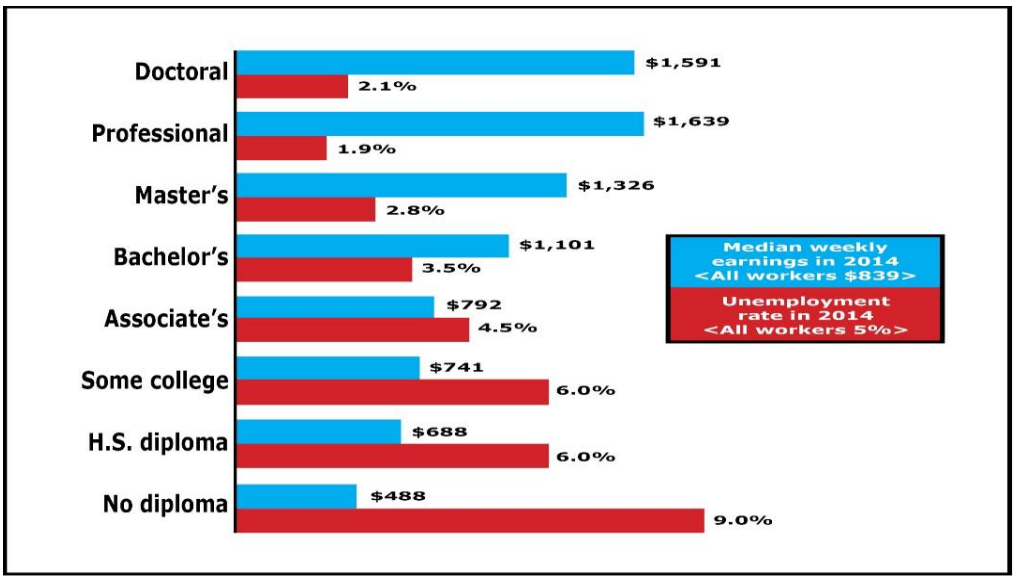


Figure 7. Adapted from "Earnings and unemployment rate by educational attainment." *Bureau of Labor Statistics.* Copyright 2014. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

If self-sufficiency is a desired goal families recognize, thought and preparation need to begin early in the child's educational experience to best groom them for success, and college may not always be the most viable option. In today's world, people who work in skilled trades such as a plumber, electrician or brick layer can earn salaries which exceed many white-collar positions (Vedder, Denhart, & Robe, 2013; Smith, 2014, Smith, 2015). Table 10 shows ten top earning occupations young people can secure without a college degree or with only training certificate, a high school diploma or equivalent, many of them in the skilled building trades.

Table 10. 10 Top-Paying Occupations That Do Not Require a College Degree 2015

Rank	Occupation	Annual Salary Range ($)
1	Elevator Installer	62,060 to 91,240
2	Brick Mason	35, 860 to 62,810
3	Construction Supervisor	46,970 to 76,700
4	Electrician	38,020 to 66,360
5	Plumber	37,530 to 67,150
6	Computer User Support Specialist	35,990 to 60,860
7	Carpenter	31,550 to 55,340
8	Massage Therapist	24,380 to 51,820
9	Health Information Technician	27,520 to 45,260
10	Dental Assistant	22,670 to 56,860

Adapated from "10 Best Jobs That Don't Require a College Degree" by S. Rapacon. Copyright 2015. Retrieved from: http://www.kiplinger.com/slideshow/business/T012-S001-10-best-jobs-you-can-get-without-a-college-degree/index.html

This study provides plausible evidence that the countertransitional boomerang kid phenomenon is disruptive to the normal life course development of both the mother and the child. This disruption can be alleviated by promoting self-sufficiency behaviors in young people from an early age. Parents can use this awareness to help their children prepare for self-sufficiency by helping them get more education, or learn a trade, which can lead to higher paying and more stable employment. School counselors can use this information to help create fiscal awareness and responsibility in students, while outside counselors can help empower family units to take a long range view of launching their children successfully into an ever-changing world. Future research can be designed to explore these topics, results leading to a reassessment of where policymakers place

emphasis on what really works in our educational system to foster self-sufficiency among our children.

Reflections on the Researcher's Experience

Having been the father in a home with an empty nest mother which subsequently received two boomerang children, one with a boomerang grandchild, I had anticipated this study would better equip me to understand the causes and ramifications of the phenomena under investigation. This it did. I learned from talking with the 23 women interviewed that our situation was not uncommon, nor were our responses in willingly admitting our children back into the home. In fact, every one of the themes identified in this study was, in retrospect, present in our life situation.

I found the first theme of this study, that a mother's identity is heavily rooted in that of being a caregiver to her children, permeated everything my wife did in relation to our children. When they were expected to arrive home, she redid the guest room and brought in towels and other welcoming supplies. When they arrived they were greeted warmly and made to feel comfortable. The refrigerator was stocked with food. My wife would take our daughters shopping for work cloths to help them secure employment. And, they would spend countless hours together talking about life and reestablishing their relationship both as mother/daughter, but also as friend and mentor. It gave my wife a second chance at parenting, aided by hindsight.

The second theme, that the empty nest phase caused the mothers to experience an emotional upheaval, was also present in our lives. I remember when our youngest

daughter left and we were all alone in a big quiet house without the noise and clamor. My wife got lonely and would call or text my daughters endlessly until my daughters would shut her off. My wife would worry incessantly about our daughters' welfare, and the slightest hint of impropriety would send into depression and worry. These feelings were exacerbated by the third theme, that mothers had a hard time letting go of their children, as she was so involved in our daughters' lives and detaching left a void, an emptiness she had a hard time filling. The participants in the study expressed these same thoughts and feeling relative to their own life experiences.

The themes propounded by my participant mothers when their boomerangers came home were also evident in our lives, particularly in my wife's life experience separate from their spouses' as I, like many of the spouses in the study, have work to keep me occupied and engaged. A noticeable daily impediment were the financial pressures imposed by the boomeranger as our bills increased for food, electricity, cellphones, gasoline, dining out and incidentals, though we felt the money was well spent as long as our daughters were engaged in productive activities which promoted self-reliance. Most of the mothers in the study felt the same way. The emotional distress indicated in the fourth theme from this study was also evident in our lives when our daughters would not clean up after themselves or engage in selfish inconsiderate behaviors as reported by my study participants across socioeconomic divisions. These improprieties would spark arguments and resentment until the child chose to change her behavior.

The reassessment of parenting skills, the fifth theme which emerged from this study, has become a constant companion for my wife and myself as we monitor our children's life progress. We constantly question what we did during the child raising years, how that affected our daughters and what we could have done differently to help prepare our children to become self-reliant and avoid some of the mistakes we all have had to deal with through the years. Parenting is a lifelong process with which we are still engaged, and will always be engaged, until we die. I cannot imagine a parent not feeling otherwise. The seeds of problems that were planted in our daughters' childhoods are still producing thorns they have to eradicate with or without our help.

I feel this study has helped me understand many aspects of the life course development of not only my children, but my life and my wife's life as well as the lives of other family members, friends, and people of all ethnicities, from all socioeconomic levels. The findings from this study, coupled with the experience of doing the study, have taught me a great deal about personal motivations, and why people do what they do respecting the exigencies of their lives. This knowledge extends to include my own life experience as both a parent and an individual, and has afforded me the opportunity to comb back through my life to my childhood and achieve new understandings of why I did what I did in my early life with ramifications ongoing in the present day. It also provided insights into my parents and their parenting strategies, what worked and didn't work toward promoting self-sufficient behaviors in myself and my siblings. And, even further back through many generations, affording me a perspective of life course

development which embodies the recent social, emotional and psychological evolution of modern society.

Conclusions

The intentions of this study were to explore the perceptions of the 23 participant mothers about their shared life experiences of living in the empty nest and with boomerang children. Six themes emerged from analysis of the narrative transcriptions which transcended ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants and extended the scope and range of previous research. The study accomplished all it was intended to do and produced many insights described in these last two chapters that should prove valuable to parents, researchers, educators, mental health professionals and social policy makers.

A main conclusion of this study is that the boomerang phenomenon represents a new and discernible phase in the life course development paradigm. The boomerang experience has become so prevalent in our society it can no longer be dismissed as a countertransitional phase, but should be considered as a trial phase of self-reliance, or an experimental phase by which young adults leave home to test themselves against the rigors of the world with the probable result of having to return home to regroup. Leaving the parental home and attaining self-sufficiency is such a major life event it can no longer be viewed as a singular composite experience, but rather a series of experiences which produce the intended result. Parents need to accept that young adults may not attain economic self-sufficiency on their first attempt, and must plan for their boomerangers to

return home once or maybe multiple times before they get it right. The boomerang phenomenon represents a major shift in cultural and societal expectations.

Positive social change can occur when families and social groups learn to accept the boomerang child as being representative of a new phase of life course transition. This emergent phase has been identified as the “last stage of adolescence” or “trial independence” Pickhart (2011), a test period of partial self-sufficiency where young adults leave home, grapple with the outside world, then return home to regroup and relaunch. It, therefore is incumbent upon both the parents, and social institutions which serve families, to recognize the boomerang phenomenon and incorporate remedial strategies into their educational and guidance plans.

References

Adelmann, P. K., Antonucci, T. C., Crohan, S. E., & Coleman, L. M. (1989). Empty nest, cohort, and employment in the well-being of midlife women. *Sex Roles, 20*(3/4), 173-189. doi:10.1007/BF00287990

Ainsworth, M. S. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist, 44*(4), 709-716. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.44.4.709

Anderson, S. A., Russell, C. S., & Schumm, W. R. (1983). Perceived marital quality and family life-cycle categories: A further analysis. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 45*(1), 127. doi:10.2307/351301

Apfel, N. H., & Seitz, V. (1991). Four models of adolescent mother-grandmother realtionships in black inner-city families. *Family Relations, 40*(4), 421-429.

Aquilino, W. S., & Supple, K. R. (1991). Parent-child relations and parent's satisfaction with living arrangements when adult children live at home. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 53*(1), 13-27. doi:10.2307/353130

Arnett, J. (2001). Conceptions of the transition to adulthood: perspectives from adolescence through midlife. *Journal of Adult Development, 8*(2), 133. doi:10.1023/A:1026450103225

Arnett, J. (2003). Conceptions of the transition to adulthood among emerging adults in American ethnic groups. *New Directions For Child & Adolescent Development 2003*(100), 63-76. doi:10.1002/cd.75

Arp, D. H., & Arp, C. S. (2001). *Empty Nesting: Reinventing your marriage when the*

kids leave home. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Arpanantikul, M. (2004). Midlife experiences of Thai women. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 47*(1), 49-56. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03064.x

Aune, K. S., Aune, R., & Buller, D. B. (1994). The experience, expression, and perceived appropriateness of emotions across levels of relationship development. *Journal of Social Psychology, 134*(2), 141-150. doi:10.1080/00224545.1994.9711377

Axelson, L. J. (1960). Personal adjustment in the postparental period. *Marriage & Family Living, 22*(1), 66-68. doi:10.2307/347406

Bachand, L. L., & Caron, S. L. (2001). Ties that bind: A qualitative study of happy long-term marriages. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal, 23*(1), 105-121. doi:10.1023/A:1007828317271

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52,* 1-26. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1

Baruch, G. K., & Barnett, R. C. (1986). Role quality, multiple role involvement, and psychological well-being in midlife women. *Journal of Personality And Social Psychology, 51*(3), 578-585. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.51.3.578

Bell, J. E., & Eisenberg, N. (1985). Life satisfaction in midlife childless and empty-nest men and women. *Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7*(3), 146-155. doi:10.1007/BF00986583

Benjamin, R. (2013). *Don't call me an "empty nester."* Retrieved from http://betterafter50.com/2013/10/dont-call-me-an-empty-nester/

Bernstein, R. (2013). *More Young Adults are Living in Their Parents' Home,* Census Bureau Reports. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/families_households/cb11-183.html

Borland, D. C. (1982). A cohort analysis approach to the empty-nest syndrome among three ethnic groups of women: A theoretical position. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 44*(1), 117-129. doi:10.2307/351267

Bowlby, J. (1982). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1, Attachment* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Boyd, M., & Pryor, E. T. (1989). The cluttered nest: The living arrangements of young Canadian adults. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 14*(4), 461. doi:10.2307/3340653

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(6), 723-742. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.22.6.723

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). Earnings and unemployment rate by educational attainment. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

Cady, K. A. (2009). Labor and Women's Liberation: Popular Readings of The Feminine Mystique. *Women's Studies In Communication, 32*(3), 348-379. doi:10.1080/07491409.2009.10162394

Campbell, E. R., Devries, H. M., Fikkert, L., Kraay, M., & Ruiz, J. N. (2007). *Trajectory*

of marital satisfaction through the empty-nest transition. American Psychological Association 2007 Convention Presentation. Doi:10.1037/e700732007-001

Canfield, J., Hansen, M. V., Rehme, C. M., & Evans, P. C. (2008). *Chicken soup for the soul: Empty nesters.* Cos Cob, CT: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, LLC.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications.

Cherlin, A. J., Scabini, E., & Rossi, G. (1997). Still in the nest: Delayed home leaving in Europe and the United States. *Journal of Family Issues, 18*(6), 572-575. doi:10.1177/019251397018006001

Chima, I. M., & Nnodum, B. (2008). Efficacy of reality therapy and cognitive coping behaviour training in handling adjustment problems of empty-nester retirees. *The Nigerian Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 13*(1), 190-200. Retrieved from http://www.ajol.info/index.php/njgc/article/view/36984

Christie, L. (2013, August 13). *Boomerang kids: Nothing wrong with living at home.* CNN Money (online). Retrieved from http://money.cnn.com/2013/08/13/real_estate/boomerang-kids/

CityTownInfo.com. (2014). Lexington, Kentucky. Retrieved from http://www.citytowninfo.com/places/kentucky/lexington

Clay, R. (2003). An empty nest can promote freedom, improved relationships. *Monitor On Psychology, 34*(4), 40-41. doi:10.1037/e300092003-025

Clemens, A. W., & Axelson, L. J. (1985). The not-so-empty-nest: The return of the

fledgling adult. *Family Relations, 34*(2), 259-264. doi:10.2307/583900

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and Meanings: Credibility and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research. Oncology Nursing Forum, 41(1), 89-91. doi:10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing Among Five Traditions. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crosnoe, R., & Elder, J. H. (2002). Life Course Transitions, the Generational Stake, and Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 64*(4), 1089-1096. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.01089.x

DaVanzo, J., & Goldscheider, F. (1990). Coming Home Again: Returns to the Parental Home of Young Adults. *Population Studies, 44*(2), 241-255. doi:10.1080/0032472031000144576

Davidson, S. (2010). *Keeping your sanity when your children and grandchildren move in with you.* Retrieved from http://www.examiner.com/article/keeping-your-sanity-when-your-children-and-grandchildren-move-with-you

Demo, D. H. (1992). Parent-child relations: Assessing recent changes. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 54*(1), 104-117. doi:10.2307/353279

Dennerstein, L., Dudley, E. E., & Guthrie, J. J. (2002). Empty nest or revolving door? A prospective study of women's quality of life in midlife during the phase of

children leaving and reentering the home. *Psychological Medicine, 32*(3), 545-550. doi:10.1017/S0033291701004810

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.). (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Deutscher, I. (1964). The quality of postparental life: Definitions of the situation. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 26*(1), 52-59. doi:10.2307/349376

Devries, H., Kerrick, S. & Oetlinger, M. (2008). Satisfaction and regrets of midlife parents: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Adult Development, 14*(1), 6-15. Doi:10.1007/s10804-007-9024-5

Deykin, E. Y., Jacobson, M. S., Soloman, M., & Klerman, G. (1966). The empty nest: Psychosocial aspects of conflict between depressed women and their grown children. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 122*(12), 1422-1426.

di Scalea, T., Matthews, K. A., Avis, N. E., Thurston, R. C., Brown, C., Harlow, S., & Bromberger, J. T. (2012). Role stress, role reward, and mental health in a multiethnic sample of midlife women: Results from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN). *Journal of Women's Health, 21*(5), 481-489. doi:10.1089/jwh.2011.3180

Disabled World. (2013). *Average Life Span Expectancy Chart - How Long Will I Live.* Retrieved from http://www.disabled-world.com/calculators-charts/life-expectancy-statistics.php

Dun, T. (2010). Turning points in parent-grandparent relationships during the start of a

new generation. *Journal of Family Communication, 10*(3), 194-210. doi:10.1080/15267431.2010.489218

Dworkin, S. L. (2012). Sample size policy for qualitative studies using in-depth interviews. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 41*(6), 1319-1320. doi:10.1007/s10508-012-0016-6

Ekman, P. (1964). Body position, facial expression, and verbal behavior during interviews. The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 68(3), 295-301. doi:10.1037/h0040225

Elder Jr., G. H (1995). The life course paradigm: Social change and individual development. In P. Moen, G. R. Elder, K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 101-139). American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/10176-003

Elder Jr., G. H. (1975). Age difference and the life course. *Annual Review of Sociology, 1*(1), 165-190. doi:10.1146/annurev.so.01.080175.001121

Elder Jr., G. H. (1994). Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 57*(1), 4-15. Retrieved from http://personal.psc.isr.umich.edu/yuxie-web/files/pubs/Articles/Elder1994.pdf

Elder Jr., G. H. (1998). The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development, 69*(1), 1-12. doi:10.2307/1132065

Elder Jr., G. H. (2000). Life course theory. In A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of psychology, Vol. 5* (pp. 50-52). American Psychological Association.

doi:10.1037/10520-020

Fingerman, K. L. (2001). A Distant Closeness: Intimacy Between Parents and Their Children in Later Life. *Generations, 25*(2), 26-33. Retrieved from http://generations.metapress.com/content/y173326828w3l4k4/

Fingerman, K. L., Cheng, Y., Wesselmann, E. D., Zarit, S., Furstenberg, F., & Birditt, K. S. (2012). Helicopter parents and landing pad kids: Intense parental support of grown children. Journal of Marriage and Family, 74(4), 880-896. DOI:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00987.x

Fingerman, K. L., Cheng, Y., Wesselmann, E. D., Zarit, S., Furstenberg, F., & Birditt, K. S. (2012). Helicopter Parents and Landing Pad Kids: Intense Parental Support of Grown Children. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 74*(4), 880-896. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00987.

Fingerman, K., Miller, L., Birditt, K., & Zarit, S. (2009). Giving to the good and the needy: Parental support of grown children. *Journal of Marriage And Family, 71*(5), 1220-1233. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00665.x

Flaubert, G. (1856). *Madam Bovary.* Retrieved from http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2413/2413-h/2413-h.htm

Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. *Collected papers*, (Vol. 4), 152-170. Retrieved from http://www.columbia.edu/itc/hs/medical/clerkships/psych/misc/articles/freud.pdf

Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.

Friedan, B. (2010). The problem that has no name. The Feminine Mystique 1963. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(9), 1582-1584.

Fry, R. (2010). Minorities and the recession era college enrollment boom. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/06/16/minorities-and-the-recession-era-college-enrollment-boom/

Furman, E. (2005). *Boomerang nation.* New York, NY: Fireside Books.

Furstenberg, F. R. (2010). On a new schedule: Transitions to adulthood and family change. *The Future of Children, 20*(1), 67-87. doi:10.1353/foc.0.0038

Gasson, S. (2004). Rigor in grounded theory research: An interpretative perspective on generating theory from qualitative field studies. In M. E. Whitman & A. B. Woszcynski (Eds.). The Handbook of Information Systems Research (p. 79-102). Hershey, PA: Idea Group. ISBN-13: 978-1591401445

Giele, J. Z., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (eds) (1998). *Methods in Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Glenn, N. D. (1975). Psychological well-being in the postparental stage: Some evidence from national surveys. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37,* 105-110. doi:10.2307/351034

Glick, P. C., & Lin, S. L. (1986). More Young Adults Are Living with Their Parents: Who Are They? *Journal of Marriage & Family*, *48*(1), 107. doi:10.2307/352233

Goldscheider, F. K. (1997). Recent changes in U.S. young adult living arrangements in comparative perspective. *Journal of Family Issues, 18*(6), 708-724.

doi:10.1177/019251397018006008

Goldscheider, F. K., & Goldscheider, C. (1989). Family structure and conflict: Nest-leaving expectations of young adults and their parents. *Journal of Marriage And The Family, 51*(1), 87-97. doi:10.2307/352371

Goldscheider, F. K., & Lawton, L. (1998). Family experiences and the erosion of support for intergenerational coresidence. *Journal of Marriage And The Family, 60*(3), 623-632. doi:10.2307/353533

Gorchoff, S. M., John, O. P., & Helson, R. (2008). Contextualizing change in marital satisfaction during middle age: An 18-year longitudinal study. *Psychological Science, 19*(11), 1194-1200. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02222.x

Gordon, R. A. (1999). Multigenerational coresidence and welfare policy. *Journal of Community Psychology, 27*(5), 525-549. CCC 0090-4392/99/050525-25

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with Data Saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82.

Hagestad, G. (1990). Social perspectives on the life course. In R. Binstock & L. George (Eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences,* 151-168. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Hagestad, G. O. (1988). Demographic Change and the Life Course: Some Emerging Trends in the Family Realm. *Family Relations, 37*(4), 405-410. doi:10.2307/584111

Harkins, E. B. (1978). Effects of empty nest transition on self-report of psychological and

physical well-being. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 40*(3), 549-556. doi:10.2307/350935

Hayes, R. L. (1994). The legacy of Lawrence Kohlberg: Implications for counseling and human development. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 72*(1), 261-267. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.1994.tb00932.x

Heidemann, B., Suhomlinova, O., & O'Rand, A. M. (1998). *Economic independence, economic status, and empty nest in midlife marital disruption. Journal of Marriage And The Family, 60*(1), 219-231. doi:10.2307/353453

Henig, R. M. (2010). What is it about 20-somethings? *The New York Times,* August 18, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Hill, J., Fonagy, P., Safier, E., & Sargent, J. (2003). The ecology of attachment in the family. *Family Process, 42*(2), 205-221. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2003.42202.x

Hock , E. Eberly , M. Bartle-Haring , S. Ellwanger , P. Widaman , K. F. (2001). Separation anxiety in parents of adolescents: Theoretical significance and scale development. *Child Development, 72,* 284-298. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00279

Holmes, T. H., Rahe, R. H. (1967). "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale". Journal Psychosomatic Research, 11(2), 213–8. doi:10.1016/0022-3999(67)90010-4.

Howell, L. (2001). Implications of personal values in women's midlife development. *Counseling And Values, 46*(1), 54-65. doi:10.1002/j.2161-007X.2001.tb00206.x

Howell, L., & Beth, A. (2002). Midlife myths and realities: Women reflect on their experiences. *Journal of Women & Aging, 14*(3-4), 189-204. doi:10.1300/J074v14n03_12

Huang, L. W. (2013). The Transition Tempo and Life Course Orientation of Young Adults in Taiwan. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646,* 69-85. doi:10.1177/0002716212464861

Ihde, D. (1977). *Experimental phenomenology.* New York, NY: G. P. Putnam.

Iman, M. T., & Aghamiri, S. F. (2011). A path analysis of the social and psychological factors influencing the psychological well-being of empty nest mothers in Sari City, Iran. *Sociation Today, 9*(2), 1-14.

Johnson, M., Crosnoe, R., & Elder, G. H. (2011). Insights on Adolescence From a Life Course Perspective. *Journal of Research On Adolescence (Wiley-Blackwell), 21*(1), 273-280. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00728.x

Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(11), 1632-1641. doi:10.1177/1049732309350879.

Kins, E. Soenens, B. Beyers , W. (2011). "Why do they have to grow up so fast?" Parental separation anxiety and emerging adults' pathology of separation-individuation. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 67,* 647-664. doi:10.1002/jclp.20786

Kins, E., & Beyers, W. (2010). Failure to Launch, Failure to Achieve Criteria for

Adulthood? *Journal of Adolescent Research, 25,* 743-777. doi:10.1177/0743558410371126

Knab, J. (2004). *Family structure and change of children born to unmarried parents: incorporating multigenerational households.* Conference Papers, American Sociological Association, 1-20. doi:asa_proceeding_34696.PDF

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1984). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Lincoln, YS. & Guba, EG. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Liu, L., & Guo, Q. (2007). Loneliness and health-related quality of life for the empty nest elderly in the rural area of a mountainous county in China. *Quality of Life Research: An International Journal of Quality of Life Aspects of Treatment, Care And Rehabilitation, 16*(8), 1275-1280. doi:10.1007/s11136-007-9250-0

Livingston, G. (2013). *At grandmother's house we stay.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/09/04/at-grandmothers-house-we-stay/

Livingston, G. (2015). Today's multiracial babies reflect America's changing demographics. Pew Research Center. Retrived from: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/24/todays-multiracial-babies-reflect-americas-changing-demographics/

Loneliness. (n. d.) In Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. Retrieved from

http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Loneliness

Lourenco, O. (2012). Piaget and Vygotsky: Many resemblances, and a crucial difference. *New Ideas in Psychology, 30*(2012), 281-295. doi:10.1016/j.newideapsych.2011.12.006

Lowenthal, M., & Chiriboga, D. (1972). Transition to the empty nest. Crisis, challenge, or relief? *Archives of General Psychiatry, 26*(1), 8-14. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.1972.01750190010003

Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Methods, ethics, and performance.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3), 1-19.

Mays, N. & Pope, C. (2000). "Qualtative research in health care: Assessing quality in qualitative research." BMJ. 320(7226), 50-52.

Mehrabian, A. (1980). Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 192 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0534009106

Mendonça, M., & Fontaine, A. M. (2013). Late Nest Leaving in Portugal: Its Effects on Individuation and Parent–Child Relationships. *Emerging Adulthood, 1*(3), 233-244. doi:10.1177/2167696813481773

Mitchell, B. A. (1998). Too close for comfort? Parental assessments of 'boomerang kid' living arrangements. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 23*(1), 21-46. doi:10.2307/3341660

Mitchell, B. A. (2006). Changing courses: The pendulum of family transitions in comparative perspective. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 37*(3), 325-343.

Mitchell, B. A. (2008). *The Boomerang Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Mitchell, B. A., & Lovegreen, L. D. (2009). The empty nest syndrome in midlife families: A multimethod exploration of parental gender differences and cultural dynamics. *Journal of Family Issues, 30,* 1651-1670. doi:10.1177/0192513X09339020

Mitchell, B. A., & Gee, E. M. (1996). 'Boomerang kids' and midlife parental marital satisfaction. *Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies, 45*(4), 442-448. doi:10.2307/585174

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52(2), 250-260. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Neugarten, B. L. (1978). Time, age and the life cycle. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 136*(7), 887-894.

New York Life. (2013). *Adult Children Moving Back Home: Don't Let "Boomerang Kids" Derail Your Goals.* Retrieved from http://www.newyorklife.com/nyl/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=d0bd47bb939d2210a2b3

019d221024301cacRCRD

Oberlander, S. E., Black, M. M., & Starr, R. H., Jr. (2007). African American adolescent mothers and gerandmothers: A multigenerational approach to parenting. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 39*, 37-46. doi:10.1007/s10464-007-9087-2

Park, Chongwon, & Lee, Hye-Won. (2010). What makes a case study really

Parker, K. (2012). *The boomerang generation.* Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends:files/2012/03/PewSocialTrends-2012-BoomerangGeneration.pdf

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Patton, MQ. (1999). "Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis." HSR: Health Services Research. 34 (5) Part II. pp. 1189-1208.

Patton, MQ. (2001). Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pew Research Center (2014). The rising cost of not going to college. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/

Phillips, (1957). A role theory approach to adjustment in old age. *American Sociological Review*, 212-216. doi:10.2307/2088860

Pickhardt, C. (2011). *Boomerang kids*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.

qualitative?: Show me your evidence, please! English Teaching, 65(4), 79-101.

Rapacon, S. (2014). 10 best jobs you can get without a college degree. Kiplinger. Retrieved from: http://www.kiplinger.com/slideshow/business/T012-S001-10-best-jobs-you-can-get-without-a-college-degree/index.html

Robinson, H. (2010). *Dealing With Boomerang Kids.* Retrieved from http://www.aarp.org/relationships/parenting/info-10-2010/adult_children_move_back_home_tips.html

Rosenberg-Javors, I. (2006). Coming Home Again. *Annals of The American Psychotherapy Association, 9*(3), 39. Retrieved from http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/22536670/coming-home-again

Rubenstein, C. (2007). *Beyond the mommy years: How to live happily ever after… after the kids leave home.* New York, NY: Springboard Press.

Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2007). *Surviving your dissertation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ryff, C. D., Lee, Y., Essex, M. J., & Schmutte, P. S. (1994). My children and me: Midlife evaluations of grown children and of self. *Psychology And Aging, 9*(2), 195-205. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.9.2.195

Ryff, C., & Seltzer, M. (1996). *The parental experience in midlife.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Sachs, B. E. (2010). *Emptying the nest: Launching your young adult toward success and self-reliance.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sage, R., & Johnson, M. (2012). Extending and Expanding Parenthood: Parental Support to Young Adult Children. *Sociology Compass, 6*(3), 256-270. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2011.00446.x

Saldana, J. (2008). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Retrieved from http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/24614_01_Saldana_Ch_01.pdf

Sarkisian, N., & Gerstel, N. (2004). Kin Support among Blacks and Whites: Race and Family Organization. *American Sociological Review, 69*(6), 812-837.

Sassler, S., Ciambrone, D., & Benway, G. (2008). Are They Really Mama's Boys/Daddy's Girls? The Negotiation of Adulthood upon Returning to the Parental Home. *Sociological Forum, 23*(4), 670-698. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00090.x

Schindler, A., Thomasius, R., Sack, P., Gemeinhardt, B., & Küstner, U. (2007). Insecure family bases and adolescent drug abuse: a new approach to family patterns of attachment. *Attachment & Human Development, 9*(2), 111-126. doi:10.1080/14616730701349689

Schnaiberg, A., & Goldenburg, S. (1989). From Empty Nest to Crowded Nest: The Dynamics of Incompletely-Launched Young Adults. *Social Problems, 36*(3), 251-269. doi:10.1525/sp.1989.36.3.03a00040

Schwarz, B., Trommsdorff, G., Albert, I., & Mayer, B. (2005). Adult Parent-Child Relationships: Relationship Quality, Support, and Reciprocity. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 54*(3), 396-417. doi:10.1111/j.1464-

0597.2005.00217.x

Seagull, E. A. (2013). Coping with Adult Children Returning Home: A Value-Driven Framework. *Michigan Family Review, 4*(1). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4919087.0004.104

Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2006). Leaving home or still in the nest? Parent-child relationships and psychological health as predictors of different leaving home patterns. *Developmental Psychology, 42*(5), 864-876. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.864

Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2010). Predicting the timing of leaving home and related developmental tasks: Parents' and children's perspectives. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 27,* 495-518. doi:10.1177/0265407510363426

Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2013). "She's Leaving Home …" Antecedents, Consequences, and Cultural Patterns in the Leaving Home Process. *Emerging Adulthood, 1*(2), 114-124. doi:10.1177/2167696813479783

Seiffge-Krenke, I., Persike, M., Chau, C., Hendry, L. B., Kloepp, M., Terzini-Hollar, M., Tam, V., Naranjo, C. R., Herrera, D., Menna, P., Rohail, I., Veisson, M., Hoareau, E., Luwe, M., Loncaric, D., Han, H., & Regusch, L. (2012). Differences in agency? How adolescents from 18 countries perceive and cope with their futures. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 36*, 258-270. doi:10.1177/0165025412444643

Settersten, R. R., & Ray, B. (2010). What's going on with young people today? The long and twisting path to adulthood. *The Future of Children, 20*(1), 19-41.

doi:10.1353/foc.0.0044

Shakespeare, W. (1642). King Lear, Act I, Scene 4.

Shaputis, K. (2004). *The Crowded Nest Syndrome: Surviving the Return of Adult Children*. Centralia, WA: Clutter Fairy Publishing.

Shehan, C., & Dwyer, J. (1984). The empty nest is filling again: Implications for parental child relations. *Parenting Studies, 1,* 67-73.

Silverstein, M., & Xuan, C. (1999). The Impact of Acculturation in Mexican American Families on the Quality of Adult Grandchild-Grandparent Relationships. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 61*(1), 188-198.

Slater, Charles L. (2003). "Generativity versus stagnation: An elaboration of Erikson's adult stage of human development." *Journal of Adult Development, 10*(1), 53-65. doi:10.1023/A:1020790820868

Smith, J. (2014). 13 college majors in which the pay goes nowhere. Business Insider. Retrieved from: http://www.businessinsider.com/college-majors-wherethe-pay-goes-nowhere2014-11?op=1

Smith, J. (2015). The 15 college majors with the highest starting salaries. Business Insider. Retrieved from http://www.businessinsider.com/college-majors-with-highest-starting-salaries-2015-1?op=1

Stabiner, K. (2007). *The empty nest.* New York, NY: Hyperion.

Stein, C. H., Abraham, K. M., Bonar, E. E., Leith, J. E., Kraus, S. W., Hamill, A. C., & Fogo, W. R. (2011). Family ties in tough times: How young adults and their

parents view the U.S. economic crisis. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*(3), 449-454. doi:10.1037/a0023697

Sutin, A. R., Costa, P. r., Wethington, E., & Eaton, W. (2010). Turning points and lessons learned: Stressful life events and personality trait development across middle adulthood. *Psychology And Aging, 25*(3), 524-533. doi:10.1037/a0018751

Swartz, T., Kim, M., Uno, M., Mortimer, J., & O'Brien, K. (2011). Safety Nets and Scaffolds: Parental Support in the Transition to Adulthood. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 73*(2), 414-429. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00815.x

Tallmer, M. (1986). Empty-nest syndrome: Possibility or despair. In T. Bernay, D. W. Cantor (Eds.), *The psychology of today's woman: New psychoanalytic visions* (pp. 231-252). Cambridge, MA US: Harvard University Press.

Thorn, E. K. (2012). *Mothers' transitions to the empty nest phase.* University of Maryland, College Park. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 140. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1314825257?accountid=14872. (1314825257).

Thornton, A., Young-DeMarco, L., & Goldscheider, R. (1993). Leaving the Parental Nest: The Experience of a Young White Cohort in the 1980s. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 55*(1), 216-229. doi:10.2307/352970

Turbotax. (2014). *Tax Exemptions and Deductions for Families.* Retrieved from https://turbotax.intuit.com/tax-tools/tax-tips/Family/Tax-Exemptions-and-Deductions-for-Families/INF12053.html

U. S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States. (2012). *Table 9. Resident Population Projections by Sex and Age: 2010 to 2050.* Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0009.pdf

U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. (2013). *Historical Statistics of the United States. Life Expectancy by Age, 1850–2004.* Retrieved from http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0005140.html

Umberson, D., Pudrovska, T., & Reczek, C. (2010). Parenthood, Childlessness, and Well-Being: A Life Course Perspective. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, *72*(3), 612-629. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00721.x

US Census Bureau. (2011). *More Young Adults are Living in Their Parents' Home, Census Bureau Reports.* U.S. Census Newsroom, November 3. [Online]. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/families_households/cb11-183.html

Vedder, R., Denhart, C., & Robe, J. (2013). Why are recent college graduates underemployed? The Center for College Affordability and Productivity. Retrieved from http://centerforcollegeaffordability.org/research/studies/underemployment-of-college-graduates/

Vespa, J., & Lewis, J. M. (2013). *America's families and living arrangements: 2012.* Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-570.pdf

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Descritpion, analysis, and*

interpretation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yeung, W.J., & Alipio, C. (2013). Transitioning to adulthood in Asia: School, work and family life. *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 646*, 6-26. doi:10.1177/0002716212470794

Appendix A: Participant Qualifying Questions

1. Are you married and still living with your spouse?
2. Do you have children, either with your spouse or by another man?
3. Has your youngest child lived away from home for more than six months trying to make it on their own (exclusive of time away during college years)?
4. Has one of your children who has lived away from home for more than six months, returned home to live under your roof?
5. If so, has this child been living with you for at least six months?
6. Would you be willing to learn more about participating in a research study?

Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of Perceptions of empty nest mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds with boomerang children. The researcher is inviting mothers whose last child has left home for more than 6 months, then has a had a child return home to live for at least six months to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.
This study is being conducted by a researcher named Banning K. Lary who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand the life experiences of empty nest women with boomerang children. The study is interested in how mothers perceived their life situation before the last child left home, their anticipations, concerns and promises. Inherent within these perceptions are fulfillment of personal plans and goals and how these perceptions changed. The study is interested in the character and structure of this renewed family dynamic and what kinds of psychological, emotional, financial and logistics issues emerge and how they are dealt with.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to: 1) Participate in one in-depth personal interview lasting about 40-60 minutes; 2) Record thoughts after the interview in a journal and mail them to researcher (20-30 minutes); and 3) answer any subsequent questions the researcher may ask at one time following the interview over the telephone (5-10 minutes).

Here are some sample questions:
1) What was your experience when your last child left home?
2) What kinds of plans did you make for yourself?
3) What were your thoughts and feelings about your child moving back home?
4) What has the experience been like since your child has moved back home?
5) What kinds of challenges has this presented and how do you deal with them?
6) How have you and your child had to renegotiate your relationship?
7) How does your child contribute to the practical household dynamics?
8) What does your husband think about your child living back home?
9) What kinds of personal adjustments have you had to make?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress or becoming upset. Being in this study should not pose any risk to your safety or wellbeing. Should you at any time during the course of this study become distressed or depressed and feel you would like to talk to a counselor, please call the toll free helpline 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Benefits of Participating in this Study:
Participation in this study may help you clarify your own thoughts about the phenomenon being studied; allow you to share your experience with others in the same life stage; afford you the opportunity to learn how others involved in this phenomenon handle common issues and challenges that arise; and, in afford a feeling of satisfaction derived from participating in original scientific research that could help others.

Remuneration:
In exchange for your participation you will receive a 1-2 page written summary of the findings of this study. You will also receive a $50 gift card to Best Buy, Target or Olive Garden (your choice). And, you will receive the appreciation of the researchers and others who may benefit from what you choose to reveal about the scope and nature of your experience.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by coding all of your responses using a color code word rather than your name. Your name will only be known is secure locked files kept within the researcher's office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, and then destroyed. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep. Please keep this consent form for your records.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone (859) 309-9015, or email: banningkl@gmail.com. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB _____and it expires on _____.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. My signature below indicates I am agreeing to the terms described above. (If agreeing via the internet, please type your name and send via your email address.)

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Date of consent: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Demographic Questions:

I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me today to discuss a topic of which we both have an interest – your perceptions of your experience as a so-called 'empty nest' mother, living with your so-called 'boomerang' child. Is that correct? It is agreeable to you to engage in this conversation? [Yes or No].

Great. Thank you. Now, before we begin in earnest, you are known for purposes of this study by the code name of Ms. _____. Is that correct? [Yes or No]

Wonderful. As you know, the code name has been devised to protect your anonymity and confidentiality of your information used in this study as per the informed consent we went over earlier. Is that correct? [Yes or No].

Beautiful. Now, the following questions have no right or wrong answers. They are simply necessary for purposes of organizing and interpreting the data to be collected. Please tell me your age and ethnic / cultural / religious heritage? White? African-American? Hispanic? Asian? Other?

Thank you. How long have you been married to your current husband? Is your current husband the father to your boomerang child? How long was your child out of the home before he or she returned? How long has your child been living with you this time? If your child has left and returned more than once, please provide that information.

Thank you. Now, what is your current state of employment: (a) housewife, not employed; (b) employed part time? Where? In what capacity? Just one more, please select one of the following categories which represents your total household annual income:

(1) $0 - $25,000
(2) $25,000 - $50,000
(3) $50,000 - $75,000
(4) $75,000 - $100,000
(5) Over $100,000.

Great. Again, that information is kept confidential and will only be associated with your code name of Ms. _____. Okay we are ready to begin.

Interview Questions:

From now on all the questions will be open-ended and you can say whatever you like.

[RQ_1: How do the participants describe the experience of living in the empty nest?

1) Please describe your experience of living in the empty nest phase?
a. Describe your typical daily life routine with activities?
b. Describe your marital relationship?
c. Describe what plans, goals, projects and ideas you held at that time?
d. Describe your sense of personal identity during that period?
e. What was your experience when your last child left home?
f. What kinds of plans did you make for yourself?

[RQ_2: How do the participants describe the experience of living with a boomerang child?]

2) Please describe your experience of living with your boomerang child?
a. What were your expectations about coresidency?
b. How did you cope with this boomerang child countertransition?
c. How did you renegotiate coresidency exigencies?
d. How do you describe the influence of boomerang kids on your need fulfillment?
e. What were your thoughts and feelings about your child moving back home?
f. What has the experience been like since your child has moved back home?
g. What kinds of challenges has this presented and how do you deal with them?
h. How have you and your child had to renegotiate your relationship?
i. How does your child contribute to the practical household dynamics?
j. What does your husband think about your child living back home?
k. What kinds of personal adjustments have you had to make?
l. How do you describe the experience of living with a boomerang grandchild? (Where applicable.)

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Notice

Life Experience Study for Mothers with Boomerang Children

Be part of an important life course experience study:

- Are you a mother whose last adult child left home more than six months ago?
- Are you a mother whose adult child has returned to live at home?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to collect perceptions of mothers who live with adult children. Benefits include sharing life experience with other mothers who are and will enter this life phase. Participants will receive a $50 gift card and a written summary of the study (upon request).

Mothers of all ethnicities who meet the above the criteria are eligible.

This study is being conducted in Lexington, Kentucky, in person, and in other areas of the United States via email and telephone.

Please call Banning Lary at (859) 309-9015 for more information. Or, you may contact him via email: banningkl@gmail.com.

Appendix E: IRB Consent Approval

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone (859) 309-9015, or email: banningkl@gmail.com. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB **10-02-14-0222359** and it expires on **October 1, 2015**.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. My signature below indicates I am agreeing to the terms described above. (If agreeing via the internet, please type your name and send via your email address.)

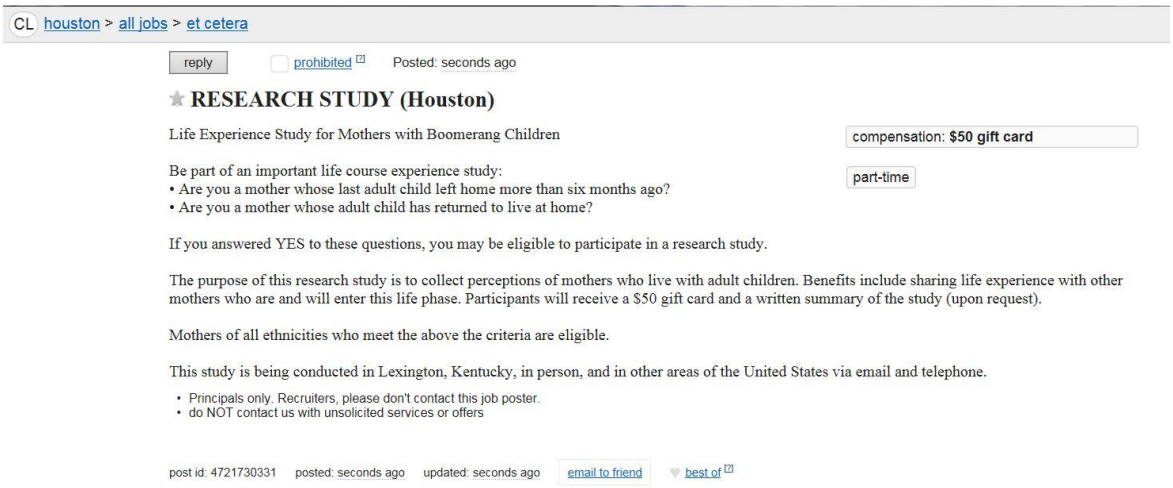
Printed Name of Participant: _____

Date of consent: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix F: Participant Recruitment Advertisement



CL houston > all jobs > et cetera

reply prohibited Posted: seconds ago

RESEARCH STUDY (Houston)

Life Experience Study for Mothers with Boomerang Children

compensation: **$50 gift card**

part-time

Be part of an important life course experience study:
• Are you a mother whose last adult child left home more than six months ago?
• Are you a mother whose adult child has returned to live at home?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to collect perceptions of mothers who live with adult children. Benefits include sharing life experience with other mothers who are and will enter this life phase. Participants will receive a $50 gift card and a written summary of the study (upon request).

Mothers of all ethnicities who meet the above the criteria are eligible.

This study is being conducted in Lexington, Kentucky, in person, and in other areas of the United States via email and telephone.

- Principals only. Recruiters, please don't contact this job poster.
- do NOT contact us with unsolicited services or offers

post id: 4721730331 posted: seconds ago updated: seconds ago email to friend best of

Appendix G: Request for Change in Procedures Form

Request for Change in Procedures Form
Banning K. Lary

Please email this change request form to irb@waldenu.edu.

1. Clearly describe the requested change and indicate what prompted the request (i.e. sponsor-requested changes, researcher's assessment of need, etc.) as well as whether the change necessitates revision of the consent documents.
I am requesting help with the transcriptions of my interviews as the interviews are lengthy and I plan to interviews more participants that I originally thought were necessary. My transcriber will only know the identity of the participants via their code name (i.e. color, Ms. Magenta, Ms. Purple, etc.). Changes have been made to the attached revised IRB application (111714) form under items #21 and #52.

2. Please send irb@waldenu.edu a copy of all documents revised or added as a result of the proposed change (i.e. consent/assent forms, recruitment letters or ads, revised protocols, questionnaires, etc.) with changes clearly highlighted. If the change involves a request for additional subjects, indicate the number of additional subjects for which approval is requested. **Signed confidentially agreement for my transcriber, Shirley Linder, is attached.**

3. If your request involves a change in research staff, please provide contact information for all new personnel, as well as any relevant degrees and qualifications. **My transcriber, Shirley Linder, has a master's degree and is a published book author. She lives in Midland, Texas, and I have worked with her for years. Her contact info is: Shirley, Linder, 2516 Emerson Drive, Midland, Texas 79705, 432-697-1183, mythicalwest@aol.com. She understands and agree with the importance of maintaining confidentiality in psychological research.**

Your request to change study procedures/staff will be reviewed by the same method in which the study was first reviewed, either by the full-committee or through the expedited review process, unless the change is minor and can be managed through expedited review. The IRB staff will route changes for review through the most rapid means possible and will provide an update as to the status of this request when confirming receipt of the form.

Appendix H: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Name of Signer: Shirley Linder

During the course of my activity in transcribing interviews for this research: "Perceptions of 'Empty Nest' Mothers from Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds with "Boomerang Kids": A Qualitative Phenomenological Study", I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

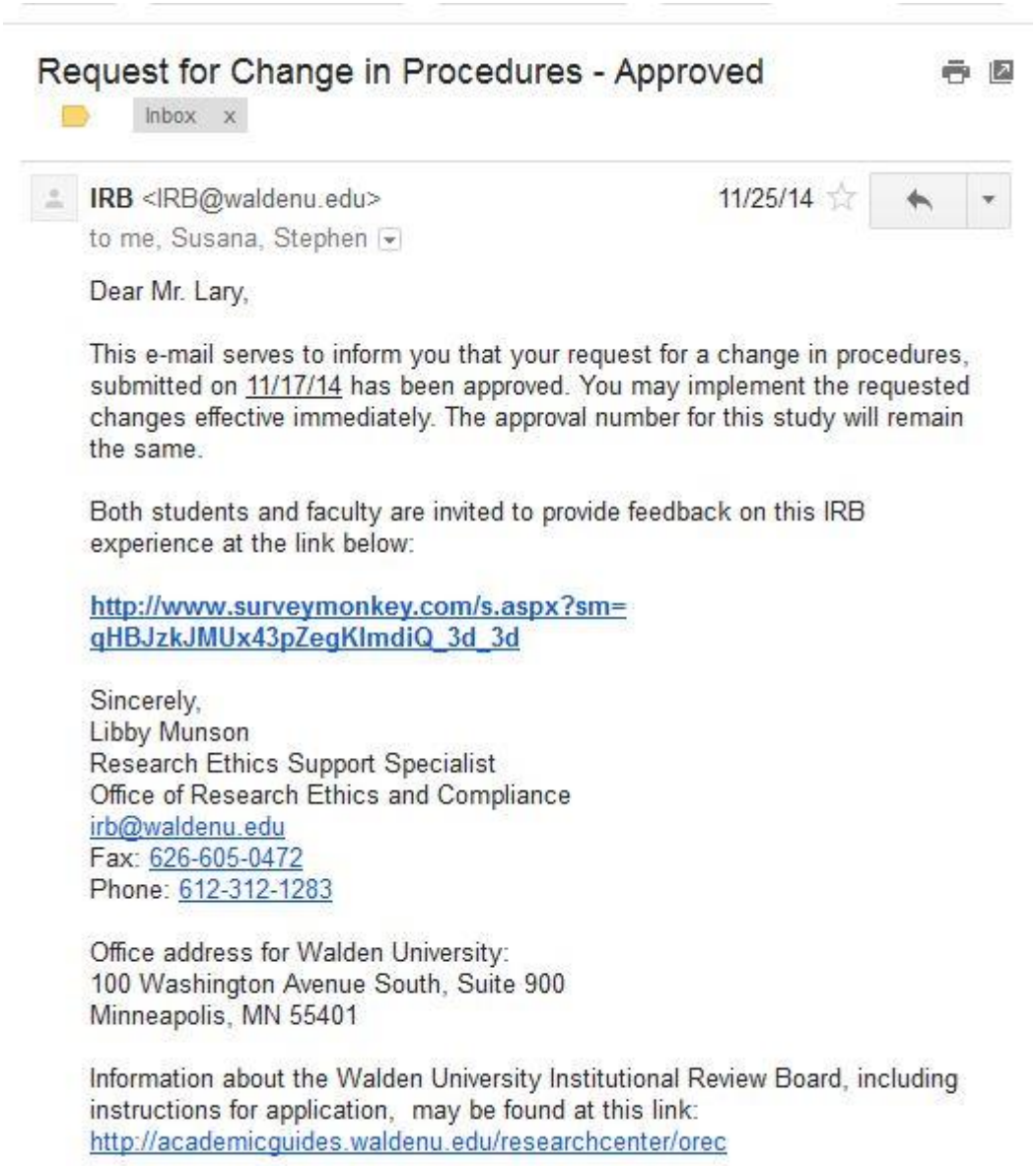
1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Shirley Ann Linder 13 NOV 2014

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix I: IRB Procedures Change Approval



Request for Change in Procedures - Approved

Inbox x

IRB <IRB@waldenu.edu> 11/25/14

to me, Susana, Stephen

Dear Mr. Lary,

This e-mail serves to inform you that your request for a change in procedures, submitted on 11/17/14 has been approved. You may implement the requested changes effective immediately. The approval number for this study will remain the same.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Sincerely,
Libby Munson
Research Ethics Support Specialist
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
irb@waldenu.edu
Fax: 626-605-0472
Phone: 612-312-1283

Office address for Walden University:
100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:
http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec

Appendix J: Sample replies from participant emails

Example #1:

12/3/14

"I came across an ad on Craigslist.com looking for participants for a survey that concerns mothers whose adult sons have left and returned to live at home. My son is 31-years-old, left home about 2 years ago and is now back living at home. I'd like to participate in your survey."

Example #2:

11/30/14

"My name is [Respondent] and I have TWO adult children that have returned home to live with me and my husband! I actually really enjoy having them at home most of the time. My son is 25 and came to live at home again about 18 months ago; my daughter is 31 and she has been living at home for the past 6 years. I am Caucasian. Let me know if you would like my input!"

Example #3:

10/21/14

"I saw your ad about the research study for boomerang children. My daughter moved out three years ago at 18 to attend college and came back early this year after she graduated. It has been quite a transition from full time mom to just being alone and restarting my life to coexisting with an adult child. The same rules don't apply anymore as she is an adult and it is very hard sometimes to just let her live her life and not be overbearing. I live in San Antonio, Texas and my name is [Respondent]."

Upon receipt of a respondent's email, I would send a return email which would further explain the study and qualify the respondent. It read like this:

"Dear Ms. [Respondent's name],

Thank you for responding. Our study involves the perceptions of "empty nest" mothers with "boomerang" children. A mother enters what they call the "empty nest phase" when their last child leaves home to make it on their own in the world. This is a period of life course development common to most mothers who have a wide range of experiences, thoughts and feelings. This is what we are interested in studying.

Then, when your child returns home to live either due to financial difficulties, loss of employment or relationship break-up, the mother's life course is

changed. We are interested in learning how mothers cope with this new experience.

Thus, to qualify for the study, your last child must have left home for six months or more. Next, one of your children must have returned home to live for six months or more after your last child left. Marital status does not matter as we are looking for mothers who are single, divorced, widowed or never married. If you meet the above criteria, please write back so we can schedule a 20-minute telephone conversation. In exchange for your time we will send you a $50 Target gift card immediately following the interview.

Thanks again for your interest. Hope to hear from you soon."