Institute for Clinical Social Work

HIDDEN SUBJECTIVITIES: A CASE-STUDY ANALYSIS OF ADULTS IN MIDLIFE LIVING WITH THEIR PARENTS

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Institute for Clinical Social Work in Partial Fulfillment
of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Abstract

Using a case-study methodology, this research sought to explore and understand, through extensive psychoanalytically-informed interviewing and related case study analysis, the lived experiences of four study participants who are in midlife and who have lived most of their adult lives with their parents. Data analysis occurred in two phases. First, the researcher performed within-case analysis involving the development of four case studies and corresponding categories of meaning. Second, the researcher performed a cross-case analysis involving the search for shared themes across cases.

These shared themes included (a) lacking mutual recognition in their relationships with parents, (b) arrested agency, and (c) feeling caught between wanting to leave and guilt. Participants described communication with their parents in such manner to convey (a) role reversals, (b) limitations to their socialization, and (c) limitations of roles and experiences generally associated with adulthood. The fourth participant described an evolution of communication with his mother, suggesting mutual recognition and changing forms of agency.

Relying on the organic unfolding of hermeneutic exploration during the course of each interview, the psychoanalytic case study analysis provided a means of exploring in depth the lived experiences of adults in midlife who have lived most of their adult lives with their parents which, in turn, broadened the researcher's understanding of each study participant's life beyond the paradigm of separation-individuation.

In memory of my nephew, Samuel G. Laties

we are so both and oneful

night cannot be so sky

sky cannot be so sunful

i am through you so i”

~ee cummings, “#49”

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Chapter I

Introduction

General Statement of Purpose

This study addresses a basic question: What are the lived experiences of adults in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with one or both parents? For the purposes of this study, midlife occurs between the ages of 40 and 60 (Nemiroff & Colarusso, 1990).

The researcher intensively interviewed four study participants, utilizing a psychoanalytic case-study method (Tolleson, 1996). This method involved a qualitative analysis of subjective meaning. Using interview data, the researcher developed individual case studies, which served as the basis for a cross-case analysis of shared themes. The researcher intended to lay initial groundwork for developing a psychoanalytically informed understanding of the phenomenon explored for this study, and to contribute to the literature concerning adult development. The researcher also intended to address the lack of relevant information in the psychoanalytic literature on this unique experience of a small population of adults.

Significance of the Study for Clinical Social Work

Existing literature relevant to clinical social work does not articulate the psychodynamic implications for adults in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with their

parents. The researcher looked for relevant literature in the fields of sociology, clinical social work, and psychology. These efforts found literature that was either not directly or only peripherally related to the topic. This study presents a psychoanalytically informed hermeneutic approach to an understudied phenomenon, one that is relevant to many lives and therefore to the field of clinical social work. The researcher hopes this study opens new possibilities for additional research.

Statement of the Problem and Specific Objectives to be Achieved

Psychoanalytic theory expands the use of self and emphasizes the importance of working with disenfranchised people in the practice of clinical social work. The researcher conducted this study to explore the understudied subject of adults in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with their parents. The researcher's psychotherapy practice includes decades of work with several individuals who meet this description. This work was generally characterized by clients expressing shame because of their perceived socially disengagement and lack of experiences normally associated with normative adult milestones. When looking for psychodynamic literature that directly addresses these dynamics—both while treating individuals professionally and in preparation for this study—the researcher did not find satisfactory results.

The researcher conducted this study with the awareness that participants' lived experiences might support or contradict the researcher's assumptions about adult development and missing out. To address the lack of directly related psychodynamic literature pertaining to the study topic, the researcher used a methodology that would facilitate an original approach to studying adult

development—namely, the psychodynamic case-study method. This method allowed the researcher to focus narrowly with respect to the following: (a) development of the criteria for study participation, (b) exploring themes in depth with participants during each interview, and (c) developing categories of meaning. In-depth exploration facilitated the discovery of lived experiences in all their complexity, which would have been missed without the use of the psychoanalytic case-study method. Ultimately, this approach facilitated an experience-near understanding of the research results.

A hermeneutic approach accomplished the objectives of learning about the participant's lived experiences and of developing a body of knowledge that could contribute to a hypothesis for further study. The researcher probed for symbolic meaning while simultaneously following the natural unfolding of information shared by participants during each interview and throughout the entire interview process. This flexibility partially owed to the researcher's knowledge of psychoanalytic technique, including (a) focusing on affect, (b) identifying patterns, and (c) exploring latent content (Shedler, 2009). By emphasizing the exploration of latent content, the researcher developed categories of meaning as described in the psychoanalytic case-study method. This allowed each interview (and subsequent analyses) to develop organically and in unanticipated ways, resulting in rich and informative results.

This methodology allowed the researcher to broadly consider two questions. First, when a person arrives at midlife without having had "typical" adult experiences, how does this shape

one's retrospective self-reflection and sense of self? Additionally, how might study participants understand their experiences in this regard?

The psychoanalytic case-study method provided the means of gathering unique narratives from each participant via psychoanalytically-informed listening and query. This approach yielded a wide variety of responses that might help open the topic for further study. Such study would help address a gap in the psychodynamic literature, particularly regarding adult development.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experiences of adults in midlife who have lived at least half their adult lives with one or both parents. The process of inquiry through each interview was unstructured. However, the following questions generally guided the development of the study as well as the overall focus of each interview process.

1. How do the subjects of this study experience living with their parents for most or all of their adult lives?
2. How do middle-aged subjects reflect upon adult experiences lived thus far?
3. How does one's sense of self shape the ways in which meaning is made of lived experience?
4. How does lived experience shape subjectivity?
5. In what ways are the vicissitudes of these individuals' lives influenced by living with their parents?

Theoretical and Operational Definitions of Major Concepts

Midlife.

Midlife is defined as the period in adult life between the ages of 40 and 60 (Nemiroff & Colarusso,1990).

Living at home.

This phrase is used throughout this study as a reference to the current choice and action of study participants to live with their respective parents permanently, daily, without intermittent stays elsewhere, for at least half of each participant's adult life.

Statement of Assumptions

Assumption one.

There is a cohort of individuals in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with one or both parents.

To support this assumption, the researcher looked at the most recent U.S. Census data (2010), as well as Pew Research Center reports on social and demographic trends (2010). This research confirmed the existence of multigenerational households, with either the older or younger generation relying on the other for financial support. Attempts to identify these individuals as a

clinical population or group only returned a small pool of indirectly related information. This information was limited to sociologically-informed topics, including the following works:

1. "Growing Parental Economic Power in Parent-Adult Child Household: Coresidence and Financial Dependency in the United States, 1960-2010" (*Demography*, August 2013)
2. "The Other Side of Caring: Adult Children with Mental Illness as Supports to Their Mothers in Later Life" (Greenberg, 1995)
3. "Will the Children Ever Leave? Parent-child Co-residence History and Plans" (Ward & Spitz, 1992)
4. "Consequences of Parent-Adult Child Co-residence: A Review and Research Agenda" (Ward, Logan, & Spitze, 1996).

These resources provide a broad context for developing various sociologically informed pictures of parent-adult child co-residence. However, no psychoanalytically informed writing was found concerning the subjective experiences of adults in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with one or both parents. Yet this dissertation is based on experiences with many adults in psychotherapy who constitute this cohort.

Assumption two.

Midlife is commonly experienced as a transition time between early and later adulthood constituted by life review, reflection, evaluation, and revisioning of self (Nemiroff & Colarusso, 1990).

The "second half of life" can be characterized as a time of retrospective self-reflection. It often involves a renewed drive to accomplish unfinished or uninitiated life goals. This development may result in a revision of the meaning of one's life and a change in the life course. The construct of midlife concerns a seminal transition period that could precipitate significant changes in life choices, depending in part on one's past experiences and current cultural, work-related, and interpersonal context.

Assumption three.

Having never left, for the purposes of this study, is not considered a pathology. This study does not assume that living with one's parents over the course of one's adult life is maladaptive. The choice to live at home is a time-honored one, shared by such brilliant thinkers as Emily Dickinson and Marcel Proust. How one constructs meaning from this experience is unique to the individual and therefore will not be generalized into dualisms of mature-versus-immature adult behavior.

Epistemology

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of four participants between the ages of 40 and 60 years of age who have lived at least half of their adult lives with their parents. This study sought to identify and understand the meanings of this life choice, as expressed by participants. The research was conducted using a hermeneutic psychoanalytic case-study method (Tolleson, 1996). The researcher's understanding of the robustness of the case study for research was informed by Gadamer's (1975) discussion of the language and philosophy of hermeneutics.

Gadamer said that what is real is not limited to what is empirical or measurable. He said that truth depends on the rules and the context that bring together different elements, or realities, into a shared language.

Listening to each study participant as a psychoanalyst listens to a patient involves listening in the manner recommended by Freud (1912). The use of evenly suspended attention reduces two things: the potential for biased or selective listening, and the potential for minimizing the importance of content. Also, evenly suspended attention allows for openness to the unfamiliar. During unstructured interviews, the researcher used psychoanalytic listening to learn as much as possible about each participant's lived experiences. The participants' narratives were unstructured and spontaneously given, which allowed study participants to decide what was most important to tell the researcher.

By allowing the study participant to determine what is meaningful, the researcher captured results that were unpredictable, unexpected, and truthful. In addition to listening without attempting to determine the results of each interview, the researcher listened for emergent themes in the study participants' narratives. Allowing naturally formulated themes to unfold through each interview was consistent with Gadamer's hermeneutics concerning listening. This involved learning what each study participant had to teach the researcher, as well as the researcher adapting her view based on what each participant said about life experiences and the meanings each participant gave to those experiences (1975).

Foregrounding

To explain my personal understanding the lived experiences of adults in the study population, I should articulate how I as researcher inhabit the phenomenon, and thereby the topic, of that population's subjective experiences. While this study proposal has grown out of my work with individuals who have essentially never left, my interest in this topic is also influenced by personal reflections on my own childhood.

When a child imagines what lies ahead in life, the possibilities may evoke pleasure or fear. Before starting grade school, I had the fantasy of one day returning home after successfully graduating from college and embarking upon my new lie as an independent adult. I would one day arrive at my parents' home as a single and self-reliant woman neatly dressed in a well-tailored suit. With briefcase in hand, I would ring the doorbell and assertively announce my success with an attitude of self-empowerment. Such fantasies were of course only one facet of my subjective life in early childhood. However, they were certainly descriptive of the ethos that permeated my family life.

This five-year-old girl, born in the 1950's, would not find the necessary support to realize her dream. Each of my siblings left home for college. Yet when I became college-aged my parents were apprehensive about letting me go. This might have been a reaction to their impending empty nest. I was not aware of any precedent in our family system that would explain their position. Both of my parents had gone to college. Most male adults in my mother's family, going back at least two generations, had gone to college. And all my high-school friends left home for college.

The gap between what I wanted and what was possible seemed vast to me at the age of 18. But this was not because my parents were unfamiliar with the world of academia and career-building. They simply did not want me to leave. When I did go away to college, it was because I made it happen independently. From then on, I received little to no communication from either of my parents. My story outwardly contradicts the theme of middle-aged adults who "never left," because I did leave. However, I still wonder what my life would have been like if I had not left home.

Personal reflections such as this speak to aspects of my own lived experience, embedded in my sense of what it means to be human. I brought to this research unconscious biases about what constitutes personal fulfillment, and I understood that these biases would contribute to countertransference in the process of conducting interviews with each study participant. To complete a thorough and useful investigation, I needed to remain open and listen carefully for contradictions to my own self narrative.

Outline of the Dissertation

The primary aim of the study was to learn how adults experience never leaving, or how they experience staying for good after brief departures. What kept them at home? How did participants think about their lives and relationships? How might their lives differ from the lives of people who leave home? How would they describe their lived experience from the context of living most or all their adult lives with one or both parents?

The following review of literature begins broadly with a review of relevant literature about midlife. The section on midlife is followed by a review of two separate discussions by Benjamin, the first on recognition and the second on subjectivity as a developmental process (1988, 1990, 1999, 2010, 2018). The literature review follows, with a discussion of transformations of subjectivity. This section also addresses the intersection of theory pertaining to Winnicott's work on potential space and object-usage. The final section of the literature review pertains to midlife. The literature review is followed by (a) description of the study methodology, (b) analyses of both within-case and cross-case varieties, and (c) a discussion of the results.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Middle-aged, single, non-disabled adults who have never left home or who have lived most of their adult lives with their parents constitute an understudied and obscured social reality. This study sought to address the related gap in the psychodynamic literature. The researcher searched

for literature relevant to the problem for study. When this search proved unsuccessful, the researched looked for any information pertinent to the study population.

Factors contributing to adult-child / parent co-residency include the following: (a) the socio-economic status of either or both child and parent, (b) caretaking of the parent by the child, and (c) cultural tradition. Research has shown that adult-child / parent co-residence, specifically in the United States, correlates to financial strain (Fry, 2013; Parker, 2012; Wang & Morin, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2010). Additionally, aging parents move in with their adult children to support the parents' wellbeing (Spitze & Logan, 1990). However, according to Ward and Spitze (1992), "… co-residence more typically reflects the housing needs of the co-resident children." The needs and roles of parents and adult-children, as well as cultural norms, are reflected by co-residency (Ward, Logan, & Spitze, 1996). While some households are multigenerational because of cultural norms, others are joined less intentionally.

Literature in the field of sociology on multigenerational households does not sufficiently addresses individual subjective experiences. From the researcher's perspective, adult-development theory moves closer to the topic by providing broad strokes of common human experiences, which generally constitute normative life endeavors through adulthood.

According to Nemiroff and Colarusso (1990), midlife is the period in a person's life between the ages of 40 and 60. During this half-way period between youth and old age, individuals become reflective concerning their accomplishments and missed experiences. Such reflection may lead to revised life goals and renewed experiences of loss and grief (Colarusso, 1991;

Colarusso & Montero, 2007). The work of Colarusso and Montero informed how this researcher listened during participant interviews for themes pertaining to midlife crises and missing out on normative adult experiences.

The researcher then looked for literature that would assist with listening for unique themes. Ultimately, the researcher used adult-development theory as well as relational theory to help listen for themes pertaining to lived experiences, with the intent of exploring the subjective lives of participants.

Midlife

People in midlife generally gain a new vantage point from which to understand their lives. They stand between decades of life experiences and an uncertain future that ultimately ends in death. Under these circumstances, many people want to optimize what time remains (Nemiroff & Colarusso, 1990). For many middle-aged adults, the examination of where they have been and of what life has entailed so far (from early life to present-day successes and vulnerabilities) can become a compelling preoccupation of day-to-day life. This retrospective ultimately characterizes the midlife experience. It can encompass a reconsideration and revisioning of the following:

1. Life experiences . . .
2. The influences of key figures from early childhood . . .
3. Achievements . . .
4. Betrayals . . .

5. Lessons learned . . .

6. Missed opportunities . . .

As participants considered how they experience living with their parents and having lived with their parents for most of their adult lives, they seemed to naturally reach back to re-examine influential family dynamics from early childhood and early adulthood. Each participant also considered current experiences from the standpoint of societal expectations for what constitutes a "normal" adult life. Participants considered their life choices in light of common expectations about the following topics:

1. Work . . .

2. Building a committed relationship with a reliable significant other . . .

3. Creating their own families . . .

4. Engaging in family life over the course of raising children into *their* adulthoods, and the ultimate repetition of the cycle of life . . .

For the individuals in this study, and perhaps for most individuals who would have met the basic criteria for participation in this study, the course of life is unclear and unpredictable. The researcher anticipated this uncertainty by studying theories of adulthood, specifically critical investigations of experiential and universal truths for adults in midlife. Stage or phase-structured theories of development (Mahler, 1963; Erikson, 1959; Blos, 1967) have been reviewed and critiqued in contemporary literature (Cohler, 1982; Colarusso, 1991; Strenger, 1998). These theories are considered linear and Cartesian. They emphasize the resolutions of phases-specific

dualisms as the overarching impetus and process by which psychic structures form, linking the beginning and the end of the life course.

For example, Margaret Mahler described maturation as biologically determined. Ego development and separation-individuation were co-occurring developmental processes. These processes were predicated on the child developing pleasure in independent functioning. This pleasure allows the child to "mature" away from symbiotic attachment to the mother at the level of need satisfaction and development of identity, by building a sense of agency. As Mahler (1963) states:

> . . . normal separation-individuation is the first crucial prerequisite for the development and maintenance of the 'sense of identity' . . . The feeling of identity may be defined as the cohesive cathexis of our securely individuated and differentiated self-image, and . . . its beginnings may be traced back to the first two years of life.

Midlife, according to linear developmental theories, would be characterized by resolution of phase-specific challenges. Freud conceptualized the developmental sequence as oral, anal, oedipal, latency, and adolescence (Strachey, 1960). Erik Erikson identified midlife in his "eight stages of man" via the dualism of generativity versus stagnation (1959). As stated by Colarusso (1992, p. 124), Erikson described generativity as central to maturity in midlife, and defined generativity as follows: ". . . to increase by whatever is yours to give, the good will and the

higher order in your sector of the world.” Stagnation meant to Erikson a lack of interest in anyone or anything beyond the self.

Elliot Jaques identified midlife as the period in one’s life where grandiosity breaks down under the reality of nearing the end of life. Jaques stated, “. . . one must give up magical dependence on the good object and develop capacity to tolerate personal shortcomings and hostility” (Anshin, 1985). Elsewhere, Pollack refers to midlife as a “mourning-liberation” process when crisis occurs, followed by re-organization, transformation, adaptation, and creativity (Slavin & Pollack, 1997). Pollack sees midlife as a period of life revision when established patterns are broken down and changed.

According to Colarusso and Montero (2007), “. . . midlife may be defined as that moment in every individual’s life when the transient nature of personal existence becomes a defining issue in the intrapsychic and real worlds.” Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (1990) emphasize the “reorganization of the self” as central to psychological growth in midlife, which they discuss as being composed of two basic themes: achievement, and the personal recognition of death.

Current thinking about adult development considers non-linear processes of subjective experience and change, as well as social constructs, as contributing to an ongoing formation of self during the life span. For this study, these non-linear developmental processes are engendered within intersubjective or relational contexts. This keeps with the intersubjective theory of mind, in which subjectivity does not occur in isolation but as an ongoing phenomenon in the context of relationship. Depending on the impressions and experiences disclosed by the study participants,

the researcher expected that individual narratives would reveal contemplation concerning (a) re-organization of the self, (b) re-evaluation of and changes in identity, and (c) awareness of mortality. As this research utilized hermeneutic inquiry, it follows that the study was informed by non-linear processes of psychological development and relational, co-construction of mind or sense of self—as opposed to stage-specific linear theories of human development.

The theory of adult development discussed by Nemiroff and Colarusso (1990) emphasizes developmental processes continuing throughout the life span. The two scholars view the adult and child as equally dependent on environment. The conceptualization of developmental processes as occurring across the life span and as being shaped by the environment supports a basic premise of this study, which includes the following facets: (a) experiences in midlife have dynamic affects, (b) meaning is derived from such experiences across the life span, and (c) not accomplishing normative adult-developmental tasks presents another challenge related to coping with or adapting to missing out.

According to Nemiroff and Colarusso, mastery throughout the life span, including midlife and later, involves an individual being in constant interaction with their environment. The environment of the adult in midlife commonly includes adult love objects, children, and colleagues. Also, according to Nemiroff and Colarusso, adult developmental tasks include creativity, work, intimacy, and mature sexual functioning, as well as coping with loss. Just as with developmental tasks of childhood, the work of accomplishing, mastering, and integrating the developmental tasks of midlife is never completed or resolved.

As is true for childhood developmental processes, adult developmental processes are not smooth. Often, it takes a crisis to precipitate healthy developmental change. For example, an experience of profound loss might prompt a greater involvement in meaningful relationships, which in turn could lead to a restructuring of one's sense of self.

Furthermore, with respect to transformative experiences in midlife, during periods of high stress, old vulnerabilities emerge. Adapting to new challenges such as divorce in midlife may involve regression to an earlier experience of narcissistic union if the stress interferes with self-soothing. Or a trauma complex may be activated, detracting from the individual's ability to adapt. Identifications of early development undergo change with each developmental thrust toward creativity and the pursuit of new love objects, intimacy, and self-expression. Accomplishment is fostered in part by a relatively supportive immediate environment as well as the world at large.

The researcher's psychoanalytically informed technique of listening during each interview process was impacted by the following: (a) challenges posed to an adult in midlife, (b) the ways in which an adult adapts to those challenges, and (c) experiences of revision or reorganizing one's sense of self.

Certain factors associated with a study participant's lived experience of having never left home, for example, may become especially complex when considered in the context of their own aging process, which involves the assessment of accomplishments in work and love. One faces

the potential for work coming to an end, which does not always involve a clear plan for the future. In relationships, the adult in midlife is faced with changes including:

1. Sexual drive . . .
2. Relationships with parents . . .
3. Increased awareness of time limitations and death . . .
4. Increased experiences of illnesses and deaths of parents, siblings, extended family, and friends . . .

Adults in midlife may also become preoccupied with what they missed or with having fallen short of their own or others' expectations.

There are no absolutes about human experience. However, pattern repetition is a fundamental theoretical consideration in psychodynamic theory (Freud, 1914). Repetition and unconscious processes are central to human experience. Therefore, it is significant for this study that repetition of early relational patterning occur across the life span in subsequent relationships. Unconscious, subjective life is imprinted by early child-maternal-other dynamics (Benjamin, 1988, 2009, 2018; Winnicott, 1953, 1969, 1971). These imprints are repeated and retranslated over time in subsequent relationships.

In midlife, personal growth may be impeded or facilitated by thematically identifiable, repeating patterns of relating and making meaning of one's interpersonal experiences. Many of these patterns influence work and love in adult life. For this study, it was important for the researcher to listen for and understand intersubjective patterns relevant to subjects' experiences

of living with their parents—just as it would be important to do in the context of a patient / psychotherapist dyad. For this reason, the review of relevant literature focuses on relational theory, specifically recognition theory as discussed by Benjamin (2002, 2018).

Recognition Theory

For this study, Benjamin's theory of recognition is central to understanding subjectivity. Benjamin's theory is akin to Winnicott's assertion that transitioning experiences are integral to the realization of subjectivity. Benjamin says that recognition, like transitioning experiences occurring within potential space, is fundamental to the development of two things: subjectivity, and the capacity for knowing the mind of another subject. Benjamin writes:

> Recognition is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right. (1988, p. 12)

Winnicott introduced the concept of transitional experience to psychodynamic literature. Winnicott identified the experience of the infant's first awareness of others as the first "not me" experience. The first "not me" experience is essential to developing subjectivity. Benjamin elucidates Winnicott's theory of transitional experience (Benjamin, 1988, 2018; Winnicott, 1969) by saying that intersubjective recognition is essential to the development of subjective awareness. Benjamin's theory expands upon and transforms Winnicott's concept of transitioning

experience to the phenomenon of an experiencing subject who, through mutual recognition, elicits experiential awareness of subjectivity in both the developing infant and the maternal caregiver (Benjamin, 2018).

In her work, *An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition* (1990), Benjamin challenges the emphasis of ego psychology in Margaret Mahler's theory of separation-individuation (Mahler, 1963, 1967, 1981). Mahler's theory outlines childhood development of autonomy via phase-specific processes wherein the mother's subjective experience is not acknowledged. This approach leaves out the possibility of the child eventually developing an awareness of the mother as an experiencing subject.

Benjamin argues that this omission is significant from a feminist perspective. Mahler does not consider the mother's co-participation in the child's development. The child's sense of self is co-created in the context of the relationship with the primary caregiver. As stated by Benjamin (1990, p. 35):

> The other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. The capacity to recognize the mother as a subject is an important part of early development.

Benjamin says subjectivity is constructed in intersubjective contexts (1990). She theorizes that the infant develops subjectivity while the maternal caregiver continues to develop her own sense of self. Benjamin's concept of recognition as fundamental to the development of subjectivity resemble the views of Stolorow and Atwood (1992). Those two researchers posit

that subjective experience, or mind, is not isolated, but rather codetermined by the felt responsiveness of others.

Stolorow and Atwood echo Benjamin's conceptualization of subjectivity as occurring within intersubjective contexts (1992, 1994). Recognition is a phenomenological potential in the context of one subject in engagement with another. Recognition is also shaped by historical and contemporary social, political, and cultural contexts.

Subjective experience is fluid and ever-changing in processes of experiential contextualization and meaning-creation. Subjectivity involves processes include the following, according to Stern (2003):

1. Felt sense . . .
2. Symbolization . . .
3. Memory-making . . .
4. Formulation of experience . . .
5. Dissociation from experience . . .

How an individual works through and contextualizes past experiences will influence the developing self (Stolorow, 1992). By collaborating with participants to investigate their experiences, this study endeavored to raise awareness within the field of clinical social work, specifically about certain themes that constitute subjectivity (both latent and manifest), which are best understood as happening in interpersonal contexts.

The inspiration for pursuing this work began with the researcher providing individual psychotherapy for individuals in a rural mental-health setting. The researcher witnessed the commonality of social isolation and similarities in treatment impasses across cases. Subsequently, the researcher developed clinically focused questions that might establish possible commonalities in lived experiences.

The experience of subjectivity, or self-awareness, in intersubjective contexts became a significant topic of exploration for the literature review. Exploring the lived experiences of study participants provided a gateway to those individuals' inner lives and unconscious processes. The researcher believed that by exploring personal experience, the lived experiences of study participants could be most deeply known. What would study participants say keeps them living at home? How would participants think about their lives, their relationships, about how these things might contrast with the experiences of individuals who leave home?

There are many ways to conceptualize lived experience. This study largely relied on Jessica Benjamin's understanding of subjectivity as a developmental process that manifests dialectically and in-relationship, resulting from the interpersonal experience of recognition (1988, 1990, 1995, 2010, 2018).

The psychological phenomenon of subjectivity cannot be considered in-depth without thinking about key processes that universally affect subjective life. To achieve an informative exploration of the lived experiences discussed by the study participants, the researcher utilized a depth-oriented theoretical conceptualization and interpretation of intersubjective processes. The

researcher understood participant descriptions of intersubjective experiences from various life contexts as revealing aspects of subjective life. Meaning-creation throughout the lifespan (Benjamin, 1988, 1990, 1999, 2010, 2018) involves the following: (a) intersubjective processes such as object usage, (b) the structural and transformational effect of an object's impact on the self, and (c) the selection of objects in such ways that evoke constellations of our inner experience (Bollas, 1992). These interpersonal processes were significant for identifying categories of meaning from the interviews.

Developmental Transformations of Subjectivity

The researcher experienced countertransference during research interviews, based on participant engagement. This resulted in the researcher refining her use of the literature in preparation for discussing research findings. The researcher was often aware that she experienced the participants as easy to engage and responsive to exploratory promptings. However, participants often communicated in circular and redundant patterns in their exploration of experiences associated with living with their parents.

The researcher often experienced the interview relationships as dyadically flattened, without development of a space conducive to the sort of exploration that would be generative and conducive to insight. This phenomenon resembled the researcher's experiences of providing psychotherapy to individuals with similar adult-child / parent co-habitation patterns. This similarity was informative and prompted the researcher to consider the implications of transitional phenomena for the development of full engagement with others, and for

transformations including self-knowledge achieved from lived experience. As explained by Bollas:

> By studying the structural effect of an object's impact on the self, which means thinking more about the different potential transformational effects of an object, we will be able to deepen our understanding of the nature of human life (1992, p. 4).

The second participant interviewed for this study, who was given the pseudonym Wojciech, spoke at length about living with his parents. He was open to queries associated with the content of his narrative. These queries were intended to deepen exploration. The researcher experienced each interview with Wojciech as rich, containing descriptive information and symbolic meaning. However, at the closing of each interview, Wojciech apologized for having filled the hour, as though this was somehow not acceptable to the researcher.

When asked what prompted his apology, Wojciech expressed concern that he had talked too much and not given the researcher equal time. Perhaps his concern about filling the hour with his own narrative—thus allowing the interview time to be dedicated solely to himself—contradicted his lived experiences with significant objects in his life.

The subject of Winnicott's conceptualization of transitional phenomena (1969) was evoked during the process of reviewing and coding the interview material, and also during the process of developing the case studies. It was important to the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of dyadic processes described by study participants, and to in turn consider the phenomenon of potential space.

From Object-Relating to Object-Usage

Winnicott developed a theory about the use of an object from two main sources: extensive work with patients, and experiences with patients who were not able to use the analyst's interpretations. Winnicott used the term "object" to mean a subject's experience of an other. "Object-relating" means the subject does not recognize the other's experience as separate from their own. Winnicott observed patterns of object-relating in his experiences of patients with borderline personality disorder and their inability to utilize interpretation. He noted this phenomenon occurred consistently among patients for whom:

> . . . the core of the individual's personality is psychotic . . . who has enough psychoneurotic organization always to be able to present a psychoneurosis or psychosomatic disorder when the central psychotic anxiety threatens to break through in crude form. . . . The only drawback is that the analysis never ends . . . the patient and the analyst have succeeded in colluding to bring about a failure (1969).

Winnicott observed in these individuals the tendency to cover a vulnerability to psychosis with an adaptive presentation, a "false self" (1969), which preempted any internalization of and identification with the analyst's ego functioning. In this way, the patient was incapable of utilizing the analyst as a means of "discovery of the self" (p.711).

Winnicott observed that for the infant, in object-relating, the physical and the psychological are one in the same (1960). This principal is eloquently articulated by Winnicott's description of

the holistic holding environment comprised of an undifferentiated infant / mother couple (p. 587):

> There is no such thing as an infant, meaning of course that whenever one finds an infant one finds maternal care and without maternal care there would be no infant . . . it refers to a phase in which the infant depends on maternal care that is based on maternal empathy rather than an understanding of what is or could be verbally expressed.

Winnicot's observations of mothers holding their infants—and of the crucial role that such holding plays in early infancy—led to Winnicott's understanding of how holding promotes the infant's psychological development from object-relating to object-usage.

A holding environment can be maternal or therapeutic, serving as one of many "transitional phenomena facilitating the individual's discovery of the self" in contrast to failures of potential space in facilitating "self-establishment and self-discovery" (1969, p.711). Winnicott noted that failures of self-establishment and self-discovery must be addressed in analysis, prior to giving the patient interpretations, through the creation of potential space in the context of therapeutic holding. Therapeutic holding allows the patient to experience merging and identification with the analyst, which in turn promotes several developments described by Bollas (1992) as:

1. Object-usage . . .
2. The patient's self-differentiation . . .

3. The patient's capacity to begin to see the analyst as existing beyond the patient's subjective life . . .
4. The ability to use the analyst, the object, as a potential form of transformation . . .

The term "object-usage" was first used by Winnicott in his discussion of an early intersubjective transformational process involving the infant / child making a perceptual shift from infant-and-mother as a unified field (or object-relating) to the infant / child perceiving the maternal figure as a subject in her own right.

Winnicott used the phrase "object-usage" as a reference to an infant's capacity to create symbolic meaning concerning the maternal caregiver. This developmental process is transformational. The infant's psychological life changes fundamentally from undifferentiated to differentiated, via consideration of the maternal caregiver / object as a subject. As Winnicot stated, "In object-usage the subject recognizes the other's independent existence" (1969).

Adult-Child and Parent Co-residency

A variety of factors are contributing to current changes in household structures in the United States as well as other countries. According to sociologist Lisa Wade (2013), approximately one in five adults in the United States is "still living at home with their parents." This figure is up from 9% in 1980, and up from 17% in 2010. Wade states that in large part this increase of adults living with their parents is related to the rise of the United States unemployment rate after 2008. However, she also states that the overall grouping of adults living with their parents may include adults in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with one or both parents, as there

is no separate category provided for this population in census data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2010; Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Factors counted as contributing to adult-child / parent co-residency include (a) the socioeconomic status of either or both the adult child and the aging parent, (b) caretaking of an aging parent by their adult child, or (c) maintaining cultural tradition.

Research has shown a correlation between financial strain and adults in the United States co-residing with their elderly parents (Fry, 2013; Parker, 2012; Wang & Morin, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2010). According to Ward and Spitze (1992), ". . . co-residence more typically reflects the housing need of the co-resident children." Needs and roles, as well as cultural norms, are reflected in choices for co-residency (Ward, Logan, and Spitze, 1992). While some households are multigenerational because of cultural norms, others are joined less intentionally.

The adult in midlife—between 40 and 60 years of age (Nemiroff & Colarusso) who has reached the liminal half-way period between youth and old age—becomes reflective concerning their accomplishments as well as missed experiences. Such reflection typically leads to revising life goals as well as to experiences of loss and grief (Colarusso, 1991; Colarusso & Montero, 2007).

This study explored differences and similarities among a small sampling of four middle-aged adults in midlife who have lived most of their adult lives with their parents. This study was intended to explore potentially non-normative adult experiences in midlife (such as missing out

on normative developmental tasks of early adulthood), and how those experience influence self-reflection and sense of self.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

By using the psychoanalytic case-study method developed by Tolleson (1996), the researcher accomplished the following objectives:

1. Using a structured phone interview, find individuals who meet criteria for study participation and who are willing to participate in the study . . .
2. Conduct thorough in-person reviews of consent agreements with each prospective participant to facilitate a clear understanding of participant rights . . .
3. Listen to and extensively explore the personal narratives of each study participant in three or four in-person unstructured interviews, each of which lasts between 60 and 90 minutes . . .
4. Develop psychoanalytically informed case studies from the narratives of each participant . . .

5. Conduct within-case analysis by identifying categories of meaning from each case study . . .
6. Conduct cross-case analysis using all case studies to identify similarities and differences among categories of meaning . . .

The research asked this question: What are the subjective experiences of adults in midlife who have lived most of their adult lives with one or both parents? The overarching goal of the research was to make theoretical contributions to the field of clinical social work.

Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Design

According to Yin (2009), a research topic is best-suited to a case-study method in the following situations: (a) when the researcher is searching for descriptions by asking "what" or looking for explanations by asking "how" or "why," (b) when the research does not constitute a controlled study, and (c) when the study pertains to real and contemporary life events.

The topic for this research met all three of these conditions, and therefore a case-study design was used.

The case-study design used for this research is the psychoanalytic case-study method developed by Tolleson. Tolleson's psychoanalytic case-study method was chosen to conduct this research because the use of psychoanalytic technique in the interview process was expected to facilitate psychoanalytically informed depth in the following areas: (a) inquiry, (b) exploration, and (c) interpretation of the personal narratives of each participant.

As the research topic is understudied, it was important to utilize a qualitative research methodology that would allow the researcher to gather as much information as possible about the lived experiences of participants. It was expected that learning as much as possible about participant experiences would assist the researcher in identifying topics for further study. To facilitate the initial data-gathering process, the researcher chose a study design that would facilitate a narrowly focused exploration of individual lived experiences.

The use of Tolleson's psychoanalytic case-study method provided an optimal means of exploration and interpretation. The choice of a hermeneutic study design supports an exploratory and interpretive approach to information-gathering and analysis. Consistent with the essence of hermeneutic philosophy, this study was designed to discover and interpret the subjective reports of the lived experiences of each participant. Additionally, it was designed to reveal essential meanings embodied by these experiences.

The researcher gathered interview material from each participant in multiple interviews. This gathering process involved in-depth exploration of participants' contemporary lives and related subjective experiences. This approach was designed to develop awareness of the unique complexity of each participant's lived experience (Creswell, 1998; Hoffman, 2009; McLeod, 2001; Yin, 2009). By using multiple cases, the researcher found variations in experience among study participants. By limiting the total number of individual participants, the researcher could conduct multiple interviews with each individual and deepen the inquiry in each interview. Invariably, the researcher and participant became increasingly comfortable with one other and

with the process of exploring emergent themes. The number of interviews in each series provided contradictions and similarities across participant narratives.

Research Sample

The scope of this study was narrow. This study was focused on a specific, understudied group, identified primarily by its status of habitation and a corresponding small set of participation criteria. The criteria for study participation were as follows:

1. The study participant is between 40 and 60 years of age . . .
2. The study participant lives with one or both parents . . .
3. The study participant has lived with one or both parents for at least half of the participant's adult years . . .
4. The study participant's living situation is not attributable to a disability . . .
5. The study participant is not married . . .
6. The study participant is not a parent . . .

Sample Descriptions

The researcher anticipated that participants would be difficult to find. The researcher expected that it would be necessary to distribute flyers and place ads (see Appendix A) in community forums and newspapers to alert potential participants. However, word-of-mouth became the

primary mode of finding participants. Two participants lived in Illinois. The other two participants lived in Michigan. Two of the four participants had experience with psychotherapy. Of these two, only one was referred by their psychotherapist. The three individuals not referred by a psychotherapist were referred by associates in the social-work community at large.

In each case, the referral source had discussed the project with the potential participant. In turn, the participant gave the source permission to pass on contact information to the researcher. Everyone who participated in the eligibility interview met all criteria for participation. This process of recruiting participants yielded four participants over the course of 10 months. The researcher gathered demographic data (see Appendix B) during the initial phone interview with each subject.

Table 1

Subject Identifying Information: A

		Identifying Variable		
Subject No.	Age	Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Employment Status
1	49	Caucasian	Cis-female	Employed
2	44	Caucasian	Cis-male	Employed
3	59	Caucasian	Cis-female	Un-emp.

4	47	Caucasian	Cis-male	Employed

Table 2

Subject Identifying Information: B

Identifying Variables

Subject No.	Relationship Status	Disability/ Employment status	Number of adult years with parents/ Living with parents
1	Single Divorced	Not disabled Employed	29 of 31 total adult years/ Yes
2	Single Never married	Not disabled Employed	22 of 26 total adult years/ Yes
3	Single Never married	Not disabled Retired	39 of 41 total adult years/ Yes
4	Single Divorced	Not disabled Employed	20 of 29 total adult years/

Yes

Data Collection Methods

The researcher decided on a process of inquiry based on four unstructured audio-recorded interviews. This approach was inspired by some initial questions that guided the development of the study proposal, including:

1. How do study participants experience living with their parents for most or all of the participants' adult lives?
2. How do middle-aged subjects reflect on adult experiences lived thus far?
3. How does subjectivity shape the ways in which meaning is made of lived experience?
4. How does lived experience shape subjectivity?
5. In what ways are the vicissitudes of these individuals' psychological lives influenced by living with their parents?
6. How does living with their parents frame participants' life experiences, if at all?

During the planning phase for implementation of the study design, the following list of interview questions was developed to deepen the interview process in situations where exploration did not flow:

1. When you were a child, how did you conceptualize or imagine that your life would be as an adult?
2. What did and did not influence your decision to not leave home?
3. How would you describe your adult life today?
4. How would you describe your relationship/s with your parent/s?
5. How would you describe your relationships with peers?
6. How does your life, in your experience, tell you who you are?
7. How do you think about yourself?
8. (If the study participant is employed) How would you describe your work life?
9. What aspects of your life are rewarding for you?
10. What sorts of conflicts do you experience in regard to your life?
11. How do you feel about aging?
12. How do you see yourself in relationship to society?

The interview.

Data collection involved gathering information through in-person interviews and using field notes to track each participant's reactions to the following: (a) the researcher, (b) the researcher's subjective impressions of the interviews, and (c) the development of inquiry across each series of

interviews. All participants initially agreed to three in-person and private interviews conducted by the researcher. After the first three interviews were completed for the first two participants, it became apparent that some emergent categories of meaning were underdeveloped and required further exploration. Coinciding with this observation, it became apparent that the objective of interviewing five participants would not be met. Speculation concerning the effectiveness of conducting a total of three interviews resulted in the decision to conduct four interviews. Participant Number 3, identified as Wojciech, did not respond to the request for an additional interview.

All participants were open and able to discuss their lived experiences at length and in detail, with no need for prompting inquiries for depth exploration. Each interview was unstructured and took shape from an organic unfolding of each participant's personal narrative about living at home with at least one parent.

Each interview was at least 60 minutes in length. Some interviews were longer due to the researcher and study participant wanting to complete a thought process rather than cut the process short. Each interview was audio-recorded, and each recording was sent to a professional transcriptionist via a secure website upload. Each transcription was available for review prior to the next interview.

Yin says one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview (2009). Interviewing is optimal for gathering relevant history and the day-to-day experiences of each participant, as well as providing subjective impressions from both the subject and the interviewer

(Thorne, 2008; Tolleson, 1996; Yin, 2003, 2009). Interviewing often elicits disclosure of psychological processes and impressions that are difficult or impossible to otherwise measure or quantify. The subjective impressions gathered during each series of interviews for this study proved to be rich with symbolic meaning, providing color and texture to each personal narrative.

The use of analytic technique for conducting each interview created non-linear processes of exchange regarding history and lived experience. The use of analytic technique allowed the researcher to obtain and explore unexpected material. The information gathered from each participant was thorough and in-depth, capturing latent and manifest content from which to further explore and understand each participants' lived experiences (Tolleson, 1996).

Gathering information from each participant during multiple interviews facilitated a context of collaboration, trust, and open disclosure concerning the topic for study (Tolleson, 1996; Atwood & Stolorow, 1993). Disclosures were multidimensional, constructive, and illustrative of each participants' lived experiences (Van Manen, 2014). Constructive meaning-making naturally occurred during each series of interviews and following the interviews as well, via the process of writing each case study.

Using the psychoanalytically informed instruments of free association and exploration of manifest and latent content, the researcher facilitated formulation of pre-reflective experience (Stern, 2003; Van Manen, 2014). Participants formulated experiences that they had not previously considered in-depth, which led them to draw new perceptions of their day-to-day lives.

An example of such a process is illustrated in the fourth case study. The participant began to realize a parallel between his parents' experiences as children living in United Nations–sponsored refugee camps at the end of World War II, and his own experience of feeling as though there was never enough "space" (physical or psychological) in his home. This realization led the participant to speculate further about the extent to which his childhood was informed and shaped by his parents' childhood experiences.

Free association and exploration of latent content elicited thematic unfolding and deepened exploration toward the development of personal meanings (Tolleson, 1996; Yin, 2009). Such exploration contributed significantly to the unfolding of each series of interviews. Additionally, this exploration helped develop categories of meaning during the process of case-study development at the end of each interview series.

The researcher closely followed each interview and built a cohesive account of each participant's narrative. The researcher sought detail and clarification throughout the course of each interview. This process of seeking detail provided the interviewer with an ongoing means of checking her understanding of participant disclosures. This helped the researcher understand the complexities that constitute the lived experiences and meaning-making of each study participant. In turn, the researcher had a felt sense of each participant's life, as well as richly textured information about the uniqueness of that life.

Field notes.

Field notes for this study included the researcher's direct observations and subjective experiences while interacting with participants. Field notes consisted of written observations made by the interviewer during each interview. Direct observations made by the researcher included the participant's overt presentation, as well as their non-verbal expressions such as gestures, body language, and changes in feeling and tone, as experienced by the researcher. Subjective observations included the interviewer's speculations concerning transference and countertransference during the interview processes, along with the interviewer's experience sharing with a participant the more salient and potentially meaningful disclosures, in terms of categories of meaning, from the perspective of the researcher.

Yin (2009) describes the collection of field notes as integral to the process of gathering case-study evidence. Yin also recommends conducting interviews in the participant's "natural setting." Observing the participant's engagement with their natural environment provides dimension to the shared content that would otherwise not be captured via interview transcriptions.

The researcher considered the collaboration with each interview participant as constituting a "natural setting." The natural development of collaboration and mutuality provided an atmosphere conducive to depth exploration. Participant reactions to the interviewer and to the interview process contributed to a context of shared exploration, wherein a participant's expression of experiences about home was considered as possibly reflective of the participant's "natural setting" of home and family.

During the process of interviewing subjects, the researcher gave each series of interviews and corresponding field notes a numerical identifier. This identifier corresponded to the order of each subject's participation. Each transcript of an interview series was sub-categorized alphabetically. For example, the first series was #1, and the four interviews in that series were labeled as 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D. During the process of developing a case study, each subject was assigned a pseudonym to protect privacy.

Member checking.

Member checking for this study was conducted by rigorous checking for accuracy during each interview. This process involved repeating information back to the study participant, to check the researcher's perceptions against the study participant's intent. Corrections were made when participants clarified a statement. This clarification became part of the audio-recorded interview content and therefore was included in each interview transcription. Each study participant was offered the opportunity to read the first interview transcription, which contained the foundational information upon which subsequent interviews were developed. Study participants were offered the opportunity to review their respective case study. Only Participant Number One responded, and this was with affirmation that each identified category of meaning was relevant to her experience of living with her parents.

Within-Case Analysis: The Case Study

Four case studies were developed for this study. The development of the case studies involved providing background information and developing categories of meaning. This information came

from each series of interviews, in accordance with the psychoanalytic case-study method (Tolleson, 1996). Yin (2009) describes various modes of case analysis. For this study, the case study allowed the researcher to build descriptions of participants' subjective experiences, and to identify and psychoanalytically explore thematic developments taken from the totality of the interview content and from field notes.

After the completion of each interview series, the researcher composed a case study from interview data. This process began with listening to each corresponding recorded interview and reviewing field notes. The researcher then conducted multiple reviews of each interview transcript to identify and code emergent themes associated specifically with participant lived experiences.

The researcher completed four case studies. Thematic developments emerged over the course of each series of interviews. Themes and patterns of subjective experiences were identified from interviews and field notes. This material ranged in qualitative value from concrete to abstract, allowing for the development of a comprehensive range of categories of meaning (Tolleson, 1996).

Each completed case study was explored in detail to identify and code salient thematic content. The themes which described the lived experiences of each study participant were organized into constructs, linking the interview material to the basic question for study (Tolleson, 1996). The logic of linking the interview data to the basic question for study was constituted by categories of meaning. These categories became apparent in the process of mining the data

within each case for themes associated with the subjective, or lived experiences, of the study participants.

Analysis of the thematic material from the interview data was presented in each case study via categories of meaning (Tolleson, 1996). Categories of meaning were defined as thematic patterns that emerged from the data, and which were relevant to the study questions, thereby ". . . representing a potential and psychological link between the subject's experiences and his eventual action" (Tolleson, 1996, p. 116).

Cross-Case Analysis

Cross-case analysis was conducted after all case studies were completed. During the process of completing the case studies, themes became apparent. These themes were noted and gathered according to similarities and differences across all case studies. Each case study was cross-checked against categories identified in previously conducted within-case analyses. This cross-check allowed the researcher to identify categories of shared and conflicting meaning across subject narratives. With these categories, the researcher developed comparative information between cases (Tolleson, 1996; Yin, 2009).

Cross-case analysis involved consideration of each case study as a separate study (Yin, 2004). By reviewing all meaning categories developed from the case studies, the researcher uncovered convergent and divergent meanings. Psychoanalytic theory (including intersubjective processes of psychological transformation) informed the cross-case examination of meaning categories.

On Protecting the Rights of Participants

Each study participant was interviewed in a location that protected their privacy. Study participants received a thorough review of their rights to privacy, confidentiality, and to end their participation at any time.

Research interviews and results—including the case studies, analyses, and audio recordings—will be locked by the researcher for safekeeping for a period of five years after completion of this dissertation.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The researcher relied on member-checking and consultation with research experts in the field of clinical social work to ensure that the research results are reasonable, understandable, and match the data (Gadamer, 2012). During the process of each interview, the researcher inquired extensively about key points in participant self-narratives to ensure that the researcher clearly understood the manifest content expressed and the meanings each subject attributed to their experiences. Each case study was examined by an expert research consultant to check that the interpretations of results were reliable and coherent.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

Due to the narrow focus of this research, participants had significant life experiences in common at the outset of the research project. They were all single, in midlife, independent financially, not parents, and were currently living with their parents. The four participants ranged in ages between 44 and 59, placing their birth years between 1958 and 1973, a span that includes both Baby Boomer and Generation X demographic cohorts.

Although their demographics are similar, each participant gave a unique and richly nuanced personal narrative about current experiences living with their parents. The manifest content of each series of interviews revealed clear differentiations between the study participants. These differentiations were delineated in the categories of meaning identified in the within-case analysis. The study participants are united by their demographics, yet each participant described a unique childhood history and current-day interests and challenges.

The following diagram (Table 3) provides an overview of the categories of meaning identified from all participant interviews and described in detail within each corresponding case study. The process of identifying and examining the categories of meaning for each participant made the researcher aware of each category as an aspect of a participant's vitality. These are not static meaning categories. The categories of meaning provided here represent psychological processes that are imbued with transformative potential.

Table 3: Categories of Meaning

Overall Categories of Meaning for all Study Participants

Alice	Wojciech	Dana	Andrejs
Unprepared for what's out there	Complementarity	Sheltered	Familiarity
Impingements on all fronts	Where's home?	Living my mother's life	Scarcity and aggression
Isolation	Breaking free through transient acts of aggression	Holding back	Dreams of escape
Guilt – Fantasies of leaving	Fleeting dreams of floating escape	Guilt and shame	Zemnieks: Giving back and protecting the land
Alone together		Going backward	
It's too late		Finding Initiative	

Each category of latent psychodynamic themes describes unconscious intersubjective processes identified by the researcher across all case studies. The researcher uses the term "unconscious" in this context to indicate that these phenomena were identified by the researcher through the process of closely examining and interpreting the relationships between the participants and their parents, as described by each study participant. These psychodynamic themes are not directly identified by any study participant. However, certain thematic dynamics

became apparent to the researcher after performing within-case analysis and while seeking to understand, through a psychodynamic lens, participants' expressed lived experiences.

Case Study #1: Alice

Descriptive information.

Alice finds comfort in her memories of being a young girl playing or "hanging out" with her cousins (who were developmentally her peers) while their parents played cards and talked for hours. The overall feeling was of joviality and belonging. She felt she did not need friends because her home life was relationally satisfying. Alice remembers many members of her extended family being at her family home for holidays and birthdays. They even took family vacations together.

> There was a great sense of family. I think at one point we were 11 or 12, including grandma, grandpa, mom and dad, aunt and uncle, two cousins. My aunt would come over during the week, on the weekends, and just sit and talk. And they (talked) all evening, for a lot of evenings. So it was always something like that, family. It's just good.

These memories reminded Alice of what she feels is missing in her life now. Alice is 49 years old and single. She has lived with her parents essentially for 47 years, and considers this situation positive from a practical standpoint. However, she misses the way family life felt when she was growing up. For most of her adult life Alice has lived with her parents and worked in the city of Chicago. Her family does not have a history of adult children co-residing with parents in

extended family systems, as a matter of family tradition. However, there is history on Alice's father's side of the family of two adult children living with their parents for most of their adult lives.

When she was 22 years old, Alice left home to live with a boyfriend. She and her boyfriend lived together for about one and a half years until Alice reached a point of saturation with uncertainty and fear. This prompted a sense of urgency to get away from a boyfriend who reminded her of her father. There was no physical assault, but Alice felt attacked emotionally and psychologically.

Alice says her father is always angry and demanding. He has an attitude of practicality as well as toughness. Her father expects the women of the household to know what he wants. He should not have to go into detail. He should not have to say anything. If he wants coffee, Alice or her mother should just know it and get his coffee. Alice is increasingly aware of feeling intruded upon by her father. He has a history of yelling at family members and calling them names. She is more inclined at this point in her life to say, "Get it yourself." It is painful for her to see that her mother no longer stands up for herself.

> He barks orders. He tells (my mother) what to do, and she does it. . . . He'll sit down and (Alice makes a tapping sound with her finger, imitating her father)—that means, get him coffee. . . . Do you know how painful it is for us to watch (my mother) be abused day in and day out? I mean, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Although Alice describes her family as "nice," she also elaborates about her increasing awareness of "broken" communication. She describes her home life as "chaotic." She feels that her personal space is so limited that she can only be comfortable after work if she goes right to her bedroom and stays there until the next day when it is time to go to work again. "I'm learning more and more how unhealthy and dysfunctional things are."

Describing this "dysfunction," Alice says, "The relationship between my mom and my dad . . . my mom is the peacemaker, my dad is what he is, you know?" Her mother has been "the glue" and the "go-to person" for the family, although more recently she has seemed to acquiesce more readily to her father's demands. Recently Alice has been sharing her bedroom with her mother. This arrangement gives her mother space from the family "chaos," which has become the norm since Alice's brother—and his family—
moved into the house seven years ago. According to Alice, this is not a family system that knows how to nurture and support a multigenerational household.

Alice has not been in an intimate relationship since she left her boyfriend in her mid-twenties. She continues to work and contribute financially to the household she shares with her parents and, more recently a cousin, her brother, and her brother's family. Alice often finds work cohorts to be adversarial, and work demands as seemingly impossible to fulfill. Alice has some college background although she did not finish.

Categories of meaning.

Unprepared for what is "out there."

Alice feels strongly that her parents did not prepare her for living an autonomous adult life. She says that her parents did not make good financial decisions and had little interest in what happens beyond the lives of their close relatives. Alice's parents did not consider that Alice might want something more or different from how they organized their lives. Alice's father always worked faithfully and held onto his job up to the time of his retirement. Her mother worked for 20 years but primarily focused on raising Alice and her brother. There was little if any discussion between Alice and her parents about the future, about planning and preparing Alice for having a life of her own. As she says, "I could have been shown, 'This is yes. This is no. This is why. Here's what you should strive for'—whatever. I never had that attention."

What is "out there" is a social landscape that Alice experiences as unnavigable. She is certain there are rules for managing in the adult world of work and love that she must figure out for herself. However, the rules do not seem accessible to her. Alice has worked several jobs as an administrative assistant. In one job after the next, she finds herself in interpersonal conflicts. These conflicts often result in Alice losing her job. She has not had a steady intimate relationship that lasted more than two years, and the last one was during her twenties.

Alice feels cheated because she was discouraged and unprepared for engaging the world on her own terms. In high school, a group of individuals offered to train and mentor her for a career in music. If she had agreed, she would have more control over her work life. She could protect herself with her sense of strong character, which she can always access in troubling times. That strength, she believes, could never be taken away from her and squandered by privileged others

in positions of power, which means should could have made it as a musician. This confidence contrasts with the common understanding of the music world as a potentially devastating marketplace where talented individuals are exploited as a matter of course.

Alice was steeped in fear during her upbringing, and that fear casts a shadow over her perception of the world. As a point of contrast, a romantic hue is cast over her dream of a life in the field of music. She has carried the fears of her parents with her as she tries to make her own life. She has armed herself psychologically against the promised, inevitable onslaught of devastation by the world "out there." Years of experiences reinforce her dilemma. Alice's psychological life closes her off from love and creativity.

Feeling hurt by impingements on all fronts.

Alice is cautious about how she interacts with others. She steps lightly in relationships, both inside and outside her parents' house. Family members make Alice brutally aware that "home" is not her own home. She says that her father often gives her this reminder: "Don't take up space." While Alice does not say she is afraid of being pushed out of her parents' home, she identifies many ways that she compromises to stay there. These compromises make her invisible.

For example, Alice still sleeps in the same bedroom she had as a child, but her mother has now entered the space. This allows Alice's mother to avoid sleeping in the living room with Alice's father. (The parents moved to the living room to accommodate Alice's brother, who sleeps in her parents' bedroom.) She feels insignificant and frustrated because of her dependence on her parents. To cope, Alice imagines having her own home.

> I'd be able to have a minute and a half just for me, without having to worry about someone else. I'd be able to maybe read one of the hundreds of books that I would love to read. I'd be able to have hobbies. I'd be able to have people over, entertain. I don't have those opportunities.

Paradoxically, Alice links being on her own with excessive vulnerability, with being hurt in relationships and in work situations. This negates any potential for the larger world to become a context for personal growth. She experiences living with her parents as a form of security. She says being a healthy adult requires, "Taking a risk, taking a chance, taking a step." When trying to build a career and relationships, at every turn Alice gets overwhelmed by thoughts of her father saying the world is a cruel place, that it's better to hunker down, cover your head, and not take risks whether in work or in love.

Alice was in a relationship with a boyfriend for one and a half years. Neither she nor he knew how to make inroads for the sort of communication that might create mutual understanding. When the relationship became strained, Alice felt out of her depth and afraid. She thought the best option was for her to leave. Since that time, because she was deeply hurt, building a new relationship has not seemed possible. She moved back with her parents at age 24 and stayed home.

Alice says she learned to be afraid of uncertainty and the unknown from both of her parents. Her father continues to warn her of the world being on the verge of complete disaster. Alice experiences these warnings as an expression of parental care. However, she also interprets the

warnings as proof that her parents do not trust her to manage on her own. Alice realizes that she has internalized her parents' fears and that this internalization had a significant impact on how she has made choices. For example, her mother warned Alice that if she pursued her life's dream of becoming a professional singer it would only result in catastrophe.

> Years ago, when I wanted to go out to California and work on my singing career, I had it all planned out and everything. My mom scared me into staying home. She cried. She was just terrified. "What's going to happen? Something bad is going to happen." She scared me into staying home.

Alice limits her contact with news about human struggle. "I don't want to hear any of the bad news," she said. "I got enough on my own. I don't need to hear the killings. Everything is bad news." Her father reiterates this fear by saying things like, "You shouldn't even go to the mall anymore. There are shootings everywhere."

For Alice, risk never has value. Whether it is hearing news from outside or the inevitability of being hurt by others in work and in love, Alice is always poised to protect herself from the outside world by living with her parents. Her self-protection has developed into role reversal in her relationships with her parents. This exacerbates Alice's experience of feeling limited by multiple barriers because of her living situation.

> There's a fear in going out on my own because that's when I've been

hurt. I've always got the raw end of things . . . plus, I have become a safe haven for my mom to come to, to get out of her chaos. My dad is getting more grumpy and my brother and sister-in-law also expect a lot out of my mom, so she comes to me. We have our shows that we watch. We have our little time together.

Loneliness: Experiences of social scarcity.

Living with her parents helps Alice manage her loneliness. Her social life has not kept up with that of her friends. She has friends from childhood going back to grade school. She says she likes to go out, although months may go by before the next occasion arises. Her life is determined in large part by living with her parents while her old friends have branched off into new pursuits and demonstrate self-reliance. She says her friends have families of their own now, as well as careers.

Going out is not necessarily how Alice's friends are spending their time. They are having life experiences to which Alice cannot relate. Alice can only share in experiences of her peers to a limited extent before she is laden with a painful awareness of what she is missing. Her avenues for social contact have, during her adult years, become gradually closed off.

Alice has not wanted to bring friends home to socialize because her father ignores rules about interpersonal boundaries and might walk through the home in his underwear. Alice does not trust her home environment with her friends. This limits her socialization further and, as a result, further embeds Alice in her parents' home life.

Growing sense of isolation.

Because of her gradual disconnection from adult relationships, coinciding with an increasing fear of "what's out there," Alice is progressively less inclined to make new friends. She also feels discouraged about work relationships. Those who need her as an administrative assistant are increasingly assimilated into what Alice refers to as "corporate America." She describes this world as inhabited by power-grabbers with an overt sense of entitlement.

At this point, another paradox presents itself. Alice does not experience her father as ambitious. However, in her work relationships, she repeatedly experiences reiterations, or enactments, of long-standing communication patterns with her father. Much like at home, at work Alice feels she is expected to anticipate what others want. As she says:

> It's like just absolutely being oppressed. Give them what they want before they know they want it. I'm tired of thinking like that. How am I supposed to guess what you're doing or what you're thinking? You have to absolutely know what their train of thought is.

Meanwhile, in the following passage of conversation, Alice speaks about her father:

> That's always the role I'm stuck in. Turns out everybody in my life that I got stuck with is like him. It's really easy to get sucked up into the house. "Hey come here! Just come here!" Never will tell me what he

wants. It's always, you have to come to him.

Not creating new friendships and wanting to retreat from a vicious work world causes Alice to feel lonely and hampered socially. She increasingly feels that she is missing out, which she attributes to being unprepared for life from the very beginning. Overall, she becomes increasingly more entrenched in the complicated comfort of staying home.

Guilt about fantasies of leaving.

Alice says she stays home because she is unprepared for and afraid of what is "out there." She has gradually become closed off from possibilities of creating a life independent from her parents. She also stays home because she is concerned about her mother's wellbeing. The household is chaotic. Her father is increasingly uninhibited in his manner and tone of communication and in his disregard for the feelings of others in the family, especially Alice's mother. Alice sees that her mother has become less outspoken. Perhaps she is getting tired. Alice's brother does not help. She feels responsible for making sure that her mother is taken care of and protected from her father's intensity.

Alice experiences internal conflict stemming from a sense of obligation toward her mother. She would love to have her own home, and dreams of a log cabin in the woods where she can fish, read what she wants to read, entertain friends, and tell family members to leave when she wants to be alone. Alice says that finances keep her from taking the step of getting her own place.

Yet, further exploration also leads Alice to consider the guilt she feels when she thinks about leaving. She would be abandoning her mother to her demanding father. Alice thinks her mother shows less backbone and has become more submissiveness. Her mother reminds Alice that without Alice in the house, her mother would not be able to make it. Alice recalls her mother saying, "Everybody is going to leave me at the same time. When I need you all the most, you're going to leave me alone." Alice remembers that after saying this, her mother began to cry. "Guilt," Alice says. "It makes me feel guilty."

Alone together.

Alice feels closed off from the emotional lives of her family members, and relationally invisible to others in her family system. She experiences communication between family members as "dysfunctional," or flattened. For example, Alice says that people in her family do not talk about their personal experiences and feelings. They seem to not know each other as individuals. Instead, relating is constellated around role identification. Her father orders her mother to do things for him, and otherwise her parents rarely talk to each other.

With respect to feeling invisible, Alice says that her parents do not know her as a unique individual. They have not taken her interests into account in terms of how she lives her life. Most starkly evident is Alice's experience of having an informally designated role in her family as "daughter," which supersedes any concept of her as an individual. Alice is her parents' daughter—not a musician, not someone who has tried to develop a career path, and not someone who needs intimacy and friendships beyond the family system.

Alice's father is her representative for what is "outside." He tells her what she needs and what she will experience beyond the safety of home. This galvanizes her experience of being "alone together." Her father insists about that Alice will inevitably be hurt by life itself, and that risks are not worth the inherent uncertainty and struggle. This insistence prevents Alice from claiming her own experiences and her own agency.

Alice is afraid of taking a risk, but she is not always certain she *needs* to be afraid. Yet she remains alone, rather than risk having an experience that would reinforce her father's stern apprehensions. And perhaps Alice remains alone rather than be confronted by the possibility that she could contradict her father. Alice stays with what she knows for sure: her home. But given the chaos inside the house, her home life is in fact uncertain. This paradox renders her unknown to others and to herself.

Alice often experiences feeling "done to" by figures of authority, caught in dichotomous interpersonal patterns. By contrast, she does not experience belonging, collaboration, and mutual appreciation. This is another example of how being "alone together" takes shape in Alice's life. Her perception within these dichotomies involves being persecuted, of being stepped on and devastated by the power of authority figures who seem entitled to take whatever they want: her time, her earnest intentions, and her creative capacities. Inherent in this pattern of feeling "done to" is Alice's disavowal of her own potential power and agency. She is reduced to victim status. She is not allowed to obtain, do, or have what others have. This pattern perpetuates her experience of being alone and left alone.

It's too late.

During the interview process, Alice revised her thinking about why she lives with her parents. By the fourth interview, she said that fear used to be the reason she did not move out of her parents' home and live on her own, but she is no longer afraid. She says her finances are what keeps her home now. Yet again, with further exploration, Alice goes on to say that she does not know how to get along independently.

> By the time I realized you've got to take a shot at life, to take a risk, it's too late. I'm in that older realm, like my father. It's hard to get out from under that blanket of heavy and be where I'm supposed to be.

Alice does not know how to make choices that would prevent her from being hurt. She does not know how to socialize with her peers. She needs the security of living at home because working in the world today requires a relational acumen that she has not learned. Decades of disappointments from lost opportunities reinforce her lived experience of irretrievably missing out. Her accounting of her life brings up a palpable awareness, acknowledged between us in the final interview, of the inevitability that Alice will one day find herself literally alone.

Impressions from the interviews with Alice.

To the researcher, Alice consistently seemed to blow into the interview space as though running from a storm. She was typically restless as we started to talk. I often sensed that she would like to run out of our interviews. I would periodically check in about her feelings toward

participating. Overtly, however, Alice seemed to be in charge and ready to get on with the conversation.

In the first interview, she wanted to make sure that I understood she does not think of me as her therapist, and that she was participating because she wants to help me understand her experience of living with her parents.

In turn, I expressed my understanding that our interviews were not psychotherapy. I explained that while the process of learning about Alive involves talking in-depth about her experiences, it was not my intent to replace her therapist. I acknowledged that this depth of exploration may evoke difficult feelings in Alice. I invited her to talk about those feelings as we went along.

When Alice expressed concern about these boundaries, I wondered if she was expressing anxiety about possibly embarking into uncharted territory during the interviews. This would not necessarily be uncharted territory in the context of psychotherapy, but in any other relationship the topics and feelings we discussed would be foreclosed for Alice. I became concerned she might not feel safe participating as a research subject. I was asking her to be open in a way that she guards against outside of psychotherapy. However, in each interview Alice reiterated her intent to participate and contribute to the study.

I had a persistent feeling of walking a tightrope during the entire process of interviewing Alice. Our connection felt tenuous. I was very cautious about my own demeanor, which developed parallel to my increasing awareness of (a) how seriously Alice felt about her participation in the study, (b) how cautious she is in relationships, and (c) how tenuous her

connections with others might seem to her. Perhaps in this sense I was experiencing Alice's struggle with authoring her life.

Consistently through the course of the interviews, I found myself thinking of closed dyadic processes, an interpersonal twoness that precludes intersubjectivity, which may indicate problems for Alice in the development of agency. Alice describes herself as an object upon whom life's challenges are imposed, provoking her ongoing efforts to ward off or protect herself from such impositions, particularly from figures of authority such as work supervisors. This warding off of life's challenges seems to perpetuate deep-seated, role-based relationships. The result is a perversion of agency.

Case Study #2: Wojciech

Descriptive information.

Wojciech thinks quickly, talks fast, and seems to run circles around his feelings and thoughts about living with his mother. Yet his feelings come through as intensely as his efforts to avoid them. Wojciech is a single white man who has lived all but four of his 44 years in his parents' home. His father died just over two years ago. Wojciech has two older siblings (a brother and a sister), who have their own families and live in their own homes.

Wojciech says his mother is a "complainer" who treats him with anger and disdain. He tries to stay out of her way as much as possible. Wojciech remembers his mother saying to him, on more than one occasion, that it was time for him to move out. Being a target of his mother's scorn causes Wojciech to feel isolated from the rest of his family. He thinks his siblings are oblivious

to the dynamic between Wojciech and his mother. When a guest or another family member is in the house, Wojciech sees his mother switch to being nice. On these occasions, she stops complaining. Wojciech's elderly uncle stayed for one month about two years ago while preparing to move back to his homeland in Poland. During this period, Wojciech received much more breathing room from his mother. This was a temporary relief for Wojciech, but he knows she is always resentful of his presence in her home.

For Wojciech, the tension with his mother is manageable compared to life-long struggles with his father. Wojciech often felt he was the object of his father's rage during childhood. His experience of being a target intensified, especially as he became physically able to match his father's strength. Wojciech was subjected to physical "beatings" by his father during most of his childhood, but he cannot name any specific cause for the violence. As he remembers his father, Wojciech manages the emotional intensity by selectively focusing on his relationship with his mother, which is merely an "annoyance." His mother is just a "complainer." Nothing else can be said about her. As such, the hatred Wojciech feels for his father becomes only a blur, and therefore a superficially livable reality.

Wojciech remembers his mother's brother moving to the United States from Poland around 1983, when Wojciech was in the fourth grade and about 10 years of age. At the time, Poland experienced considerable uprising among workers, who wanted labor rights and an end to Soviet communism. His uncle stayed with the family for about four years while he got settled with work and finances, until he could afford his own home. Wojciech expresses respect for his

extended-family life, and for a moment he seems to identify with his uncle and the immigrant experience.

> I remember people, other students, like more Americanized kids, they would look funny upon that, that my uncle was living with us. But to me, I just never thought anything different, anything weird of it. And then other people are like, “We don’t have our uncle living with us.” It wasn’t anything mystical or anything. It’s like, when you come here, you’ve got to get your ground, get your footing. I think to Americans it’s more . . . when you’re fourth, fifth, sixth-generation American, I think it’s more foreign, living with multiple relatives in a home.

The only time Wojciech permanently lived away from his parents’ home was when he was in the military, between the ages of 18 and 22. Despite the comparatively structured regime of the military, Wojciech welcomed the opportunity to escape the mundanity of his parents’ middle-class lifestyle. He lived in Europe for most of those years, an experience which he thinks presented the possibility of one day being on his own again, engaging in new life endeavors and new experiences.

Wojciech was in a relationship with a woman off and on for five years. The relationship ended approximately six months before Wojciech’s first interview for this study. This was his longest romantic relationship. Although he never shared a home with her, Wojciech stayed with his girlfriend occasionally and inconsistently, only as a matter of convenience. His girlfriend

lived closer to his workplace than his mother. Where he stayed depended on Wojciech's work schedule.

These five years of the relationship were the only time since his stint in the military when Wojciech might have formally moved out of his mother's home. Toward the end of the relationship, Wojciech's girlfriend bought a home and asked Wojciech to move in with her. Wojciech did not like his girlfriend's new home and he did not like the location. Most important to Wojciech was the fact that the home was too far from where he works, and living there would add more time to his daily commute. He did not consider living with his girlfriend as a way of growing their relationship. He expressed during the interviews that he felt put out by his girlfriend buying a home in a location that required a long commute. Their relationship ended when Wojciech became adamant he would remain living with his mother.

Categories of meaning.

Locked-up in complementarity.

When Wojciech talks about his life in response to the interview questions, he only seems capable of exploring his emotional life for brief moments. The experience of living with his parents is characterized by ways in which each of his parents has obstructed his path. Wojciech speaks of his father and his mother with very salient emotional intensity. His father died more than two years ago. If this fact were not known through the course of our interviews, I could easily have assumed his father was still living.

Living with his mother at his childhood home is emotionally excruciating for Wojciech. He compensates for the displeasure he experiences in his relationship with his mother by organizing his home life primarily around his work schedule, a rigidly structured weekly routine of rising early in the morning and turning in early at night. Wojciech describes this routine as "rinse and repeat." He and his mother live together like roommates. They eat separately, clean up only after themselves, and essentially live separate lives. Their embedded (and seemingly scripted) emotional distancing masks the effects of a complex history of chaotic family dynamics.

His mother's persistent efforts to display her irritation with him is excruciating to Wojciech, as is her obvious efforts to ignore him. He says he cannot make a move without hearing his mother "complain" about the "noise." It seems like she would rather he become not only unseen and unheard, but totally invisible.

> I'm literally trying to make as little noise as possible because I just don't want to hear her complaining. That's the only thing. If I ever wanted to move out, that would be the only thing that would be a big plus: I don't have to deal with listening to her. It's like, you need support. And if you're not getting it, you don't realize you're not getting it if you've never gotten it.

Wojciech does not experience his relationship with his mother as a source of "support." To him, support means that someone demonstrates their interest in you by asking, "How's school?" or, "How can I help?" He says that trying to talk with his mother about his life is ". . . like trying

to talk to an elephant." This metaphor is Wojciech's way of describing his experience of family life—and of living almost all of his adult life with his mother—as psychologically flattened. His mother has vague, nondescript (but ironically ever-present) expectations of Wojciech that are only expressed by her saying, "It's time for you to move out."

Wojciech's experience of living with his mother is an experience of invisibility. He does not feel engaged by his mother, and does not want to engage her. To him, all communication from his mother expresses her desire to avoid him. Wojciech does not describe his mother-son relationship as enlivened by mutual sharing, or a sense that each of them wants to know the other as fully alive. Instead he describes the pair existing in each other's lives solely as mother and son, which freezes their relationship with limited life-giving potential. In this respect, the relationship is stuck in role identification or complementarity.

Where's home? Practicality of relationship.

Last year Wojciech's decided to continue living at ". . . our . . . *my* mom's house" rather than move in with his girlfriend. This involved a practical decision-making process of considering whether he liked his girlfriend's new home and whether its proximity to his workplace was suitable.

Wojciech gives highest priority to developing his financial autonomy as a prerequisite to moving out. However, he is ambivalent about what constitutes readiness. He has been working consistently since he left the Army. He is solidly employed in a technical field and is satisfied

generally with his current income. He says he just needs to have enough savings to buy a house. Although he can do it financially, Wojciech will not move into an apartment because that would amount to throwing his money away. Living with his mother helps Wojciech save more money in preparation for someday buying his own home. Additionally, he says, ". . . it also gives me time to figure out what I want".

> Before, I couldn't afford a house. Now it's just that I want to save and I don't want to go through the steps of getting a house. If I can wait two years and get the house that I want, I'd rather just wait. I've already been living at home for this long, two more years or three more years or four more years . . . what's the difference?

By still figuring things out, and therefore not moving away from home, Wojciech is perpetually unresolved about his future while living in a situation where he feels unwanted. His mother has told him that it is time for him to move out. She complains to him, a passive way of pushing or poking at him, which increases the tension and discomfort between them. By now, it seems, Wojciech's mother resents his presence in her home. He was never expected to stay home, nor did he even ask to stay home. While Wojciech talks about his intention to keep his goal of financial independence front and center, he isolates his awareness of the dynamic tension with his mother.

Wojciech's plan for staying home centers on "saving money." This is his most satisfying preoccupation. The dream of "having enough" opens a door to reveries of decorating his home

when he finds it. He may just focus on the bedroom and the living room at first. This way he can gradually buy things that he really likes, instead of wasting money trying to get the house furnished all at once. If he is in a relationship when he begins to look for a house, he and his girlfriend can decide where to live as a couple. It will be a mutual decision.

At this point, the dream becomes precarious. How, he wonders, is he ever going to meet someone who wants to live with him? The dream of autonomy becomes more complex when it involves a partner. Perhaps Wojciech can "buy" a woman from the Philippines, as his friends have suggested on multiple occasions, as a joke. He takes the suggestion seriously.

> In all honesty I don't want to live here. But right now, I'm not dating anybody. If I'm dating somebody, if I'm married, then I could definitely, probably move out much faster. I guess one reason to look for a mail-order bride is I can move out of the house, but I wouldn't do that. I'm assuming there's probably some girl in the Philippines that wouldn't mind living here. It's like the lottery: "I won the lottery! I'm going to live in America!" But, if I couldn't hold a conversation with the woman, no. And, if she didn't have her own opinion, I don't want that.

The theme of "having enough" commodifies Wojciech's potential for agency. His potential becomes the "things" that interfere with his plans for a steady relationship and having his own home. If he were satisfied with living with his mother there would not be the question, "Why does he stay?" There is no judgment inherent in this question. Wojciech expresses being

dissatisfied with not leaving his childhood home. Yet, saving money and "having enough" seem to prevent him from actualizing a sense of agency, from responding to his realization that his mother does not want him there.

Wojciech is aware that his mother wants him to leave, but in day-to-day life, he isolates this awareness from conscious attention. By concentrating on saving and never "having enough," he perpetuates his desire for recognition by other subjects and for the inclusion of others in his life. In this way Wojciech seems to live an existence of relational invisibility. From an intersubjective standpoint, Wojciech gives the practicality of saving money much higher importance than relating with his mother as a like-subject. Meanwhile, his mother may feel used by her son, who does not pay rent and who relates to her as an "annoyance."

Breaking free through transient acts of aggression.

More than a decade ago, Wojciech took college classes in the medical field. He dropped out after an altercation and physical fight with his father. He says he was provoked by his father, and not for the first time. The fight ended when his father called the police. The police came to their home and charged Wojciech with "elder abuse." Wojciech became concerned that he would not be able to find work in medicine with this history. He changed his focus to technical training. Wojciech has not had difficulty finding employment.

He considered trying to get the charges for elder abuse expunged from his record. He had subsequent conversations with the police when his father called them to the home. They

eventually were satisfied that the calls were his father's last-ditch effort to exert parental and patriarchal authority.

Violence between Wojciech and his father was the norm for most of his life until his father died. Even when Wojciech was a boy in grade school, his father was contentious and challenging. He would often try to provoke Wojciech into a fist-fight. Wojciech says that he was "beaten" many times by his father as a child and into adolescence. He expresses hatred for his father, and says his father got through life ". . . just by luck." Constructive or positive communication between father and son was limited. In his later years, the father would provoke Wojciech by passive means, such as hiding his son's laptop or taking the last hamburger at the family barbeque before Wojciech had a chance to eat.

While he maintains a highly responsible focus on work and finances, Wojciech has a boyish preoccupation with wanting to buck authority. He links his relationship with his father to his difficulty with authority figures, especially with what he refers to as "misplaced authority." Wojciech currently experiences this difficulty while interacting with police officers and workplace managers. He pays particular attention to learning how far he can bend the rules, as though he derives pleasure from taunting authority figures without getting into trouble.

He recalls driving at night through a neighborhood that has heavy police patrol. His friend was an Asian-American man with dark skin. Wojciech decided to test the climate of the neighborhood. He thought he could easily be pulled over because of racial profiling. As it

happened, although Wojciech was not speeding, he was pulled over. During his exchange with the police officer Wojciech challenged the officer to search the car. The police officer did so, and during the process Wojciech spoke loudly to his friend about the office "wasting time," instead of arresting other drivers for "driving home drunk." Prior to this experience, Wojiech had been forcibly restrained by police officers and even spent time in jail. No legal repercussions followed the officer's car search, ubt Wojciech derived pleasure from knowing he was toying with the limits of the police officer's patience.

Wojciech's charge of elder abuse developed from childhood experiences with his father, who crippled their relationship with physical assaults. Wojciech's acts of aggression, via taunting authority figures, are breakouts of his desire to impress his potential for agency onto authority figures who are symbolically equal to his biological father. These breakouts convey a perversion of agency that precludes Wojciech's personal initiative to author his life in ways that promote his self-awareness and capacity for mutual recognition in relationships.

Fleeting dreams of a floating escape.

Wojciech's goal of "saving money" is daunting because he now wants to buy a 37-foot sailboat and spend his life sailing around the world. He might buy a sailboat instead of a house, or he might buy both. He is not sure yet.

> The biggest reason that I save up so much money is boats are ridiculously expensive. The 50-footer . . . maybe if my retirement fund does really well. But even a 40-footer is like $240,000, and that's not even starting to put in options.

When asked about his experience with sailing Wojciech replies boldly that he has never been on a sailboat.

> I just think it's neat . . . no gas, and you can go anywhere in the world. I'm just thinking about the ones you can afford that are ocean-worthy. How far are the weather ranges on them? With a sailboat you can literally just sail around the world. The only time you need the engine running is to charge the battery.

Although he has never been in a sailboat, Wojciech has collected information about the intricacies of maintaining a large ocean-worthy sailing craft. He attends boat shows and reads about the mechanics and maintenance essential for taking care of a 37-foot boat. He is concerned about (and studies) the legalities pertaining to life on the sea. Wojciech knows where to train for a sailing license and a permit to dock in parts unknown. He hopes to begin training to sail in the next year or two.

Wojciech says he is very much drawn to the idea of sailing around the world, taking his time and stopping in various ports as he follows the coastline of all the world's continents. This dream keeps Wojciech looking forward, even more so than thinking about buying his own home, having a long-term love relationship, or creating his own family.

> I just think it's something neat to be able to say you circumnavigated the globe. I don't know how many people have done it. I know Magellan was the first one to do it. There is just something appealing to that. Like I said, I don't know the first thing about, like, how close you can get to land . . . how far you can go without having to go through customs.

Wojciech dreams of having the freedom to be off the grid, unavailable to people who need him, spontaneously wandering wherever he wants on any given day. So, he stays home to save money. This logic of staying home to get away constitutes a circular pattern of reverie that provides Wojciech moments of breaking free and having what he wants. He fantasizes about escaping to exotic places in peaceful solitude on a sea-worthy craft that serves as a form of cryptic incubation of potential, checked and challenged only by natural elements and without impingements from a life-threatening father, a disapproving mother, and uncompromising women.

Impressions from the interviews with Wojciech.

After writing this material and giving extensive thought to the development of the categories of meaning, I am surprised to recall how kind and responsible Wojciech seemed to me. These were qualities he brought consistently throughout the interview process. He was always on time and took each interview process very seriously. This is an impression by recapitulation.

From the beginning of the interview process, although he seemed anxious, Wojciech was bright and earnest about his participation in this study. He typically spoke at length without interruption. I often wondered if he wanted to become friends. Wojciech was engaging. He also seemed naïve and I wondered if he is isolated, other than his contact with people while working. He talked about meeting friends after work on Friday nights for pizza and beer. Yet after each interview, and again after all the interviews were completed, I felt adrift without life support. I thought I would have difficulty parsing categories of meaning. Perhaps there was nothing to say. I couldn't sort out meaning because I felt deluged. I first needed to find my way back from a long trajectory of disclosure after each interview. As I consider it now, the feeling I had overall was like needing to swim back to shore without a lifesaver—a long, exhausting haul. I cannot help but wonder if Wojciech has been traumatized and does not realize it consciously. "It's like, you need support," he said at one point, "and if you're not getting it, you don't realize you're not getting it if you've never gotten it."

How does one ask for anything if they do not know what they need? Perhaps Wojciech is subject to the impacts of intergenerational traumas. The one positive identification in Wojciech's life seemed to be his uncle from Poland who returned to Poland relatively recently after living most of his adult life in the United States. By association, and considering Wojciech's experiences of feeling separate from peers in school who could not relate to being first-generation American, I reviewed videos of events in Poland that happened around the time that his uncle left Poland: turmoil in the streets, the vicious stronghold police officers attempted

to force upon demonstrators for workers' rights, so much misplaced authority. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia—so much terror for hundreds of years of occupation by one captor and then another, over and over. So much dread and sadness.

Case Study #3: Dana

Descriptive information.

Dana is energetic and eager to talk about living with her parents. Upon first meeting, Dana seems bright and candid. She is a 59-year-old retired woman who never married and who has no children. With few exceptions, throughout her life Dana has thought of herself as (a) "sheltered," (b) "the kind of person people make fun of" because she is overweight, and (c) as someone who has missed out on just about every sort of experience associated with adult life.

Dana says she has come a long way since her mid-twenties, especially since the day she moved back into her parents' home. She had to move back after the break-up of her two-year relationship with a boyfriend named Jerry. Dana never dated in school. The relationship with Jerry was the longest of the two adult romantic relationships.

Dana shared expenses with Jerry when they lived together. After the break-up, she could not afford to have her own home. She describes feeling surprised and betrayed by Jerry's sudden change of heart. Dana lost her only experience of feeling like an independent woman, building a life with a man she loved. Looking back, Dana vividly recalls the way she felt the day she moved back to her parents' home. It was almost the same feeling she had years later when taking an

early retirement from the only job she thought she would ever need. On both days, Dana felt as though what she had been building for herself, “a life of my own,” had completely collapsed. On that day she felt like “a failure.”

Dana says she did not want to move back home with her parents, but she had no other choice. Her mother was “ashamed” of her for living with her boyfriend. Dana sensed contempt emanating from her mother. Her father was emotionally supportive through this time, and Dana continues to feel grateful for his compassion.

Dana continued working her full-time factory position with benefits, just as her parents had wanted for her. She found this job when she was 20 years old, after working as a cashier since graduating high school. Her parents did not think being a cashier was a good job for her, even though Dana felt comfortable and liked the work. She found a new job with a local corporation doing line work.

This job provided Dana with more financial security, and for that reason she hoped to work there her entire adult life. The biggest reason for wanting to find the right job and stay there was that Dana was generally very uncomfortable with people. Finding a job where she could interact openly with her co-workers was an important accomplishment for her. It was something she had not previously thought she could do.

Dana describes difficulty making friends during grade school and high school, due to her “shyness.” As a child, she played with neighbor kids, riding bikes and spending time at each

other's houses. Thinking back to that time, Dana realizes these were not "real friends." By the time she and her peers in the neighborhood started school, she did not make new friends. Dana's mother was involved in some school events when Dana was in grade school. However, this involvement did not give Dana the support and confidence she needed to socialize. She missed most of the usual and significant formative social experiences with her peers. She was "shy," "overweight," and painfully "self-conscious." Beyond childhood and primary school, Dana only socialized at the end of a shift, with her coworkers.

Dana felt deeply and emotionally involved in the lives of her parents even as a child. As far back as early grade school, she felt responsible for being their emotional support, especially when they were at odds with each other. Her father occasionally called home to let her mother know he was running late at work. Dana's mother regularly became distraught at these times, thinking that her husband was having an affair, and that he did not love her. Before her father arrived home for the night, Dana's mother would go to her bedroom, close the door, and take to her bed. She would not come out for hours. Dana would take over making dinner. During our interviews, these specific memories figure prominently in Dana's recollection.

When her father finally returned home, he and Dana would discuss how they would reassure and bolster her mother so that she would join them for dinner. Dana would talk to her mother through the bedroom door and try to coax her to come out. This tension between her parents

played out almost weekly and the effect seemed to limit Dana's parents' social life, which was limited to Dana's aunts and uncles.

Dana describes her sister, older than Dana by six years, as her opposite. Her sister had a lot of friends. She was always busy after school and on weekends. She got married about five years after graduating high school, and quickly had two children, three years apart. Dana's sister was diagnosed with cancer and died 18 years ago, when her children were still in grade school.

Dana's sister was never on the scene when conflicts arose between their parents. Dana talked with her sister about the conflicts when they were both adults, but her sister did not remember the fights, and accused Dana of "lying." As a result, Dana began to question her memories. She even told herself she must be "crazy" for making up "lies" about her parents.

In just the last year, Dana's mother has acknowledged that these conflicts with Dana's father did happen. This acknowledgement has been a profound and life-changing relief to Dana. Her mother even apologized to Dana for, as Dana says, "what she put me through." The relief Dana feels from knowing now that these childhood memories are real has helped her begin to re-gather something essential in herself. As she puts it, she now has a sense that "I matter," and trusts her knowledge of the past. She has "come a long way" since her early adult years, when she moved back home.

Three years after her sister died, Dana took on parenting responsibilities for her younger nephew, who at the time (as a 10-year-old) was having trouble with his father and at school.

Dana has been a strong advocate for her nephew, who is now 25 years old and lives with Dana and her mother. Recently, this nephew has faced legal concerns stemming from his addiction to methamphetamines.

Ten years ago, Dana's father began to develop problems with his eyesight, and soon thereafter suffered a massive stroke, which left him paralyzed and in a coma. Dana and her mother became heavily engaged in daily medical consultations and visits to the nursing home where Dana's father had been taken for long-term acute care.

For nearly three years following her father's stroke, Dana and her mother spent every day with him. Dana always felt close to her father. He had a dry sense of humor and brought lightness to the family circle. He always made sure that Dana's mother was taken care of. Life changed considerably, however, after Dana's sister died. Dana says that she began to feel responsible for making sure that the family held together, that holidays and birthdays continued to be celebrated. She spent most of her free time with her parents going for rides in the country and watching television at home. After her father started to have difficulty with his eyesight, Dana took over all the driving and made sure her parents had what they needed every day. Dana's father died five years ago.

At age 59, Dana remains single. She is just beginning to initiate contact with a woman she knew at work. Dana hopes that a friendship could develop, which would allow her to branch out

from only having her mother as a confidant. She feels encouraged by changes she sees her mother making.

Dana feels that she needs to develop a social life, even if only includes a few friends. She has become acutely aware that she does not want to be alone when her mother dies. Dana has noticed an interesting dynamic: as she becomes more self-reliant, so does her mother. In turn, because her mother has started to do more for herself, Dana feels she now has approval from her mother to "have my own life."

Categories of meaning.

"Sheltered."

During her childhood, Dana felt "isolated." She quickly corrects herself on this point, saying that instead of "isolated," she felt "sheltered."

> (My sister) did a lot more than I did. I was the shy kid. She was more outgoing. My friends—not really my friends, but kids from school—they'd be going to the movies. They had each other. I didn't have friends to do stuff like that with. I was very sheltered.

Dana's sister was able to make friends, and Dana wonders why that skill was lost on her. For Dana, life has been organized around taking care of her parents since around the age of 10. In this way, her life takes on the quality of being sheltered. It does not seem that her parents imposed this condition on her. As an adult, Dana chose to stay home to help smooth the tension between her parents. Dana has become increasingly isolated socially and becomes "sheltered" from experiences with peers. Such experiences could potentially inform her of what she brings to relationship other than her role with her parents.

"Living my mother's life."

Dana believes she can fulfill the role of surrogate parent for her adult nephew. She acknowledges and appreciates the trust that has developed between them. However, Dana is troubled by her role in her mother's life. She can't discern how she is important to her mother. She has difficulty differentiating between her lived experiences and her mother's life experiences. "I'm having trouble separating and having my own life," she says. "I'm not living my own life. I'm living my mom's life." This goes back to Dana's childhood years, when she first started bolstering her mother through day-to-day life.

> . . . probably 10, 11, 12, right around there I was always the one . . . I learned to cook by watching my mom, and then I just kind of took over when she would go through her temper. I call them temper tantrums because that's kind of what she was like. She'd get mad at my dad. And then she'd be all mad. And more or less, we did

> what mom wanted to do. So, I now go back to that sometimes. I have to say to myself, I'm not going to go back to that spot in my childhood. I'm going to be the adult, and I need to do something for myself.

Dana wants to live her own life, but she has invested a great deal of her life, emotionally and psychologically, to her parents, going back to childhood. Dana only confides in her mother. She is satisfied discussing worries and life challenges with her mother, but she also realizes that only having her mother as a "friend" limits her personal growth. When Dana talks to her mother, it seems that her mother is only half-listening, and has little to say in response. Because of this, it seems that Dana's mother "isn't present."

Dana's mother relies on her daughter to make decisions. Not only does her mother want to go everywhere that her daughter goes, but she expects Dana to take on the role of "partner" or "husband." This is a major source of frustration and confusion for Dana.

> It's difficult because she is such a clingy person. She needs me to be there, like my dad was. When we first moved in together she would always say, "Well, your dad used to do this. Your dad used to do that." I would say, "I'm not my dad. My dad was in love with you. And I love you. But I'm not my dad." I think it was hard for her at first to get that through her head that I'm not her partner. I'm not her husband. I'm her daughter.

Dana knows intellectually what constitutes healthy interpersonal boundaries. However, she finds it especially difficult to separate her mother's needs from her own. It would be different if Dana had a family of her own, or if she had a sense of having her own life apart from her mother. Now that her mother is older, Dana's feeling of being "held back" has intensified. She loves her mother, but "it gets frustrating."

> I can't blame everything on my mom. Part of it is my own insecurities about going out and meeting new people. But I think she's holding me back from doing that. And it makes me frustrated, like I said. And I get very down because I could go do this. But she doesn't want me to go by myself and do something. It's very hard for me to tell her "no" because I become that little kid again, who has to take care of the mom because the mom has got her problems.

Holding back.

Dana does not have a friend to talk with about her life. It would help her to have someone besides her mother to confide in and share experiences. There are plenty of extended family members who would understand if Dana wanted to talk, but she holds back from sharing. She does this because she does not want people in her family to think badly of her mother. Also, she does not want people to think badly of her.

> It's really hard to talk about my mom to other people, because I don't want them to think badly about her—or that I was a bad daughter. I think if I had a close

> friend, that would probably be a good thing. I could talk to her because she wouldn't be family. I need to have an outlet.

There is a double-bind inherent in Dana's effort to protect her mother from the opinions and the judgments of others. This double-bind becomes apparent in Dana's discussion of needing a friend. She expects that having a friend would require monumental effort. She would have to contradict the engrained pattern of protecting her mother from the anticipated negative opinions of outsiders. Dana would also have to come to grips with the potentially painful process of opening herself up to others while developing new relationships. To avoid long-term pain in the future, in the short term Dana must confront her protected self and her ideals about protecting her mother. As long as Dana has her mother "to live for," she might take the risk of not taking a risk.

> I feel I need more. It's scary because if I don't have friends, I have a feeling that I'm just going to stay at home and die. I have nothing. Even though I have problems with my mom, I have her to live for because I need to take care of her. And I don't want to not take care of her. I have always had this thought that the child takes care of the parent.

To Dana, it is "the child" who provides the needs of the parent. When describing her difficulty separating her own needs from her mother's needs, Dana reiterates that it has been her life-long role. She is still a child who is "taking care of the parent." She acknowledges that, to provide this

care, she must "hold in" her natural desire to make her own connections and her own life, however challenging that might be.

Guilt and shame.

Dana feels she has been a disappointment to her mother since moving in with a boyfriend almost 40 years ago. Dana's mother disapproves of a couple living together without being married. When the young-adult Dana made forays into independent decision-making, her mother's reactions were informed by family history, specifically a development that involved Dana's grandmother.

When Dana's grandfather died, her grandmother made significant and surprising changes. Prior to her husband's death, Dana's grandmother was submissive. She followed her husband's rules. She deferred to him to do all the driving, pay the bills, and coordinate their social life. After Dana's grandfather died, her grandmother began dating. She found her first job. She began driving for the first time, even though she had been legally able to drive for years. She made friends of her own instead of only spending time with her husband's friends. Dana's mother disapproved of this sudden openness. She felt that her mother was betraying her late father. Dana's mother also felt personally betrayed by her mother's expressions of individuality. These behaviors seemed to Dana's mother to be the behaviors of a stranger with ill intentions.

Dana says that now, in the wake of her father's death, her mother could be much more like her grandmother in terms of initiative and self-reliance.

> She is just clinging to me instead of going out and doing her own thing. Because she wasn't that old (when my father died). My grandma was still working when she was 82. And my mom just acts like an invalid, like she can't take care of herself, and she can't make up her own mind about things.

Dana feels folded into her mother's disappointment regarding her own mother's behavior. Both Dana and her grandmother have been maternal figures for Dana's mother. By association, Dana experiences shame for not fulfilling her mother's expectations for living a respectable lifestyle. When Dana tries to assertively express her desire to experience more on her own, her mother often responds by instilling guilt.

> When I try to talk to her about how I feel, she'll say, "Well, do you want me to move out?" So, then there's this little guilt. She has a way of switching it around, and then it makes me feel like the bad guy. I try not to give into that guilt. I'll look at her and say, "Mom, don't start that. You know that I don't want you to move out." I try not to feel guilty about it. But she has a way that she's used all her life to make the other person feel guilty.

This is not a new development. Dana's mother behaved in similar ways when Dana was a girl.

> She would say things that would make you feel guilty, so you would do whatever she wanted you to do. She was a yeller. She always yelled, and that was kind of scary. When you came home from school, you never knew if she was going to be in a good

mood or a bad mood. You never wanted to bring friends home. So, we were isolated. I think "sheltered" is the word I want instead of "isolated." Sheltered. What was fun for us was family stuff. It was all about family.

When I asked, Dana later clarified that her mother in no longer "a yeller." That was only when Dana was much younger. As Dana talks about her childhood and being "sheltered" in regard to her mother, she conveys discomfort. She acknowledges heaviness and shame about her home life, yet she disconnects from any ownership of her feelings. Her dissonance with these experiences emerges and becomes evident as Dana distances herself from feelings about these experiences of being yelled at and shamed by her mother.

Dana remembers her mother saying, "You never wanted to bring a friend home," but Dana did not have friends. Dana wonders whether her mother was talking about Dana's sister—or maybe even her father. As she begins to elaborate on the word "sheltered," Dana shifts her focus, saying, "It was all about family." Perhaps distancing herself from her own feelings of guilt and shame shows the extent to which Dana works unconsciously to protect herself and her mother—not only from difficult life challenges, but from the realities of Dana's lived experience.

"Going backwards."

Further inquiry and exploration prompted a more detailed discussion about how Dana experiences guilt and shame in her relationship with her mother. Dana has had considerable

difficulty staying present in moments of high tension with her mother. When Dana describes her feelings to her mother, the older woman seems “not present.” Additionally, Dana feels like she is “going backwards” when she is assertive or disagrees with her mother. When asked what “going backwards” means, Dana responds as follows:

> I go back to my childhood. It brings up a lot of feelings from when we were little, when she used to hit us with the belt. Because if we did something wrong, she was flying in a rage and grabbed Dad’s belt and whipped us. It just brings that back. I need to be good or something might happen.

Dana also says that “going backward” as “not moving forward” are consequences of her moving back home.

> I should have been moving forward, into my own place. I just felt like I failed. I had to go back into this situation, where I really didn’t want to be. “Going backwards” is not being independent. I wasn’t doing the independent things I was doing before. My mom was out of the house and married before she was 22. So, she figured I should be doing the same thing. I forgot all about that. She pushed me to get out because she was (out at that age). I completely forgot about that. I felt like I was that little kid again.

Dana seems open as she talks about her experiences of feeling emotionally vulnerable in her relationship with her mother. However, “going backwards” also means that Dana can become

defensive on her mother's behalf. She can feel pressured even now by her mother, coerced, even bullied. "Going backwards" not only refers to Dana's experiences of becoming "that child again." It also describes her efforts to distance herself further from the anger she feels toward her mother. She will again defer to speaking generally about family life, about having "fun," and that "fun was with the family." Perhaps Dana does this to keep both of her parents alive as a couple symbolically, and to shine a positive (yet blurring) light on her childhood experiences with her mother when she felt "scared."

Dana did feel close to her father and greatly misses him. It is with respect to her father that Dana sounds nostalgic at times.

> When she was being a mother, she was a great mother. She was involved in all our school activities. She was in PTA. She did work for our spaghetti supper. She'd come to the schools, and she would bake cupcakes. She was a good mother. But I think that like her brother and sister and her sister-in-law, I think they know how she is. They've known. But I just feel it's good to talk about it.

Finding initiative.

Dana knows that her mother can manage her own basic self-care. Dana remembers that her father "did everything for (my mother)." When Dana reminds herself that her mother is capable—and therefore Dana is not necessarily trapped—she allows herself to stop and consider

her own potential for having “my own life.” Recognizing that her mother is “able to do” for herself reinforces Dana’s own sense of ability.

Talking about her experiences helps Dana recognize this new dynamic. As she becomes increasingly aware of her mother’s mortality, Dana acknowledges the finitude of her own life. She must do something to engage in living her own life because the prospect of being alone without a life frightens her. Dana finds initiative in this line of thinking. She also realizes that at times she had initiative without realizing it. This occurs when she remembers that she is not the same person she was 10 years ago and that she does have a sense of movement about her life.

> It has been five years since my father has been gone, and it’s time to let go and be my own person because I haven’t been for a lot of my life. It’s like I depended on other people. But I’m starting to move forward now because I’m starting to say, “Speak up to her.” Before I was always afraid. Speaking up is how you know you’re beginning to move forward. I’ve been working hard at that. Because when she’s gone, I’m going to have to do things on my own. I need to start doing that now, so I have something to hang onto, so that I’m not going to feel like my life is over.

Impressions from the interviews.

Dana came to my home four times on four consecutive Sundays. She drove two hours round-trip, each time, to participate. She seemed to welcome exploring her experiences of living most of her adult life with her parents. Through the course of the interviews Dana added

comments such as, “It feels good to talk,” and, “I feel like I matter.” She could examine difficult experiences and acknowledged her feelings openly.

Dana initially presented herself as focused and serious, but as interviews progressed, she seemed increasingly open, perhaps less defended, when describing her life experiences. The past experiences she shared with me—except that of playing as a child with other children in her neighborhood—took place solely within the context of her family life. This point alone is expected because the researcher asked Dana to talk about her lived and felt experiences of having “never left.” Yet it became increasingly apparent that Dana was describing her entire world, and bringing me into that world. We were explorers together. She engaged *me*, not only in a process of interviews but in a process of contextualizing. We brought memory and feeling together, trying to make sense of experiences that she rarely explores.

One of my assumptions for this study was that subjectivity develops in the context of relationship. Despite what some might see as a life of limited movement or change, Dana’s life trajectory seems to defy any linear notion of personal development. She and her mother have lived seemingly symbiotic and circularly driven lives in tandem. The child evoked a slowly developing capacity for self-reflection in the mother. The mother inspired the adult child’s permission for movement toward—as well as fear and inhibition against—discovery and attunement. It makes sense to think about dialectic in this respect, especially when Dana

describes how the roles of parent and child alternate between her and her mother. As Dana said, "It flips. If she can do it, I can do it. If I can do it, she can do it."

Dana's self-narrative seems most salient in association with her childhood experiences. She describes a discordance in her relationship with her mother. In this context she describes "going backwards," an experience she occasionally has with her mother. I wonder if "going backwards" occurs when Dana is not able to express a natural aggression in the service of becoming or having her "own life." The topic of the development of aggression in the service of separation (Mahler, 1981) comes to mind.

Case Study #4: Andrejs

Descriptive information.

Andrejs is 47 years old. He is intelligent, thoughtful, and able to explore his life and ideas in depth. He has lived 20 of his 29 adult years with his mother, who is in her early seventies. For most of those years, Andrejs also lived with his father, but his father recently died. When Andrejs compares how he feels about his family to how he feels about peers, including friendships which go back to grade school, he sees important differences.

> Outside the family, I mean, I meet (people), we become friends and whatever, but sometimes I just don't get them. We just can't click on subjects. With my family, we can talk about anything, any time. There's not really judgments. All things are fairly open. We talk, and we listen. And a lot of people are not necessarily like that. It's like

> they're operating from conformity or something. So, there's a bit of disconnect with most people, it feels like. Closeness does exist outside the family, and definitely it has in my past relationships. But, it's like, they weren't family.

Andrejs says he does not want to be judged by others, so he is careful to not form negative opinions of anyone. He always wants to be fair and to be treated fairly. He aims for "neutrality" in his outlook on life. According to Andrejs, everything that happens in life, in nature, is for the "greater good." He learned these principles from his father, who loved him "unconditionally," and who was and will always be his "best friend" and his biggest inspiration.

> I choose to have a self-awareness where I try to pay attention to these things. I try to look at the heart of things, such as dying, mortality, things that need to be done. I think this speaks to my life as an adult, even though I'm very childlike and childish in a lot of ways. I am a loving, compassionate human being who hasn't been completely jaded by life.

Andrej will admit, however, that his relationship with his mother has been contentious for most of his life. He describes his mother as a "hoarder" who imposes her values on him. Andrejs attributes his intense need for "space" to this mother. When she tries to give him advice, Andrejs feels her "pushing up against me." Sometimes, although not as much as in the past, this makes him feel "angry." This was especially true during his teenage and earlier adult years.

Andrejs describes his family history in rich detail. He was raised in the home that his paternal grandparents purchased around 1955. At that time, his father's parents were transitioning from living in United Nations–sponsored refugee camps in Germany to living in the United States. Andrejs' father lived in this house during high school and after returning home from college. Additionally, Andrejs' parents lived all but four years of their married life in this house.

Andrejs' grandparents died in this home, years apart. He considers the likelihood that his grandparents and father would have died tragically in their secluded country home in a west-Latvian forest, except for his grandfather making a lifechanging decision. On a cold October night in 1945, his grandfather decided that his family—including his wife, Andrejs' father and aunt, Andrejs' grandfather's mother and his sister—would leave their country farm to avoid invading Russian soldiers, who were only two kilometers away.

Andrejs' parents spent their childhood years in refugee camps in Germany at the end of the Second World War. Andrejs heard his father describe childhood memories including (a) arriving in Berlin at night by train from Poland and watching as the Brandenburg Tower burned, (b) what it took to survive long winters, and (c) moving to various camps between the ages of eight and 14. Andrejs says his mother was born in one of the camps. Her family had escaped from Lithuania around the same time that Andrejs' father's family left Latvia. Andrejs grew up with his paternal grandparents in his home. He was also close to his *tante*, his grandfather's sister, who lived close by.

Andrejs and his two brothers grew up hearing his parents, grandparents, and other elders in the local Latvian community tell stories about life in Latvia and Lithuania. Some of these stories were about Andrejs' paternal great-grandmother, who was known as "the county healer." His paternal grandmother studied opera in Vienna. According to some stories, his paternal grandfather protected Latvian soldiers at the family farm when the soldiers were on leave from the Russian front. Long into the night, these soldiers would eat and drink in the empty grain mill on the farm. They sang the traditional folk songs which constitute Latvian oral history, and they shared stories from the front. They would cry and pray together for the lives of their male relatives, who either willingly fought alongside the Russians or were sent to Siberia.

Later when their families were living in the same refugee camp, Andrejs' maternal and paternal grandfathers worked together with other adults to help re-create a traditionally structured Latvian life. Community members set up schools, mediated disputes between fellow citizens from the Baltic states, and otherwise assisted the community with holding together and surviving the camp.

When asked about his parents, Andrejs describes them as having been "a couple of free-loving hippies" when he was growing up.

> And I say "hippie" in a very good sense. They believed in human rights, human equality—just an innate sense of good. I would describe them as very loving people. My father was a bit of a rebel in his own way, not necessarily

> against society but against certain expectations: you'll grow up, you'll go to school, you will conform, you will do what society says. I don't think he bought into any of that.

Both parents went to college. Andrejs' mother studied modern dance. His father, to his grandfather's dismay, studied psychology. Andrejs' father started out in the field of chemical engineering but dropped out after his first year at university because he had spent too much time trying to translate the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke from German to Latvian.

When Andrejs was in grade school, one particular classmate kept turning up in his classes. By middle school the two boys had developed a bond. They competed to see who would get their homework done first, and who would do the best in school overall. Andrejs remembers the moment he realized that this competition did not feel good to him.

> It was just competition between the two of us, a good, friendly competition. But I can remember sitting there one time, we were just trying to get a book report done. All of a sudden, I was just done with that competition. My question at the time was, "Why am I going through this? Why am I pushing?" I didn't see any value in it. That was the day I said "no" to the corporate kind of world, or just pushing forward in academia. So, going through high school and planning for college, and then getting a degree, and then entering the workforce. It was at that time when I said, "Forget it." It was like, "This isn't fun."

Andrejs dropped out of high school when he was 16 years old. He worked odd jobs, fixing cars and doing maintenance work. Otherwise he spent much of his time with friends he had known since childhood. Andrejs lived away from home for two years, beginning when he was 20 years old. During that period, he lived with his father's sister out of state.

Andrejs felt rejection from his mother for most of his later childhood and adolescence. He disagreed with his mother about how he should live his life. By the time he was a teenager, Andrejs took issue with being told what to do by his mother. His father arranged for him to live with his aunt and his cousin, so that he could get distance from his mother and think about what he needed without pressure.

Andrejs returned to his parents' home two years later, after his aunt remarried. Andrejs met his eventual wife at his older brother's wedding. They were married for four years in the early 2000's. They did not have children. Andrejs' ex-wife left him because she thought he was too "unconventional." He says he has not been in a steady intimate relationship with a woman since.

Andrejs is not willing to conform to social norms concerning how adults should live their lives. He openly discusses this aspect of his personality during our interviews. After his divorce, he moved to Maui where he lived for four years. He learned a trade that provides a steady income. As of this year, Andrejs has his first steady employment position laying tile on large building projects. He has one older brother who is 50 years old, and one younger brother who is

44 years old. Both of his brothers have steady professional work and are married. His younger brother has two children.

Categories of meaning.

Familiarity.

Andrejs was inspired to move back with his parents more than 10 years ago. While far away from home, he developed a new appreciation for his family, his family history, and the feeling he has about family "connections."

> It's familiarity. Ties to the past. A sense of comfort, I think. A new appreciation, because I haven't lived all of my adult life there. The times when I was away I learned to appreciate (family) a little more. I always made friends where I went, but never had any close friends. I never felt like I could connect with people the same way I can with my own family and long-time friends. It's somewhat emotional. I've left and come back. I could push it harder as far as making money goes, just to get out. Right now, it's just a choice to be there, really.

Andrejs considers familiarity as a more "superficial" explanation for his draw to living at his family home for most of his adult life, in comparison to his other reasons for being there. Andrejs thinks of familiarity as the sense of loyalty he experiences with his family. He can trust them to be on his side. He says he is not invested in taking time to form new relationships beyond his family and his friends from childhood, because new friends will not know him as

deeply. When initially asked why he has lived most of his adult life with his parents Andrejs says, “They didn’t throw me over a cliff.” This statement reflects his overall experiences out in the world. He does not dislike people in general. However, generally, he does not enjoy anyone as much as he enjoys members of his family. Given the choice to live with a partner or live with his family, Andrejs will choose his family, without question.

Scarcity and aggression: “Stay out of my space.”

When we began this series of interviews, Andrejs expressed being at the edge of his tolerance with his mother. He began on a positive note, echoing the positive value his father placed on neutrality, on taking life in stride. However, when Andrejs started talking specifically about his mother and exploring related lived experiences, he admitted that he needs his own space. His mother controls their living space.

> She’s got her own little idiosyncrasies, quirks, a little bit of a control bug. She’s definitely always had that. And that’s probably one of the main reasons she and I always butted heads. I just wouldn’t have any of it, especially as a teen.

Andrejs speculates that his mother needs to control the space. He considers the possibility that she is largely motivated by her early childhood experiences of being born and raised in a refugee camp. The rules for living were shaped by harsh conditions, including having to search for food and heat sources. Humanitarian values were suspended as resources dwindled. Parents stole food for their children. Children ran in gangs, fighting each other and playing with unused

bullets and unexploded grenades. Children were injured and even killed in the camps.

> Anything and everything you had, you held onto. That's what she was born into. If you start out in that kind of environment, chances are it's going to stay with you. Like say, the hoarding, because there was nothing. You waste nothing.

Andrejs expresses a clear effort to understand his mother's current motivations for "hoarding"—keeping things that he wishes she would throw out. Nonetheless, he continues to express feeling angry with her.

> I don't judge it but sometimes, on a day-to-day basis, it can be aggravating. And something gets activated in me. It's like I can feel myself get angry. I try to let it dissipate. Does it work? No. Only now and then. There is still a blow-up. There's a part of me that gets pushed up against. It's me saying, "Stay out of my space. I'm not throwing my ways toward you. Don't flood yours toward me." I swear she is so unconscious of half the things she does. So that's why I write it off.

Andrejs notes that he has worked to keep his anger in check for years. He hasn't been in a physical fight since his teenage years. He remembers, however, that when he got into fights it was in the context of needing to get out of the house, to get away from the feeling of being boxed in at home. Andrejs remembers beginning to feel angry after his younger brother was born. Even as a child he felt as though there was not enough room for him at home.

> Starting with the middle-child syndrome. Here comes the baby. He's getting everything he wants, and older brother has all the stuff. Just for whatever reason, I didn't ever feel like I had my own space around there. I think that's still there.

Andrejs further reflects on how he has expressed anger in his past. He remembers getting into fights and deciding in the moment that if he was outnumbered and the odds were against him, "I'm going to charge." As he remembers this, Andrejs links this all-out fighting behavior with "fight or flight."

> And that gets down to a basic fight or flight. So, did I grow up in a refugee camp? It almost was like a refugee camp in a way, and that's why the longing, the reason why I stayed away in my teens. I remember going out and staying out as much as possible. That's a way to get space. All the stuff we did. It was all hanging out back of the tracks when the old paper mill was still up. That was our playground.

Andrejs realizes during our interviews that his parents' and grandparents' experiences in the camps were transferred to his own childhood experience. The atmosphere of the refugee camp in Germany after World War II, as experienced by his family elders, and Andrejs' felt experience of his childhood seem inseparable to him.

Andrejs remembers hearing his older brother telling his father, "Dad, the war's over." For their father, being an eight-year-old refugee meant (a) no rules, (b) being away from his parents fighting in gangs, and (c) total chaos without responsibility. Andrejs' father did not leave the

refugee camp until he was 14 years old. In some ways, his father seemed to have never left. He continued to live a "take no prisoners" lifestyle as an adult. He had developed many long-lasting friendships in the community. He was a character, and he did well as a professional. Only people in his personal life new of his addiction to alcohol and the ways he seemed to thrive on chaos.

Upon further reflection, Andrejs considers the influence of the refugee camp on his own childhood as a primary factor in his development. The refugee experience was ". . . a factor in my day-to-day living. I'm still fighting it, in a sense, and I wasn't even there." As he thinks specifically about his mother's childhood and his own need to "get space" in his teens and early twenties, Andrejs realizes that he had not considered how his mother's early experiences may have contributed to her need to control their shared space. He begins to understand the importance of the time he spent living away from home when he was younger. He seems now to speak for both his mother and himself.

> So, being away and now looking back at how it was, I can see things from different angles. It's like putting myself in her shoes and thinking, "What did she go through when we were kids? What is she going through now?" Well, if you've got all that going on, sure, I'm going to be a little crazy, too. That makes sense.
>
> That anger is big. It's dense. It's heavy. It smells. And once I get past whatever that anger was, because anger takes up a lot of space, then, oh—look at all this space. You can put good stuff in it.

Dreams of escape.

Andrejs has dreamed about school throughout most of his adult life. He thinks of school as a metaphor associated with efforts by authority figures to shape children, to make them conform and lose their creativity.

> It's always in my dreams anyways, about school, more kind of walking the hallways and I'm seeing all the people in the classes. And I'm never there to actually go to class. I'm just passing through. It's like I'm trying to find a way through it. I see the people in the classes. And part of me wants to say, "Hi, everybody!" But I know I have to keep walking. Usually when I'm in a school dream, it's about walking through and trying to get somewhere else, going through the hallways. The hallways are multi-leveled, with stairwells or elevators. Sometimes I'm avoiding the hall monitors and principles.

School was boring for Andrejs. However, he makes a link between this dream material and his desire to live life on his own terms. Sometimes the only way this can be accomplished is in the moment. He describes daydreams about getting away, imagining sitting in silence "for hours," as he did when he lived briefly on Maui, literally living on the beach. He imagines "1,800 miles of beachfront property." Sometimes Andrejs imagines himself just floating on

water. This is his ultimate reverie. "I've found more space here, in that sense. My mind was expanded (in Maui) beyond that childhood setting."

Zemnieks*: Giving back by protecting "the land."*

Andrejs was away from home long enough to recognize considerable differences between his parents and people out in the world. He does not have anxiety about leaving home or about his ability to live on his own. Andrejs feels confident about his ability to deal with people in most situations. Money makes him nervous. Otherwise, if he needs to, he even knows how to survive if he is homeless. This is how he lived much of his time on Maui.

> Here and there, when you're left to your own devices, you have to figure it out for yourself. I think it would behoove anyone to have some time apart on your own. I've seen both sides. The side with family was always better. But in those times where you are removed, it's been my experience that you do grow.

Lately Andrejs has realized that his time away from home gave him lots of space. He feels he took the space into himself, and that it has allowed him to have more tolerance for others. Andrejs spends time with his younger brothers' sons. Even though his nephews tire him out, they are his "passion." He experiences satisfaction from having come home early enough to have more time with his father. Andrejs was able to help his father through very difficult situations involving addiction to pain medication and a series of strokes. He does not feel like he must live at home. He says being there is "a choice" that he is making for his family and for himself.

> I am somewhat emotionally attached to that house: the walls, the creaks and the groans, everything. I also know if I left there right now, (my mother) could not afford that by herself. It's both practical and emotional.

Andrejs can live with his mother with a new sense of appreciation. The "unconditional love" he experienced from his father helps him rethink his relationship with his mother. He began to consider, after our second interview, how he might "transfer that to other relationships." Although he feels very ready to "have my own space," Andrejs says he wants to continue working on building a positive relationship with his mother. He speaks of his relationship with his mother with increasing specificity.

> Because we're living together, and have been for some time, my mother and I have a better relationship now than at any time in the past. I am enjoying her friendship most of the time. I am not at a point where it feels like I need to get out. It's a gift in a sense that I now have a better relationship with her than at any other time in my life.

When asked to further explore what keeps him home, Andrejs clearly articulates that he has grown to think of his role in his family as that of "protecting the history, just the whole communal effort of making things better." He explains that he has taken on the role of "protector" of the family home. He gives his role a Latvian name: *zemnieks*, which he translates as "groundskeeper," "protector," and "watchman." He is the one who takes care of the land, or *zeme* in Latvian.

> Sometimes I think back to all the stories starting with the parties back in the '50s, and all the gatherings and people dancing—and then from my own childhood and all the people who were over (at the house). All sorts of good times. So, I think about all those memories that I know on an energetic level continue. But at the same time, it's just a house, you know. And all those memories and all that, that's all within me. But there's that part of me that says, "That energy is here," and it's just great. I can connect with that. If I went somewhere else, it would just be basically a domicile. Something about that house, yeah.

Impressions from interviews with Andrejs.

Andrejs expressed wanting to help me with my question for this study. He was an enthusiastic participant who seemed ready to dive in at the beginning of each interview. He thought about my questions and seemed more flexible and willing to explore as the interviews developed.

Initially, however, I also sensed from Andrejs that he prefers to keep a philosophical distance from his lived experience. He spoke in general terms that felt non-committal. He seemed to want to deflect his and my attention from his personal experiences with expressions like (a) "It is what it is," (b) "Whatever," and (c) "I'm not judging." When Andrejs considered some of his past behaviors with respect to "fight or flight" and his parents' early histories, he seemed to become more directly engaged with his personal experiences of living with his parents.

I experienced grief, which hardened and then softened, as I listened to Andrejs talk about his family history and memories of his ancestors. He mentions the "longing" he sometimes feels. I sense that this longing is an expression of both holding onto and wanting to be free of sorrow, which Andrejs experienced while living among generations of family at home, and during his personal life trajectory. Perhaps this longing adds to the heaviness of his anger.

During the third interview, Andrejs described his anger as being "activated." I thought he was telling me that I had "activated" his anger.

Andrejs: There is a part that when pushed up against, when it gets pushed, gets very mean.

Researcher: Mean?

Andrejs: Mean. Yes. You keep pushing up against me.

Researcher: Am I seeing that aspect in you?

Andrejs: You would know it, I think. I think you would know it.

I don't think Andrejs meant to say I was pushing up against him. However, I cannot help but wonder if he heard himself clearly. Perhaps he was addressing his mother in that moment. I cannot help but wonder what I missed by not asking him if he felt I was pushing him in the interview process.

I was impressed that Andrejs used the interview process to think about living with his parents, specifically by reconsidering his mother's experiences of living her initial years in a

refugee camp in Germany after World War II. He openly expressed feeling aggravated with his mother, wondered what it must be like for her, and then expressed wanting to be there with her. And then he gave himself a name: *Zemnieks*.

Results of the Cross-Case Analysis

Close examination of emergent themes identified as categories of meaning in the cross-case analysis revealed descriptions of the following: subjective experiences concerning the subjects' lives with their parents, and subjects' sense of self in relationship to their worlds. Significant themes were constellated particularly around the following dynamics: child and parent, and adult-child and parent. All study participants described these dynamics as integral to their current lived experiences. All participants except Andrejs described psychological conflict related to their limited engagement with the world outside of work and home. The cross-case analysis resulted in the identification of intersubjective processes occurring across cases between adult-child and parent. These themes are: (a) problems in mutual recognition, (b) forms of arrested agency, and (c) feeling caught between wanting to leave and guilt. The discussion of the cross-case analysis will include a review of each of these themes. A table for each theme offers a visual orientation to how the categories of meaning from within-case analyses provide data for similarities shared across cases.

Problems in mutual recognition.

Alice identified herself as "unprepared." Her parents' fears cast the world as unsafe and foreboding. She feels that she has been steeped in these fears via her upbringing. Fear limits her

parents' engagement with social worlds beyond work and extended family. With biased perspective resulting from a limited variety of experiences, Alice's parents may not have extensive knowledge of their capabilities (or Alice's capacities) for adapting to new experiences. In turn, fear prevents her parents from knowing Alice's innate capacities for creating a life of her own via her love for music. As Alice is not understood and recognized as a subject in her own right, in this sense, she simultaneously expects to be devastated by the world "out there" while guarding against new objects that would promote the transformation of her subjective life.

Alice is psychologically confined to her role-based relationships with her parents. This is because she has limited possibilities for recognition, and is deprived of an intersubjective basis for knowing and being known. She identifies herself as a vulnerable adult-child in relation to her fearful and over-protective father, who assumes Alice should not take risks while prioritizing predictability in her decision-making. What was "out there" in the 1950s and 1960s when Alice was growing up was a world of men and values rooted in patriarchy. Alice was openly discouraged by her father from pursuing the study of music. He believed she would fail, which resulted in the foreclosure of a transforming identity that would have allowed Alice to be in the world as a subject in her own right. She could have developed a community associated with her love for music, and authored a life of her own.

"Locked-up in complementarity" describes Wojciech's relationships with both of his parents. He experienced a push-pull dynamic of submission and resistance in relationship with his father. At times, this dynamic was overwhelming. His father related to Wojciech by fighting. In this

rigidly constrained means of making contact, Wojciech and his father could not have conversations and meet each other through mutual recognition. Over time, Wojciech resisted his father's provocations to fight. His father's efforts to engage him in this manner intensified until the police visited their home often enough to see that Wojciech was not trying to provoke his father. Wojciech's mother shows no curiosity about her son, and seems unaware of his innate complexity.

Wojciech's seemed to obfuscate his place in his parents' lives. He expressed hatred for his father. He did not express awareness of his significance to either of his parents. He leaves home and returns every day following a rigid schedule and routine—"rinse and repeat"—and rarely engages with his mother. She is not "there." He is not "there."

At the close of each interview, the researcher and Wojciech seemed to enact a similar dynamic. Wojciech consistently ended the discussion by apologizing for "talking too much." He appeared unaccustomed to talking about his experiences and perhaps was uncomfortable. This momentary expression of discovering himself in the room seemed to encapsulate his limited awareness of having an impact on others. But he immediately responded to this discovery by asking forgiveness for a perceived incursion into the researcher's field of experience.

As stated in the case study, "Wojciech and his mother live together like roommates. They eat separately, clean up only after themselves, and essentially live separate lives. Their embedded,

and seemingly scripted, emotional distancing from each other covers the effects of a complex history of chaotic family dynamics."

Complementarity is conveyed in the history of Wojciech's relationships with his parents, whose descriptions are flat and without complexity. Agreement is better than going against the grain, and daily life is infiltrated with dynamics of power and subordination. Wojciech says he "hates" his father and that his mother is a source of irritation because she wants him to leave. Wojciech spoke of his parents with limited detail and complexity. His descriptions of how he experiences life are also confined to patterns of routine.

Dana describes her experience of living with her parents for most of her life as being "sheltered." Ever since Dana was a child, she has provided emotional support for her mother. She helped her mother recover from feeling abandoned by Dana's father when his work life was demanding. Dana was also an emotional support for her father during these times, as she would help him coax her mother from periods of withdrawal from family life.

Dana continues to experience her mother as emotionally fragile and needing support. Dana's lifetime roles of peacemaker and keeper of birthday celebrations constitute a life-long role reversal. She became a caregiver to her parents. This reversal paradoxically makes Dana feel confined. She does not have experiences beyond her role of providing emotional support to her mother. She feels sheltered because outside of home, she lacks experiences considered basic to adult life.

Dana considers her mother a passive participant. However, Dana also experiences her mother's voluntary subordination as controlling. The controlling impact of her mother's passivity and seeming fragility evokes Dana's sense of being responsible for her mother. Dana is fearful on her mother's behalf. She works hard to encourage her mother to make her own decisions. This is an ongoing challenge for Dana, one that keeps her merged with her mother. Her mother's needs become her needs. "I'm having trouble separating and having my own life," she says. "I'm not living my own life. I'm living my mom's life."

Despite his historic need for "space," Andrejs seeks "familiarity." Home provides that familiarity. It represents his father's unconditional love. Additionally, he cannot find people like his family anywhere but home. He left home, and he is his own person and a character in his own right. However, Andrejs has chosen to continue living with his mother and to remain in the home that represents his family history, including war-time traumas and survival, which cannot be understood by anyone who has not "been there." The exclusivity of interpersonal experience may constitute seeking safety, a natural outcome of intergenerational trauma. However, Andrejs is also limiting himself to the repetition of what is known.

Table 4: Cross-Case Analysis

Problems in Mutual Recognition	
Alice:	Unprepared for what's out there
	Alone together
Wojciech:	Locked-up in complementarity
Dana:	Sheltered
	Living my mother's life
Andrejs:	Seeking familiarity

Forms of arrested agency.

Loneliness and isolation—these are two categories of meaning identified for Alice via the within-case analysis. Alice would be lonely if she did not live with her parents, yet living with her parents prevents her from building and maintaining friendships outside of her family. Therefore, Alice feels socially isolated.

Alice does not experience her parents as really knowing her. They have discouraged her from seeking new experiences that would facilitate self-awareness. They have downplayed her creative capacities in the name of (a) reducing risk, (b) avoiding financial hardship, and (c) not surviving in a highly competitive music industry at the hands of ruthless agents. In the process, they have denied Alice authorship.

It is Alice's experience that her parents do not see her accurately. She does not have anyone in her life who really knows her. She has friends from childhood, although their lives have taken a different, more traditional course. Alice has progressively less in common with these friends. She does not know with certainty whether she would experience more incentive or impetus to live her life on her own terms, even if she could maintain meaningful connections with peers, thereby mitigating her parents' narrowed view of life and limited understanding of their daughter.

Alice seems to struggle with generating spontaneous responses that would self-correct her isolation. Living with her parents reduces her loneliness in the short run and exacerbates her social isolation in the long run. Isolation defines her life. She lacks relatedness and endures an endless feedback loop of family interaction based solely on the affective state of the other. As Alice's father ages, he becomes less powerful and more like "a big baby." In turn, Alice increasingly confronts his outbursts and demands. Yet this seems to only reverse a pattern of aggressive subjugation in which any affective resonance is coercive.

In relationship with her mother, Alice functions as a protective buffer against her father. She complies with her mother's self-expression of fragility and lost authority. In relationships with

both parents, Alice appears engaged in a dynamic of coerced mirroring, either as aggressor or victim (in this latter instance, resonating with her mother's own experience as victim). Either way, Alice does not experience herself as a subject, but as subjected to mutually negating polarities.

Wojciech demonstrated initiative joining the military as a young adult. His enlistment came about by the encouragement of an older adult neighbor whom his parents did not trust. Wojciech remembers his military experience with enthusiasm. His service seems to have influenced his development of independence. After leaving the service, he sought professional training and has become financially self-sufficient.

Wojciech describes his past efforts to rankle authority figures by verbally taunting them. At times this resulted in physical altercations with police and even incarceration. These experiences were aggressive outbursts that parallel Wojciech's relationship with his father. Such behavior also contradicts his efforts to establish self-reliance and autonomy.

With respect to violent home-life experiences provoked by his father, Wojciech may have been repeating a pattern of being treated more like an object than a subject. Wojciech recreates situations with authority figures wherein he experiences not living as an active, personal agent but as a passive object. These events may be most salient in the asymmetry of "doer-done to" (Benjamin, 1988, 2018) enacted in the heightened power differential between agitator (boy) and disciplinarian (police officer / father), wherein there is still no space for personal agency.

Dana's role in her mother's life has been one of emotional support since around the age of 10. Dana knows her mother has been able to be independent and experiences her mother as a force to be reckoned with. Yet the dynamic with her mother has seemingly forever perpetuated a sense of helplessness in Dana, because she must be the strong one. She has said to her mother on several occasions, "I'm not your husband. I'm your daughter." Lately it seems to Dana that while she may be getting by, she is not in the clear because her feeling of being trapped in role-reversal is relentless.

Being trapped precludes psychological intimacy. Dana does not experience any history of feeling psychologically contained by her relationship with either of her parents. Now that her father is deceased, she feels she is not only cast in the role of emotional support for her mother, but also in the role of husband. Dana is stunned by her own realization that being caretaker now includes absorbing the symbolic functions of father and husband. This requires a steady dissociation of awareness from the dual functions of submissive daughter and caretaker. She also has the experience of not being real to her mother, which entails a psychological reality of annihilation. For her mother, the emotional presence of the father can be reassigned arbitrarily. There is no mother-child dyad. There is certainly no adult child who experiences a sense of agency as a subject in her own right.

Andrejs has experienced his mother as coercive going back to his childhood. However, in recent years this experience has diminished. Andrejs recognizes his mother's efforts to give him "space." He is also aware that as a child and into his adult years, his home life was infused with

the impact of his parents' traumatic childhoods. He often felt compelled as a child and teenager to get out of the house and stay away for as long as possible. His parents understood, however. In this respect, Andrejs has experienced feeling understood in ways that other study participants have not.

Andrejs fully took in the space he savored as a child. Today he can call up an inner sense of openness and acceptance for his current life. He can hold in mind his perceptions of both his parents as unique individuals who are occasional sources of irritation that he nonetheless loves. When as a child Andrejs felt there was no space for him at home, he still knew his father loved him. He knew his father wanted him to pursue whatever felt right. Although he experienced his mother as coercive and unaccepting, Andrejs was recognized by his father.

At this point, Andrejs makes what he feels to be a conscious choice to live with his mother. He has assigned himself the role of keeping the family house for as long as possible. The home is a source of comfort to his mother, his brothers, and his nephews. If he is not able to persist in this self-assigned role as caretaker of "the land," he says he is flexible. He can revise his thinking. Andrejs will hold together in the face of change.

Table 5: Cross-Case Analysis

Forms of Arrested Agency	
Alice:	Loneliness Isolation
Wojciech:	Breaking free through transient acts of aggression
Dana:	Holding back
Andrejs:	Scarcity and aggression

Feeling caught between wanting to leave and guilt.

Alice feels tied to and protective of her mother because her father can be demanding. Her mother used to stand up to him, but now she submits. This infuriates Alice. She dreams about having her own place. She wants to have quiet, and to do whatever she wants without her father interrupting.

Alice is also uncomfortable imagining herself in her own home. There seems to be little to no room for her symbolically in her parent's home. However, Alice says she stays because her mother needs her. She also stays due to a sense of guilt. Perhaps her guilt is an expression of knowing that if she left, she would betray an established expectation that she must stand between her parents as (a) problem-solver, (b) peace-maker, and (c) as an assurance to her parents that she is not leaving. While it is not practical for Alice to leave, she also feels deeply obligated to not abandon her mother. She describes her mother's capacity to hook her with a sense of guilt. "Everybody is going to leave me at the same time," Alice remembers her mother saying. "When I need you all the most, you're going to leave me alone." Alice cries remembering these words. "Guilt," she says. "It makes me feel guilty."

Wojciech dreams of being unavailable to the people who need him. The fantasy of sailing around the world, off the grid and unobtainable, keeps Wojciech inspired to work hard. This fantasy takes him out of the "rinse and repeat" daily reality long enough to feel encouraged that his hard work will pay off. He expresses guilt, in contrast to other study participants who dream of living away from their parents. He stays home to save money. Yet, the logic of staying home to get away constitutes a double bind or paradox. He does not allow himself to leave. His reverie

of sailing away from home provides Wojciech a soothing balm of freedom and peaceful solitude, in which he is free from the symbolic impingements of home—namely, a life-threatening father and contemptuous mother.

Dana does not experience escape by dreaming of leaving her mother, although she wants to have her own separate life. She carries enormous guilt that she has been a disappointment to her mother for living with an ex-boyfriend almost 40 years ago. This theme of disappointment has endured through most of Dana's adulthood. She feels belittled and shamed by her mother to this day. Leaving would only intensify that shame.

During the interview process, Dana expressed guilt and confusion about how her mother has treated her, in relation to her mother's expectations of a respectable lifestyle. When Dana tries to assertively express her desire to experience more on her own, her mother often retorts with a guilt-inducing statement.

> (My mother will say,) "Well, do you want me to move out?" So, there's this little guilt. She has a way of switching it around, and then it makes me feel like the bad guy. I try not to give into that guilt. I try not to feel guilty about it. But she has a way, which she has used all her life, to make the other person feel guilty.

Dana experiences her mother as skillful in her effort to keep this guilt-inducement function actively engaged. It is another form of coercion that flattens Dana's potential for agency.

Andrejs has a fantasy life of "getting space." He dreams of "just passing through" the halls of his old school without being seen. For Andrejs, these dreams evidence his proclivity to not join the mainstream. He thinks of school as a metaphor for how authority figures shape children to conform and lose their creativity. He understands his dreams are symbolically informative. He knows the significance of living his life on his own terms. He might intentionally imagine for a moment that he is floating on an open span of water or that he is sitting for hours on a beach on Maui. These reveries allow for the experience of agency. "I've found more space here, in that sense," he says. "My mind was expanded (in Maui) beyond that childhood setting." Rather than feeling guilty for his escape fantasies, Andrejs gives himself permission to go there whenever he wants. This act of agency allows him to balance his revised sense of self as *Zemnieks*, the caretaker of the home his grandfather purchased two years after coming to the United States. *Zemnieks* is the conclusion of his family's long journey from Latvia.

Table 6: Cross-Case Analysis

Feeling Caught Between Wanting to Leave and Guilt	
Alice:	Fantasies of leaving
Wojciech:	Fleeting dreams of floating escape

Dana: Guilt and shame

Andrejs: Dreams of escape

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

With this study, the researcher intended to discover how middle-aged adults make meaning of their decisions to live with their parents indefinitely. Specifically, this study looked at adults between 40 and 60 years of age who were (a) not parenting, (b) not disabled, and (c) did not

belong to a culture in which families typically live in multi-generational households. The researcher also intended to create possibilities for future research, and thereby shore up the present lack of relevant study in the psychoanalytic literature.

Traditional norms for adult achievement generally include finding one's place in the worlds of work and love. All participants for this study made significant non-normative life choices including (a) living with their parents, (b) not having a life partner, and (c) disengaging from significant experiences with peers outside of work.

Within-case analysis identified unique manifest content related to lived experiences. Categories of meaning produced themes. Among those themes, "day-to-day experiences with parents" was a central part of each participant's life. Each participant identified the following unique childhood experiences as significant in current relationships with parents:

1. The protective yet insular quality of only socializing with extended family . . .
2. The hostility of a parent toward a child . . .
3. Taking on the role of buffer and providing solace to an emotionally injured parent . . .
4. The impact of being raised by parents who survived refugee camps as children during World War II . . .

The identification of the within-case findings led the researcher intuitively to inquire concerning the following:

1. The nature of subjectivity . . .

2. The contribution of potential space in the development of subjectivity . . .
3. What constitutes having a sense of self . . .
4. Whether information concerning phenomena in intersubjective or family-system contexts might raise further questions that would help the researcher understand "not leaving" when there is no cultural precedent for living in an extended family household . . .

By utilizing the lens of recognition theory, the researcher highlighted variations in surface terrain concerning participant's self-narratives. Additionally, this lens equipped the researcher metaphorically with a sort of night vision that brought deeper psychological processes and meanings to the foreground. Further mining of the data from each case study revealed shared themes across cases. These themes were identified as (a) lacking mutual recognition, (b) forms of arrested agency, and (c) feeling caught between escape and guilt.

Each study participant shared a unique life story. However, study results revealed adult-child and parent dynamics descriptive of shared invisibility and significant hesitation to author one's own life. The research uncovered these commonalities by seeking to know more about each of the following for each participant: (a) the lived experience of having "never left," (b) emotional and psychological life, and (c) the dynamics of communication with parents.

The fourth case-study subject, identified as "Andrejs," was exceptional in regard to his self-awareness and his experience of parents as subjects in their own right. Initially Andrejs identified a childhood atmosphere of anarchic scarcity. However, through the course of the

interviews, he developed an understanding of his parents via consideration of their experiences as children and how these experiences shaped their choices as adults and parents. He understood his parents' childhood experiences with fear, scarcity of resources, and lack of security. He felt compassion. He had a visceral recollection of his need to frequently get out of the house during childhood and adolescence. Nonetheless, Andrejs realized that even though he can leave, and he has left home, his place in life is as caretaker. He expressed feeling at peace with this calling.

Implications for Theory

Cross-case analysis identified three themes: (a) lacking mutual recognition, (b) forms of arrested agency, and (c) feeling caught between escape and guilt. Each participant described histories and current-day interactions with parents as power struggles. These struggles included role reversals wherein the child becomes the caretaker for the parent, but the parent still expects submission from the child. In response to this discovery, the researcher explored two subjects: the development of subjectivity within intersubjective contexts, and the development of awareness of an other as an experiencing subject within potential space. In keeping with the hermeneutic exploration for this study, the researcher also considered the cultivation of the mind with regard to mentalization and self-regulation, as well as the topic of agency related to the development of subjectivity.

These considerations eventually centered on recognition theory (Benjamin, 1988, 1995, 2009, 2018) and the development of mutual recognition. As discussed by Fonagy and Target (1998), Benjamin distinguishes between two things: mentalization (defined as the capacity to get inside

the mind of another individual and to understand their experience), and recognition, which involves relatedness and the awareness of oneself and of an other as a subject. Benjamin (2018) says that affect regulation and mentalization are associated with (a) the safety of being held and nourished, (b) distinguishing between inside and outside, and (c) the development of symbolization. Recognition is an additional development that (a) makes one a subject, (b) pertains to intersubjective contexts, and (c) builds upon Winnicott's conceptualization of potential space wherein mutual recognition becomes possible.

Benjamin points out that splitting can occur between security and recognition (2018). The categories of meaning in this study introduce the possibility that splitting between security and recognition might impact the development of agency, or influence how agency is expressed over the course of one's life.

For example, Wojciek opts to stay home to save money for a house or a boat, which would allow him to leave. However, the amount of money necessary to make these purchases continues to increase. Ultimately, Wojciek creates a lose-lose situation for himself. He may never have enough to feel secure financially or psychologically separate from his mother. Psychologically he remains tied to his mother in a negative sense that indicates a lack of mutual recognition.

Wojciek's relationship with his mother is an example of two people not seeing each other as subjects. Wojciek does not describe his mother's reality. He describes only how his mother impacts his own reality. This direction in his development—the splitting of potential for

recognition away from the maintenance of security—has become a primary expression of Wojciek's agency, as well as an anchor that mires his life experience in repetition.

Variations in the expression of agency lead to further theoretical questions about what constitutes "normative" life choices in adulthood. Andrejs' narrative provides rich detail concerning his awareness of his mother as a subject in her own right. He is not opting for repetition. He remains open to developing an accurate awareness of his mother as a subject. He also seeks to understand his reactions to her, as opposed to focusing solely on how she impacts him.

The case of Andrejs suggests that one can experience generativity in a much broader sense than what has traditionally been considered for a well-adjusted adult. Andrejs feels satisfied with his choice to stay home. As he might say, he wants to take care of the home that holds the experiences of recent ancestors, to be *Zemnieks*, the caretaker of the land.

This study has raised important theoretical questions concerning (a) the development of mutual recognition, (b) its impact on the expression of agency, and (c) the necessity for revising theory, specifically in terms of what constitutes real satisfaction over the course of adult life, making room for uniqueness which can stand apart from or include more than materialism and security.

Implications for Clinical Practice

Traditionally, psychoanalytic psychotherapy has been informed by theory that promotes one-way directionality through the practitioner's stance as an objective expert and change agent.

Social-work practice has grown out of the psychoanalytic tradition. Social work itself is distinguished by an emphasis on the impact of family and social contexts on the individual, as well as the impact of individuals in group contexts.

The findings from this study support the significance of recognition theory with respect to the importance of mutual recognition in development across the life span. The relational movement emphasizes both patient and psychotherapist as subjects within the treatment relationship. It makes way for informing the practice of psychotherapy as it concerns recognition and recognition theory.

The findings from this study also support the significance of not imposing expectations about life choices in the context of clinical practice. The practitioner needs to be aware of the potential to enact patterns involving power differentials. The practitioner's expectations for behavioral indicators for normalcy in adulthood could trigger such enactments.

Implications for Research

This research was facilitated via a hermeneutic psychoanalytic case-study method (Tolleson, 1996). The researcher intended to open a new area of study in the field of clinical social work and in the study of adult development. The study was designed to develop a fund of information concerning the lived experiences of adults in midlife who have lived most or all of their adult lives with their parents. The intent of opening a new area of study was a response to finding no psychodynamic literature that addresses the problem for study, either from the standpoint of adult development or psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

The hermeneutic psychoanalytic case-study method allowed the researcher to gather a wealth of complex data from the development of four case studies following four series of interviews with four study participants. Hermeneutic inquiry (Gadamer, 1975) allowed the researcher to utilize the interview process as a mode of depth exploration. Unstructured interviews documented each participant's unique perspective and self-narrative related to the research question. Each case study provided close examination of the lived experiences of each subject, as well as an understanding of the inner workings of the participant's minds.

Using psychoanalytic inquiry as outlined in the psychoanalytic case-study method, the researcher thought of meaning as data. This is significant because measurable data (e.g., behavioral observations) are incomplete when research seeks to understand human experience. Rather than gathering only observable (and therefore incomplete) data, the psychoanalytic case-study method allows the researcher to learn about internal phenomena that would be unobtainable if the researcher had used a quantitative research method.

The psychoanalytic case-study method also allows the researcher to interview each participant individually and privately. The researcher can provide a setting where the participant feels safe to share openly about painful experiences, vulnerabilities, shame, and interpersonal conflict. As the researcher reviewed interview transcripts and developed individual case studies, there seemed to be limitless potential for learning about each participant's subjective life. The psychoanalytic case-study method provides a wealth of meaning-as-data, such that understanding the results of

each interview series requires considerable time for analysis and coding for categories of meaning.

Summary

This study used a hermeneutic psychoanalytic case-study method to explore the lived experiences of individuals in midlife who have lived at least half of their adult lives with their parents. The research method included four series of individual interviews with four study participants. Case studies were developed from each interview series, and categories of meaning were identified in the within-case analysis from each case study.

The within-case analysis was followed by the cross-case analysis of categories of meaning. This analysis showed similarities across all cases concerning latent meanings. These similarities were grouped into three categories: (a) problems with mutual recognition, (b) forms of arrested agency, and (c) feeling caught between leaving and guilt. While the first three participants conveyed themes representing forms of twoness and lacking mutuality (Benjamin, 2018), the fourth participant conveyed capacity for using the interview process to reflect and revise his understanding concerning his relationship with his mother and his in-the-moment consideration of relevant emergent themes.

Problems for further study emerged from the within-case and cross-case analyses. One problem concerns the need to broaden the topic of adult development and revise notions of normative adult fulfillment. Another topic for study is the contribution of theory concerning mutual recognition as it pertains to the development of agency.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Institute for Clinical Social Work
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Research
A Case Study Analysis of Adults in Midlife
Who Have Lived Most of Their Adult Lives with Their Parents

I,___________________________, acting for myself, agree to take part in the research entitled "A Case Study Analysis of Adults in Midlife Who Have Lived Most or All of Their Adult Lives with Their Parents. This work will be carried out by Margaret L. Bluhm, LMSW (Principal Researcher) under the supervision of dissertation chair Jennifer Tolleson, PhD. This worker is being conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Clinical Social Work, at Robert Morris Center, 401 South State Street, Suite 822, Chicago, Illinois 60606, (312) 935-4240.

Purpose
Participation in this study will include being interviewed privately three times by the Principal Researcher at her downtown Chicago office. Each interview will involve talking and answering questions related to what you are sharing. Each interview will last for 60 to 90 minutes. Each interview will include talking about thoughts, feelings, and impressions about living with your parents. Each interview will be audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. The principal researcher will use the transcriptions of each interview to write one case study based on what you share during all the interviews combined. You will be given the opportunity to review your case study and provide feedback.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this research. Participating in this research is a contribution to the knowledge base of Clinical Social Work.

Costs
There is no direct cost for participating in this research. Getting to each of the interviews could involve spending your money for transportation costs such as gas, parking, or bus fare.

Possible risks and/or side effects
There is no more risk from participating in this study than would be encountered in everyday life. Participation involves talking about personal experiences. The principal researcher will be conducting each interview. She can provide information for seeking psychotherapy or supportive services at your request at the time of any of the interviews.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Each interview in its total duration will be private. I will not share your name with anyone. The audio-recorded interview material and transcriptions will be given a unique identifier such as a number rather than your name. digital audio-recordings will be given to a professional transcriber who will have signed a confidentiality agreement with the principal researcher in a password protected digital file in a password protected computer. Notes made on paper by the researcher during interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet at a location only known to the principal researcher. Only the principal researcher and her advisor will have access to these materials. All materials will be securely stored in these ways for five years in case a question arises during that period of time about the research which requires having access to the research data. After five years all of these materials will be destroyed.

Subject Assurances

By signing this consent form, I agree to take part in this study. I have not given up any of my rights or released the Institute for Clinical Social Work (ICSW) from responsibility for carelessness.

I may cancel my consent and refuse to continue in this study at any time without penalty. My relationship with the staff of the ICSW will not be affected in any way, now or in the future, if I refuse to take part, or if I begin the study and then withdraw. If I have any questions about the research methods I can contact Margaret Bluhm (269) 344-2202, or Jennifer Tolleson, Ph.D. (312) 342-3184. If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject I may call John Ridings, Ph.D. (773) 263-6225.

Signatures
I have read this consent form, and I agree to take part in this study as it is explained in this consent form.

_________________________________ _________________________________
Signature of Participant Date

I certify that I have explained the research to ________________________________and I believe that they understand and have freely agreed to participate. I agree to answer any additional questions when they arise during the research process or afterward.

_________________________________ _________________________________
Signature of Principal Researcher Date

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED SCREENING INTERVIEW

Review:

Purpose of the Study
What will be expected of participants
Review of Consent Form; to be signed at the first in-person interview

Demographics:

Age

Gender
Ethnicity
Employment status
Current living situation
Number of years there

Questions:

What is the respondent's understanding of the purpose of the study?
What is the respondent's understanding of what is expected of participants during the study?
What is the respondent's interest in the study?
Why would the respondent like to participate in this study?

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