

Institute for Clinical Social Work

POSTADOLESCENCE: REBALANCING PRIMARY TIES AND CONNECTIONS

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

By

JENNIFER THOMPSON

Chicago, Illinois
June, 2010

ABSTRACT

This study of current postadolescent experience explored how developmental processes of separation and individuation are reflected in shifting relationships with parents in the years of the twenties. Consolidation of these processes, which allows for transition into autonomous adulthood and mutual relatedness with parents, appears to be particularly challenging. Twenty participants between the ages of 23 and 29 were interviewed: constructionist grounded theory shaped the research process and data analysis. The theoretical framework included a range of theories which address human development. Elements of internal structure, representations of self and other, were focal in considering developmental process. The findings of this study were that a number of young people are struggling in processes of separating and individuating, and are painfully aware of inability to move forward. Accrual of psychic structure was found to be critical to autonomous function. Parental ambivalence or non-support of separation-individuation undermined developmental process. Unconflicted support to offspring involved a definite shift in parental stance which bolstered the internal structure in the postadolescent necessary for autonomous function. Additionally, it was found that there is a paucity of support, beyond parents, to this difficult developmental phase in the current environment, with implications for clinical thinking, practice and future study.

For my father, who died in November 2009.

And for my son and favorite young adult.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to those I interviewed, who were so generous and earnest in their sharing of personal experience, their genuine acknowledgement of struggles and the feelings around those struggles. I am glad to have met each of these young adults and was honored by the frank telling of their stories, their spirit of willingness to be helpful to my project.

The encouragement and support of my friends has been invaluable to me in this endeavor. I thank all of my instructors at the Institute for Clinical Social Work, whose thoughtful teaching opened up my awareness and guided me through this degree. I am grateful to my committee members who each had a sui generis contribution to my work; Joan DiLeonardi, Ph.D., my chairperson, whose encouragement was ever-present, Robert Mardirossian, Ph.D. who reviewed my drafts with detailed attention, asking critical questions, Dennis McCaughan, Ph.D., who helped focus the study and literature review. My thoughtful readers, Miriam Reitz, Ph.D. and Rita Sussman, Ph.D., also made judicious contributions to the written work.

JWT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
Chapter	
I. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
General Statement of Purpose	
Significance of the Study for Clinical Social Work	
Statement of the Problem to Be Studied and the Specific Objective	
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RELEVANT THEORY.....	7
Early Processes of Separation and Individuation	
Separation and Individuation Recapitulated in Adolescence	
Separation and Individuation in the Postadolescent Phase	
Transition to Adulthood	
Concurrent Drives to Autonomy and Connection	
Descriptions of the Contemporary Postadolescent from the Literature	
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for Proposed Study	
Question to Be Explored	
Theoretical and Operational Definitions of Major Concepts	
Statement of Assumptions	

TABLE OF CONTENTS – *Continued*

Chapter	Page
III. METHODOLOGY.....	51
Aim, Type, and Design of the Study	
Participant Recruitment	
Description of the Participants	
Data Collection Methods	
Analysis of Data	
Use of Member Checking	
Statement on Protection of Rights	
Limitations of the Research	
IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE FINDINGS.....	63
Major Concepts in the Chapters on Findings	
Cultural Valence and the Larger Environment	
V. STRUGGLING TO SEPARATE AND INDIVIDUATE.....	70
Provision in Lieu of Support Is Not Helpful	
The Hierarchy Is Maintained	
Parental Conflict Over Separation-Individuation Undermines the Process	
Maintaining Dependency	
Maintaining Over-involvement	
Separation Anxiety	
Rapprochement Process or Regression?	
Preoccupations & Persisting Childhood Dynamics with Family of Origin	
“Adult Helper” to the Parent	
Facing Adulthood with Trepidation	
Individuation Is Risky	
VI. GRAPPLING WITH THE WORK OF THESE PROCESSES.....	93
Level of Involvement Dates Back to Homework	
Use of Significant Others to Support Separation	
Mentors Promoting Separation	
Learning Hard Lessons—More Realistic Thinking	
Transitional Phase	
A Shift in Relationship with Parents—Towards More Mutuality	
Reluctant Adults	
Individuation in Process	

TABLE OF CONTENTS – *Continued*

Chapter	Page
VII. DEVELOPMENTAL ACHIEVEMENTS ARE MORE DEFINED.....	107
Unambivalent Parental Messages in Support of Independence	
Experiences That Have Promoted Separation-Individuation	
Autonomous Functioning	
Useful Identifications with Parents	
Seeing Parents as Own People	
Mature Connections	
Embracing Adulthood	
Individuation	
VIII. THEORETICAL EXPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS.....	123
Findings	
Internal Structure Accrues Over the Course of Development	
IX. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY.....	136
Appendixes	
A. RECRUITMENT NOTICE.....	141
B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	143
REFERENCES.....	146

CHAPTER I

FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

General Statement of Purpose

In changing cultural contexts, developmental phases in the course of human life expand and contract in subtle ways. Development is understood to be an ongoing process from birth to death, reflecting the complexity of the innate, in constant reciprocal interaction with every facet of the environment (Spitz, 1965). The process is manifested in continual reorganizations and shifting integrations of these factors in each individual, integrations that become more intricate with ongoing combinations of the internal and external. Each reorganization and new integration permits a higher level of function. The human life course is generally divided into major developmental phases, with each phase characterized by some fundamental changes, reorganizations and integrations which represent consolidations of previous developmental process and which undergird transition into the next phase.

A widely acknowledged phenomenon in current American culture is the lengthened postadolescent phase of development, a period now roughly extended through the twenties. Some theorists have designated these years as a separate and new phase of development, “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 1994), a term which conveys the fact that the traditionally accepted achievements of adulthood have not yet been surmounted.

In the past, these tasks have generally been defined as financial independence from parents, marriage, and commitment to career. American culture was founded on principles of autonomy and independence, embedded in which is the expectation that young adults will establish themselves apart from their family of origin. Regardless of the term used to describe these young people, or the criteria for adulthood, the current experience of postadolescence appears to have unique qualities which are important to explore and understand.

Prolonged adolescence is not a new phenomenon, but has re-emerged in numerous contexts over the history of human life. "Prolonged adolescence" was defined as such by Siegfried Bernfeld in description of European males in the post World War I environment (Blos, 1979, p. 38). Current postadolescence, lived out in the decade of the twenties, has singular characteristics which reflect the challenges of the larger environment, as well as interrelational configurations between the postadolescent and parents. The context for the lived experience of today's postadolescent is predominated by an unprecedented rate of change and technological advancement. This reality trickles down with a myriad of implications for every facet of life.

Every society has been concerned with how to support healthy development, one aspect of which is the shaping of future adults. Understanding the psychological aspects, as well as the behavioral, is essential. Separation and individuation, in relationship to parents, are fundamental concepts in developmental theory, and represent lifelong processes. While not the only framework for understanding transition into adulthood, the psychic concepts involved are understood to underlie autonomous behavior and function, as well as capacity for genuine connection. Blos observed that each culture and age has

its own style of individuation: the underlying effort is always to move away from the established order (1979, p. 149). Emotional attachments between parents and offspring are always significant. The degree to which culture supports, or fails to support, psychic separation from infantile objects and individuation process, is something which shifts with contemporary attitudes towards family, economic conditions and societal provision of organizations to ease transition from dependence on parents. If we understand human psychic development to encompass achievement of separateness and individuation in relationship to others, it follows that separation-individuation is a valid framework for studying and understanding the transition into the autonomous functioning of adulthood. This study provides current information about the experience of postadolescence in terms of relationships with parents, and how that experience is reflective of processes of separation and individuation.

Significance of the Study for Clinical Social Work

Clinical social work theory is subject to constant revision as those in the field report on current work and findings. It is clearly important to reassess each phase of human life in terms of current cultural circumstances and in terms of ever-evolving formulations of how best to understand human function. This study is significant in its description of current experience of individuals within a developmental phase that is in particular flux at this time. It is critical to attempt to understand the reasons for this and to think about the data in terms of the assessment of healthy development. Assumptions around what constitutes “health” should also be open to exploration. The goals of developmental process also require critical reconsideration. Additionally, findings

regarding the challenges of young adulthood will also inform our evaluation of the successes and failures of earlier phases of development, thereby increasing knowledge of what has been efficacious in supporting development. Clinical social workers have the ongoing challenge of understanding clients in terms of their environment, as well as responsibility for continual appraisal of working theory as to its relevancy and efficacy. This study contributes to that dynamic process.

Statement of the Problem to Be Studied and the Specific Objective

The psychic structure of each young adult undergoes substantial and challenging revision during postadolescent years. Consolidation of developmental processes that have been ongoing since infancy allow for greater degree of separation and individuation between self and object, and autonomy in function. Entry into adulthood is marked by psychological change, and therefore is not as easy to observe as earlier developmental transitions, which often included a biological component. If psychic separation has gone well, subtleties of individuation emerge and flourish. A primary marker of transition into adulthood may be achievement of relative equality and mutuality between parents and offspring. This would reflect separate and equivalent psychic structures, allowing for the young adult and parents to share a fairly balanced subjectivity. The young adult is able to appreciate the de-idealized parent as a person with his or her own mind, interests and struggles, which facilitates the young adult moving into other relationships with capacity for equality and mutuality.

This study collected and recorded rich elaborations on the experience of becoming a young adult today, through the particular lens of internal representations of

self and other. The search for the optimal distance from, or optimal closeness to, the object is an ongoing theme of life. Relationship to objects is central to psychic structure and the acquisition of psychic structure. Ego functions, differentiation of self and other, boundaries of self and other, object constancy and constancy of self are components of psychic structure that support autonomous function. Individuation into a unique elaboration of human personhood represents culmination of developmental process and the parent/offspring interrelationship. These structural concepts are fundamental in psychoanalytic theory. Consolidation of this developmental process appears to be challenging for today's postadolescents, and examination of that process is indicated.

Focus on psychic structure was central to ego psychology. In subsequent years, theory, and the language around theory, have undergone continual revision. Terms describing components of psychic structure are not common in the theoretical parlance of today, but remain undeniably foundational to the understanding of development. Goals of healthy development are currently discussed in terms of mutual subjectivity, rather than separation-individuation, however, the importance of separation-individuation process to development is embedded across theories. A mature relationship of mutuality is only possible pursuant to fairly successful separation-individuation. This study asks the question, "What is the current experience of postadolescence in terms of parental relationships: how is the experience reflective of processes of separation and individuation?" Qualitative descriptions will focus on changing connections to parents and how mental representations of self and other shift over the decade. Concepts of psychic structure will provide points of reference in the study, in order to assess contribution to autonomous function, and in order to elucidate the current challenges

around transition into adulthood. The objective of this study is limited to an understanding of a relatively small sample of young people who will not necessarily be representative of all of those in this phase of life. Results will not be generalizable to larger populations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RELEVANT THEORY

Early Processes of Separation and Individuation

Every early stage of development persists alongside the later stage which has arisen from it; here succession also involves co-existence, although it is to the same materials that the whole series of transformations has applied. The earlier mental state may not have manifested itself for years, but none the less it is so far present that it may at any time again become the mode of expression of the forces in the mind, and indeed the only one, as though all later developments had been annulled or undone. (Freud, 1957, p. 285)

Mahler's research on the separation-individuation process provided a body of developmental theory which was grounded in Freudian libido theory, and was consistent with object relations theory. Mahler's theory was "compatible" with the ego theory prevalent at the time of her writing, as well as Erikson's conceptualization of trust (Blum, 2004, p. 2-3). Widely recognized in the psychoanalytic field for contributing critical intrapsychic concepts to the study of development, Mahler's work remains foundational, despite later theoretical contributions and modifications. Her theory informs postadolescent process, which can be understood as a more sophisticated recapitulation of the developmental processes Mahler and her group detailed.

Theorists in the tradition of Stern, who described a self which evolves from fine mutual attunement between infant and mother, were expanding on Mahler's

understanding of the human psyche as emergent in the bath of maternal care (Mitchell, 1995, p. 47). Stern disagreed with Mahler on the concept of symbiosis, stating “there is no confusion between self and other in the beginning or at any point during infancy” (1985, p. 10). He theorized that the infant experiences a sense of self from the moment of birth (1985, p. 10) and focused on understanding the development of self. More recent infant research has largely refuted evidence of an autistic phase occurring in the first few weeks of life, as Mahler described. However the theories of Stern and Mahler do not differ in their proposal of a “slow emergence of self” (Stern, p. 70) predicated on the interaction between mother and infant. In recent years, Pine synthesized the perspectives by noting that “we have ‘both/and’ minds, not ‘either/or’ ones,” and that observations of “moments of differentiated perception” recorded in infant research not do preclude times of undifferentiated states with the mother (2004, p. 14).

Mahler’s studies elaborated on the intrapsychic changes that underlie infant separation from the primary love object, a process which Mahler conceptualized as reverberating throughout the course of life (Mahler, Pine and Bergman, 1975, p. 3). Stern stated that his ideas are “closest” to Mahler in privileging infant experience of self and other. He conceptualized different goals for development, centered around development of self, rather than phases or sequences of structural development (1985, p. 19). Stern understood sense of self to be “an experiential integration” (1985, p. 71) of subjective experience with the other. He noted, “the possibility of sharing subjective experiences has no meaning unless it is a transaction that occurs against the surety of a physically distinct and separate self and other” (1985, p. 125). Mahler stressed the need for the psychic distinction.

Mahler marked the separation-individuation phase as occurring between ages of four to thirty-sixth months, and conceptualized separation process to be divided into four sequential subphases, though she has been criticized for this somewhat rigid framework. Individuation, more specifically relates to a child's "assumption of his own individual characteristics" (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 4). Mahler described the central work of the separation-individuation phase as the "intrapsychic achievement of a sense of separateness from the mother" (Mahler et al., 1975, p.8); "achievement of separate functioning in the presence of, and with the emotional availability of the mother" (Mahler, 1963). The process is gradual, and supported by attention to "readiness for and pleasure in, independent functioning" (Mahler et al., 1975, p.3).

Infant experience is affected in fundamental ways by how the mother handles the infant, that handling inevitably reflective of her own anxiety or conflict. Experiences which are "emotionally fraught" for the mother will be imprinted on infant experience with particular valence and over-determination (Pine, 2004, p. 5). Early marking of separation process may result in a lifelong disturbance in this area: minimally, future separation process will stir some related conflict. "As is true of any region of conflict-ridden object relations, once begun it will be drawn on thereafter by both participants" (Pine, 2004, p. 6). Vestiges of this early experience will be carried forward in the psychological and emotional world of the growing being.

Louise Kaplan wrote, "ultimately, every facet of human existence is reflected in the reconciliations of oneness and separateness" (1978, p. 31). Mahler's theory described an initial state of symbiosis with the mother, an undifferentiated state of fusion forming a single entity. She conceptualized this phase, in Freudian terms, as a state of primary

narcissism (Mahler, et al., 1975, p.42). The human infant is totally dependent on the mother, and maintenance of physiological and psychological homeostasis, through her, is the infant's primary activity. Mahler wrote that Hartmann, as early as 1939, recognized the infant's skill in adaptation to his environment, through accommodation to the particular expression of the mother (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 5). "Nascent perceptions of attention/satisfaction" (Spitz 1955, Mahler, 1969, p. 46) focus on the mother, and the infant begins to orient towards the object discerned to be the source of pleasure. In tandem with this, the newborn stirs "receptive and holding on attitudes" in mothers (Kaplan, 1978, p. 72). Remnants of these entwined behaviors persist through all phases of development.

I have had the idea that the process of birth itself is the first great agent in preparing for awareness of separation; that this occurs through the considerable pressure impact on and stimulation of the infant's body surface during birth and especially by the marked changes in pressure and thermal conditions surrounding the infant in his transfer from intramural to extramural life (Greenacre 1960).

Greenacre wrote of the sensate "sense of oneness" with the mother's warm body, while sight and hearing begin to pull infant attention to the outer world. Exploration behaviors emerge, despite the safety and pleasure associated with the mother (Mahler et al., 1975, p.53). The separation-individuation phase of development encompasses growing awareness of a separate self and other, which allows for grasp of outer reality, object relating, and burgeoning sense of self (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 48). The first of Mahler's four sub-phases was termed differentiation. Mahler and Kaplan both noted that the cadence and quality of this early experience of moving out from, and returning to the mother, survive in lifelong patterns of personality organization. Mahler observed that as the baby ends the first year of life, two developmental tracks of separation and

individuation become evident, “the intrapsychic developmental track of separation . . . distancing, boundary foundation and disengagement from the mother” and the “track of individuation, the evolution of intrapsychic autonomy, perception, memory, cognition, reality testing.” These concurrent processes structuralize the “internalized self-representation” (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 63).

Mahler named the second portion of separation-individuation process, practicing, which includes beginning efforts to propel away from mother as well as the practicing permitted by ability to walk (1975, p. 65). Observation revealed that babies with good ability to contact back to mother from a distance were able to travel further from mother. Unwillingness to relinquish proximity prevented babies from venturing out from the mother with eagerness. Healthy development is characterized by “elated investment in the exercise of the autonomous functions, especially motility to the near exclusion of apparent interest in the mother at times.” Mother’s consistent presence as a “home base” is critical to practicing (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 69). Also central is the baby’s narcissistic investment in his body, and his ability to employ it to reach new objects and goals (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 71).

The third sub-phase of separation-individuation is rapprochement, a time of considerable individuation, and a period characterized by ambivalence about closeness versus separateness. Developments in cognition permit increased awareness of separateness (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 76). The toddler rocks back and forth between fears that his or her new autonomy may be delimited, and the wish to reunite with the mother. “No” emerges in defense of his independence, predominating in the vocabulary. Mahler stressed that “optimal emotional availability of the mother” during this challenging

period is critical; for it is her regard and acceptance of the toddler's ambivalence, which supports establishment of a neutralized self-representation (1975, p. 77). The co-existence of wishes for connection and separation will remain in the individual's psychology, and will be strongly echoed in the postadolescent phase.

Intrapsychically, representations of the self and other are becoming more differentiated for the toddler. Increased awareness of the parent as having her own mental life undermines efforts to maneuver the mother back into an omnipotent other with whom the toddler can meld. A broader range of affect in the toddler supports emerging capacity for empathy and identifications with others (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 97). Cognitive developments allow verbal communication to begin replacing communication based on affect and motility, so that relationships can be internalized (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 79). Early consolidations of object constancy in the second half of the third year, along with identifications, offset some of the feelings of vulnerability that are pursuant to awareness of separateness (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 98). Theorists subsequent to Mahler have taken issue with her use of the term "rapprochement crisis," as individual resolutions involve an extended and gradual process (Blum, 2004, p. 5). While "crisis" is perhaps not the best descriptor, resolutions to rapprochement are widely accepted to be foundational to personality.

Each child has a unique elaboration around coping with separateness: this process is summarized in the intrapsychic structuring that occurs as rapprochement concludes (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 104). Recognition of separateness is shaped by relationships with each parent, and also is a shaping factor in those relationships (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 102). Mahler observed that boys tend to motor out into their larger environments with

more ease than girls, who generally remain more ambivalently involved with their mothers. Recognition of anatomical sex difference, (and a perceived lack of something), complicates separation from the mother, as girls tend to blame the mother for something missing (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 106). Early identification with their mother is another complication for girls, whereas boys' identifications with another male supports separation process. Extreme ambivalence in the toddler may result in attempts to coerce the mother to continue in the role of omnipotent extension of the child. Alternatively, the child may split the object world into "good" and "bad" in order to preserve the good object from his or her aggression (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 107-108). Toddlers must manage increased awareness of oral, anal and genital pressures. Another aspect of development involves very early superego development, which takes the form of internalizations of the demands of the parents, with the attendant fear of loss of object love (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 107).

Mahler assigned two tasks to the fourth segment of the separation-individuation phase of development, "(1) achievement of a definite, in certain aspects lifelong, individuality, and (2) the attainment of a certain degree of object constancy" (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 109). The toddler's ability to hold a "constant, positively cathected, inner image of the mother" underlies object constancy, permitting management of tension when apart from the mother (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 109). Intrapsychic structure development includes broadening of the ego, early gender identification, stability to the boundaries around the self and ability to integrate "good" and "bad" objects into a "whole" representation (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 110).

Kaplan wrote of constancy in terms of human love, and the lifelong attempt to resolve longing for the oneness of initial love with the need for a separate self (1978, p. 27). Mahler describes the achievement of object constancy as an involved process, which rests on some earlier critical aspects of development; capacity to trust, (based on an essentially reliable object who relieves tension), internalization of the reliable object as a whole positive image, and the establishment of symbolic representation of this permanent object. Other factors involved in consolidating object constancy are endowment, reality testing, neutralization of drives and ability to tolerate frustration (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 110). In fairly normative circumstances, an inner image of the mother is in place for the 3-year-old, permitting the separation required by preschool attendance (Mahler, et al., 1975, p. 112). The 3-year-old may demonstrate negativity, which serves the development of his separate identity, however, the essential formation of his identity rests on the capacity for mental representation of a self as separate (Mahler, et al., 1975, p. 116). In tandem with this process, cognitive development and ego differentiation support drive pressure management and help to maintain the essentially “good” inner object (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 117). This newly formed psychic structure, the internal mother, “holds” the 3-year-old. Sustained ambivalence, or more aggression, impedes development of object constancy and progression to secondary narcissism (Mahler, et al., 1975, p. 117). The structural elements and process Mahler laid out are critical to this study of current postadolescent experience of transition to adulthood.

Mahler agreed with Erikson (1959), that individuation is a force, innate and intense in early years, but evident throughout life (1975, p. 208). Enduring personality is an expression of this process, which proceeds alongside the separation process. Mahler’s

understanding of development included appreciation of the mother's unconscious, her fantasies regarding the child, as well as her personality structure and the cadence of the mother's parenting in terms of the separation-individuation process (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 202). Psychic structures in the child are somewhat fragile, and very much a product of the mother's ongoing ability to support normative developmental process. Thoughtful provision of both gratifying and frustrating experiences is crucial. Optimally, investment in the self builds in the toddler (secondary narcissism), the ego grows more autonomous, and object relations can develop with neutralized libido, as noted by Kris (1955) (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 226).

Mahler wrote that this fourth subphase of separation-individuation never fully terminates: the tension between the wish to regress to a merged state, and the forward press to autonomy, shades all subsequent developmental process (1975, p. 227). Kaplan captured the tension that survives around earliest experience in the following quote. "At each step of the way, whenever his mother disappoints him or the world frustrates his efforts to conquer it, the child will long to restore the primary bliss of oneness, when the harmony inside him was like being an angel baby in the lap of a Madonna" (1978, p. 119). Separation process moves beyond the simple issue of physical proximity, to include the psychic realm, and the complexity of internal representations of self and other, though the tension is retained, and will be apparent in postadolescent function.

Anni Bergman, who was involved in Mahler's study and in the write-up of the work, has discussed some of their findings in more current terms; for instance, the process of mother/child rupture and repair within the separation-individuation process as described in their study, can be described as a co-construction in which both participants

are affected (2004, p. 1). While some have criticized Mahler's work for being based on a single person model (and Bergman readily conceded that parent/child studies should be structured on a two person model) Bergman stressed that their findings did in fact include the idea that each developmental step of the child altered the nature of the dyadic relationship. In addressing attachment theorist claims that focus should be on how the mother's sensitive response affects attachment (as opposed to focus on achievement of object constancy) Bergman posited that these two formulations are not contradictory (2004, p. 2). She regarded Stern's ideas about mutuality of intention and affect, and shared meaning, as further enrichment to the understanding of developmental process (2004, p. 6). As a child is frustrated and a mother helps the child to manage his conflicts and affects, they are together co-constructing around the separation-individuation process (Bergman, 2004, p. 8). And in overall developmental process, with each achievement by the child, parents must modify expectations, needs and hopes in relationship to that child's incremental movement towards autonomy (Bergman, 2004, p. 10).

Bergman emphasized the constant search for a mother and child to find a way to be together, as the child progresses towards autonomy (2004, p. 7). Bergman further defended the validity of Mahler's work by noting that the research group did report on pleasure and mutuality of affect, having recognized the child's awareness of subjective experience (2004, p. 4). She also highlighted implicit losses for mother and child embedded in separating and individuating, (2004, p.3). Bergman pointed out the importance of the mother's presence in the rapprochement phase, at a time when one might surmise that the mother was less needed (2004, p. 3), this paralleling the idea that parental presence is important to developmental process in postadolescence.

Relational theorist Benjamin has grounded many of her ideas in Mahler's theory, agreeing that the creation of psychic structure is a result of the interaction with mother, with internalization as the primary mode of structure building that supports achievement of autonomy (1990, p. 186). Like Stern, she emphasized early differentiation and more "mutual influence" (Frie and Reis, 2001, p. 8). Benjamin stressed that "pleasure" in the mutual recognition of the other, as subjective being, encourages the developing mother/infant relationship (1990, p. 187). Her criticism of Mahler was that the earlier theorist emphasized maternal provision, or failed provision, as opposed to elaborating on the pleasure of experiencing connection with the other (1990, p. 189). Like Mahler, Benjamin recognized that the psychological health of the mother is a crucial variable in the child's development.

Rather than privileging the achievement of object constancy, Benjamin values resolution that involves a "constant tension" between the recognition of the other and self-assertion (1990, p. 191). While Mahler described developmental goals in different terms than Benjamin, she arguably did capture this tension. It is implicit in her statement that separation and individuation are non-terminal processes. Tension results from the duality of conceptualized objectives of separation and connection playing out in an intersubjective field (Frie and Reis, 2001, p. 8). It is an unnecessary criticism of Mahler to state that she would consider connection to be a "failure in differentiation" (Stern, 1985, p. 241), as if she had believed that parent and offspring shouldn't maintain relatedness.

For Benjamin, ideal resolution includes simultaneous connection and separation (1990, p. 189). This formulation has origins in Stern's idea that the drive to be with

another parallels the drive for autonomy, both processes operating throughout life (1985, p. 10). Benjamin believes that in the achievement of independence, we are dependent on the other to recognize our independent state (1990, p. 190). To separation-individuation theory, she adds “establishment of a shared reality,” this concept echoing the Winnicott notion of “cross identification” as promoter of shared feeling (1990, p. 193).

Recognition of one’s own will and the will of the other allows for equality in relating (Frie and Reis, 2001, p. 8). Mutual recognition of self and other as equals could be viewed as a primary task of postadolescence in service of attainment of adulthood. Adulthood should involve a balance of power and submission between parent and offspring. Benjamin describes an aspect of early infant/mother interaction as “development of the capacity for mutual recognition” (1990, p. 188). It can be argued that mutual recognition is really only possible between two adults, representing culmination of developmental process which began in early years, but is achieved in the decade of the twenties.

The culmination of early separation-individuation process results in the psychological birth of the young child, and allows him or her to turn attention to mastering the environment, shifting energy and preoccupation to learning. The school age years are a time of relative calm internally, before the conflicts and challenges of adolescence arrive with attendant demands for greater separation and individuation. Brandt has noted that while the toddler must recognize, to some degree, his separateness, resolution of the crises of adolescence are particularly difficult because the adolescent must know and accept himself to be separate and reliant on his own strengths and abilities in the larger environment (1977, p. 7). Peter Blos understood adolescence to be

a second critical period of separation and individuation. As structural achievements characterize the end of the third year of life, structural modification of existing psychic structure, as well as acquisition of new structure, characterize adolescence.

Separation and Individuation Recapitulated in Adolescence

The adolescent version of separation-individuation involves greater loosening of archaic object connections in order for the adolescent to be more independent in the larger world (Blos, 1979, p. 142). Adolescent process opens up access to deeper ties with objects beyond the family. Prior to adolescence, the child draws on the parental ego to supplement management of anxiety and regulation of self-esteem (Blos, 1979, p. 144). In relinquishing both infantile and latency stage ego dependencies, the adolescent ego is left weakened. Contributing to the weakness is more intense drive activity. Optimally, ego broadening and differentiation proceeds with drive development, a process which ultimately comprises the restructuralization of the second individuation, thereby restoring strength to the structure (Blos, 1979, p. 145). Critical are the shifting investments in libido, in terms of “holding on” or “pushing away” from the object. Blos understood these processes as recapitulation of the first separation-individuation phase, again preparing the individual for more independent functioning, in an even larger environment (Blos, 1979, p. 146).

Individuals who do not relinquish ties to parental objects may effect an apparent disengagement by taking on a presentation contrary to those objects. Adolescent efforts to attempt to avoid the pain of separation may take the form of running away, achieving physical distance in lieu of psychological distance (Blos, 1979, p.147). Blos noted in

these cases, “the regressive pull to infantile dependencies, grandiosities, safeties and gratifications” are frightening. However, separation by rejection or critical withdrawal from infantile objects aborts the process and results in “alienation” (Blos, 1979, p. 148). Acting out, aimlessness, mood disorder or learning disturbance can also reflect regressive process (Blos, 1979, p.147). Yet creating physical or otherwise purported distance from parents generally precludes working on internal separation (Blos, 1979, p. 147). “The countercathetic energy employed in upholding this stage of life generally accounts for the often striking inefficacy, emotional shallowness, procrastination and expectant waiting which characterize the various forms of individual avoidance” (Blos, 1979, p. 147). Attempting to substitute another form of dependency represents another derailment of developmental process. The defenses against castration anxiety are often seen to block progressive development in the male adolescent. Resultant inhibitions and arrests are reflected in indecision, self-doubt, aimlessness and moodiness. True maturity rests not on “distance” from parents, but on actual separation-individuation process, as maturity requires substantial ego structure and maturity of drives (Blos, 1979, p. 148).

Adolescence involves intensification of drives, which occurs within preferred modes related to early object relations. The process of ego restructuring, which allows for a new love object to replace the archaic one, is a long and involved one of gradual cathetic shifts. Included in the process are re-experience and re-engagement of the infantile drive and ego positions: reworking of these produces more lasting solutions (Blos, 1979, p. 149-150).

Reorganization of the superego is another aspect of structural change in adolescence. Superego development can be compromised by previous failures of the

latency period, during which period infantile object dependencies are, optimally, reduced by identification processes. If primitive identifications carried in the earliest organizations of the superego have not been modified, “enmeshment of the superego with infantile object relations” persists (Blos, 1979, p. 151). Remaining identifications with the omnipotent mother render all efforts towards goals disappointing, as they fall so short of the grandiose (Blos, 1979, p. 152). Individuation cannot advance under these conditions. Blos emphasized that “the task of psychic restructuring by regression represents the most formidable psychic work of adolescence” (1979, p. 152). Return to infantile object relating reinstates some ambivalence, which must then be reworked. Disengagement from the archaic objects and decathexis from the archaic object representations allows for libidinal cathexis of the self, which supports ego and superego autonomy (Blos, 1979, p. 154). The particular regressions of the adolescent reveal the previous psychic structure resultant from the first separation-individuation to be durable or defective (Blos, 1979, p. 157), and future development always reflects earlier process.

Bloom described the “nostalgia,” in adolescents and parents, associated with conscious awareness of the loss of the parent/child relationship (1980, p. 61). In some cases, the separation-individuation process is suffused with grief and mourning (Bloom, 1980, p. 15). Blos described disengagement from internalized parental representations as freeing, but also noted that some depression is inevitable due to the inherent loss; this tending to leave the ego somewhat impoverished. However, with eventual consolidation of these processes, autonomy emerges as the achievement of true individuation (Blos, 1979, p. 165). Individuation is demonstrated in the young adult’s actualizations in his environment, his choice of career, friends, partner, lifestyle.

Blos theorized that the Oedipus complex is not resolved in childhood, and that what comes to the fore in adolescence is the love of the same sex parent, or the negative Oedipus complex (1979, p. 316). He described the dilemma for adolescent boys: paralleling rivalry of the father is the wish to be loved by the father. These more passive yearnings for love conflict with more active goal-directed aims and trigger criticism of the self (Blos, 1979, p. 321). There is a developmental press for resolution of this conflict, and with resolution, childhood bisexuality is closed out through the resulting structure formation. Blos considered this to be new structure, which is acquired in tandem with a general restructuring of existing structures. This work accrues in the adult ego ideal (Blos, 1979, p. 316). Both positive and negative Oedipus complexes are involved in the last phase of adolescence, and their reactivation loosens connections to infantile objects, spurring individuation. Resolution is colored by the particularities of the childhood bisexuality and points of object related fixations. Ego ideal precursors and superego functions are sexualized during adolescence, in part because of their enmeshment with narcissistic object libido. With resolution of the negative Oedipus complex, the ego ideal can transform from a wish-fulfilling version, into a desexualized, goal directed, abstracted agent of motivation. Though ego ideal development processes are different for males and females, “the adolescent structuralization of the ego ideal determines, for both sexes, the end phase of the adolescent process: in other words, it marks the termination of psychological childhood” (Blos, 1979, p. 324). A limitation of Blos’s theory should be noted: he conceptualized resolution to be of a heterosexual nature. Subsequent theorists have thought more broadly about resolution, encompassing a better understanding of the continuum of sexuality.

As adolescence consolidates, the mature ego ideal is highly influential over more of the personality, thought and behavior, with a corresponding reduction in superego function (Blos, 1979, p. 326). The ego ideal provides regulatory function through a sense of wellbeing, rather than fear of punishment characteristic of the Oedipal superego (Blos, 1979, p. 329).

Some of the outward signs of a terminated adolescence are that mood swings are less intense, self understanding replaces the urgent need to be understood by others, and establishment of capacity for a more reserved public presentation of self, while another presentation is withheld for intimates. The primary sign is consolidation of personality around the reordered ego, ego ideal and superego; this consolidation allowing for investment in plans, goal-directed activity and ability to make commitments (Blos, 1979, p. 410). In the following statement, Blos summarized relevant developmental process:

Formation of object and self representations establishes the boundary between the the internal and the external world. The internalized parents, and through them, the internalized culture in the widest sense, remain relatively unchallenged until puberty. During adolescence, these old and familiar dependencies, as well as infantile love and hate objects, are drawn anew into the emotional life. The object disengagement through individuation at the adolescent level does not proceed in relation to external objects, as it did in early childhood; it now proceeds in relation to the internalized objects of early childhood. (1979, p. 412)

The course of culture is not always supportive of these newly achieved structures, which can impact their durability (Blos, 1979, p. 411). And many parents revel in the adolescent wish to “enshrine” the infantile attachments, encouraging perpetuation of their role as the all-knowing, all-giving parent. De-idealization is painful for both sides, but can be seriously undermining for the adolescent sense of self (Blos, 1979, 413). Over-valuation of a parent may transform into the expectation that the larger surround will provide solutions to life’s dilemmas, which Blos termed the “rescue fantasy” (1962, p.

153). He described the wish to have some form of good circumstance intervene to solve one's problems. This type of fantasy represents a failure to integrate residual trauma into the ego structure, so that reparation from the larger environment is expected. If postadolescence is not characterized by successful ego integration process, the rescue fantasy may persist throughout life (Blos, 1962, p. 155). Frustrations with larger world institutions can represent an externalization of frustrations with an imperfect internal object (Blos, 1979, p.414).

The Blos definition of prolonged adolescence was "a static perseveration in the adolescent position which under normal circumstances is of a time-limited and transitory nature" (1979, p. 39). While the prolongation may express the wish to combine perks of adulthood with the gratifications of childhood (Blos, 1979, p. 39), Blos stated that prolonged adolescence structurally represents an absence of stable drive and ego function organization (1979, p. 43).

Blos emphasized that total renunciation of infantile sexual ties to each parent is required to terminate adolescence (1979, p. 324). Later theorists have criticized Blos for the requirement of renunciation, as if his intent was rupture of relationship with the parent. It is unlikely that his thinking would have been so intolerant of ongoing relationship between postadolescent and parent. Freud noted that individuals have differing capacity to resist the influence of "erotic object choices" which have so fundamentally shaped one's life (Blos, 1962, p. 155). Detachment of the sex drive from infantile objects allows for drive stabilization, and the libido previously invested in these objects can now be invested into the ego or narcissistic libido, with attendant conflict reduction (Blos, 1962, p. 156).

Separation and Individuation in the Postadolescent Phase of Development

Blos wrote extensively on the postadolescent phase, which he conceptualized as the time of the most intense work of “harmonizing the entire drive and ego organizations” (1962, p. 150). The psychic structure achieved in adolescence requires an extended period for consolidation as well as full integration, a process which occurs through completion of early adult tasks of job selection, partner choice and development of social role (1962, p. 149). Blos noted that reduction in instinctual conflict allows the ego to strengthen and devote itself to goal achievement. Under the sway of the ego ideal, self-respect and esteem replace reliance on parents (Blos, 1962, p. 151-152). As each new degree of separateness forces reassessment of selfhood in relationship to the other, psychic reworking is necessary. This ongoing reworking and assimilation process characterizes postadolescence, though it is normative for these developmental tasks to be achieved in partial fashion (Blos, 1962, p. 153).

Identifications are resifted, with a more conscious process of rejection and selection of parental attitudes and characteristics (Blos, 1962, p. 155). Frequently a love partner assists the postadolescent in selecting identifications or counter-identifications with the parental object (Blos, 1962, p. 156). The very substantial work of “character formation” proceeds, with the “adaptive and integrative function of the ego in ascendancy” (Blos, 1962, p. 156).

Settlage stressed the role of object and self-constancy in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as they are critical to the maintenance of relationships, the regulation of self-esteem and to identity. He agreed that the ego, super ego and ego ideal

are the structures for regulation and allow for independent functioning, Settlage additionally traced the evolution of trust, beginning with infancy, and noted that another product of the structural changes of adolescence is an increase in trust of the self (1990, p. 33). The young adult has a sense of ownership of regulatory functions and capacities. Object and self-constancy are the “primary structural basis for commitment and a reasonably stable identity, steadfast morality, loyalty and fidelity” (Settlage, 1990, p. 37).

Settlage also considered current familial/cultural context to be significant and indicated that the appropriateness of dependency on parents is culturally mediated (1990, p. 27). Staples and Smarr also noted the possibility for serious regression in the postadolescent during unstable times, when support to the young adult process of becoming established in work and developing social roles is minimal (1991, p. 431). The capacity of the ego is strained when there is a paucity of adult support to psychic structure. Isay noted that various forms of acting out by the postadolescent may be in the service of forcing separation to avoid feelings of dependency. Attachment to parents, at this point, can be unconsciously frightening (Isay, 1991, p. 457). There is a cultural expectation for progression to independence, which can be intimidating, but also stirs feelings of loss. These difficulties are compounded in a cultural context of minimal support.

In the 1980’s, Gilligan articulated a specifically feminine perspective, emphasizing that women are undervalued for their skills in attachment, particularly in a culture that rewards autonomy (1982, p. 155). Gilligan noted that development theory lacked elaboration around the process of relationship building, though her statement that “development,” as understood at the time, could be “charted by measuring the distance

between mother and child” (1982, p. 151), was an unnecessary reduction. Progression in relating with others moves the individual “toward a maturity of independence” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 155). Gilligan was concerned that with correlation of autonomy and maturity in postadolescent years, female strengths of maintaining attachments could be viewed negatively. However, attention to concepts of separation and individuation need not indicate underestimation of connection, but elucidate the underpinnings and complexity of the connection between two individuals. Some degree of achievement of separation and individuation is required for the mature attachment Gilligan described. Dismissal of these processes, as if they were in opposition to connection, is unnecessary.

Bloom wrote that the increase in formal operational thinking in postadolescence allows for awareness of the larger culture and the diversity of different cultures. This awareness contributes to a process of self re-evaluation, in terms of values, norms and ideals. Reflection on self and identity is folded into the changing relationship with parents, as sense of individuated self is strengthened (1980, p. 67). In their consideration of shifting parent/young adult relationships, Staples and Smarr described the need for each generation to accept the others’ differences, strengths and deficiencies (1991, p. 422).

Michels wrote of the decade of the twenties as a time to further develop self representations, representations which are consistent and contiguous with those in evolution since childhood, and yet ones that are not restricted by the past. This process requires some ability in the young person to recognize that the past has imposed certain limits (Michels, 1993, p. 3). In these years, the individual must realize that the grandiose fantasies of success that went along with infantile narcissism, must transform into mature

goals which are realistic and achievable (Michels, 1993, p. 5). At some point, the young person must give up change for stability, and give up the stimulation that goes along with a constantly changing format of experience (Michels, 1993, p. 6).

Nemiroff and Colarusso also wrote about postadolescent years in terms of revision of narcissism, describing a “healthy self aggrandizement” which emerges as the gratifications of work and relationships are integrated with narcissistic issue residuals from previous phases (1980, p. 3). The two believed achievement of “authenticity” to be a foundational task. Embedded in the concept of authenticity is acceptance of the less than perfect, the imperfect having been more injurious in the past. As independent function builds and expands, acceptance of imperfections and limits becomes a strengthening factor (Nemiroff and Colarusso, 1980, p. 4). With relinquishment of the fantasied self of childhood idealizations, comes some mourning, though this really constitutes a “shedding of naiveté” (Nemiroff and Colarusso, 1980, p. 4).

Given the mourning and sense of loss often experienced by postadolescents as they continue to separate from parental figures, Galatzer-Levy and Cohler questioned the demand for independence, which appears to be in conflict with their needs (1993, p. 221). They believed that the separation-individuation framework, which stresses autonomy, is problematic in its insufficient focus on expanding reciprocity in the parent-postadolescent relationship (Cohler, 1987b, Cohler and Stott, 1987, Marris, 1974) (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 222). “Youth’s goal is not psychological autonomy but maintenance and development of appropriate interdependence” (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 222). Ideally, institutions and others outside of the family complement the transforming parental relationships, and social roles nourish identity by providing linkage to society

and community concerns (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 228-229). Galatzer-Levy and Cohler concur that “one’s place in the workforce” fortifies and grounds the sense of self, describing the workplace as an “essential other” (1993, p. 231). While our culture is dedicated to a “work ideology,” places of employment rarely provide support, training, or any guarantees of ongoing employment (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 237).

Nemiroff and Colarusso wrote of the usefulness of mentors: whereas parents contribute to psychic structure, mentors add detail and specifics to that structure, frequently contributing to work identity and promoting individuation (1980, p. 12). These authors stated that in the event that the postadolescent experiences himself or herself as a mere “extension” of the parental self, aggrandizement or self-criticism is likely to occur (1980, p. 10). Adatto added that mentors, leaders and organizations are vital in providing transitional support, in order to fill the space where the infantile objects resided, and to give sustenance to the ego, super ego and ego ideal (1991, p. 365). Mentor qualities can be internalized free of the complications inherent in parental relationships (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 241). The mentor relationship also fosters young people’s reconsideration of parents as people aside from their parenting role (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 198). Additionally, youths require social institutions within which they can grow, without being required to assume a definite adult role (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 206). Education provides institutional holding, and idealized teachers can become essential others (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 212). Engagement with these “others,” promotes transformation of the parental relationship, which is reflected in interdependence and mutuality of caring (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 218).

In considering impediments to relinquishing the parent-child relationship, Gould emphasized the notion of “illusion of absolute safety,” which is embedded in the idea of “the parent,” and protects the young child from fears and anxieties. However, as the illusion survives unconsciously, it serves to institutionalize parents as necessary to survival (1993, p. 65). Gould delineated false assumptions which are likely to be integrated with this illusion; one must remain loyal to the “primary reference group,” parents, in order to remain safe, and one will be rewarded if one follows the “right” way as dictated by the parents. These notions underlie a type of separation anxiety. Concomitantly, life is viewed as relatively uncomplicated and within one’s control, in a naïve negating of the struggles and complexities of life. In the event that one might falter, parents will be there to save the day. For Gould, the transformational process in achieving adulthood is the chipping away at the illusion of safety, by ongoing press to redefine the self in a way that is free of the prohibitions of childhood and the absolutes of that sheltered world (1993, p. 64). We thereby “enlarge the license to be,” through recognition that something we previously accepted as fact, was in actuality a mere restraint (Gould, 1993, p. 58). Human resistance to change and inherent conflict around growth further compound the vise of the illusion (Gould, 1993, p. 57). The “vise” can take the form of “preconceptions, habits, routines, patterns, old object images, old self images and unquestioned values” (Gould, 1993, p. 56). For Gould, freedom is the prize of adulthood (1993, p. 56), freedom being liberation from the fantasies of childhood.

Also critical to this study is what Galatzer-Levy and Cohler describe as the “myth of personal independence,” which may preclude full engagement with work, marriage, parenthood (1993, p. 283). Adherence to “prescribed positions,” and insufficient

appreciation of the gratifications of full engagement with work, marriage and parenthood, denies the young adult opportunities for growth and development (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 283). Substituting for true autonomy, which is supported by psychic structure, pseudo independence may contribute to delay in achievement of adulthood. The assumption that separation has occurred may foreclose on the actual work of separating and individuating.

Hauser and Greene referenced some of the theorists who have particularly appreciated the struggles of the postadolescent as he or she faces adulthood. Levinson has suggested that “early adulthood may be the most dramatic period of the life span” (Hauser and Greene, 1991, p. 379), as the need to transition to a new phase of life with investment in new roles can be overwhelming. As in the earlier rapprochement phase, increased awareness of separation contributes to psychic disequilibrium. Certainly “loss of the current way of being in the world” can involve a mourning process, as noted by Levinson (1986), and Hauser and Greene, (1991, p. 377). In cases where parents are not available for necessary engagement and renegotiation, the youth may experience particular loneliness and confusion.

Blos defined the tasks of moving into adulthood as,

1. resolution of any previous trauma
2. individuation from parents
3. establishment of sexual identity, and
4. attainment of a coherent sense of one’s past, present and future (1979, p. 412).

He understood achievement of these tasks to be the culmination of psychic structural consolidations of the postadolescent phase. The press to master the residuals from previous trauma motivates the individual to use current experience to come to terms with his past (Blos, 1979, p. 418). Individuation from parents summarizes the shift to libidinal cathexis of the self, but involves a complex and effortful relinquishing of infantile representations, along with the attendant belief in parental perfection (Blos, 1979, p. 412-413). The process of forming a sexual identity rests on giving up idealizations of the infantile state, allowing the infantile narcissistic ego ideal to transform into the mature, desexualized ego ideal (Blos, 1979, p. 419). Ego continuity involves the need to assimilate one's history, present and future into a coherent narrative (Blos, 1979, p. 415), this being a lifelong process.

We must realize that the developmental thrust is not over in adolescence – far from it. There is a continuing, dynamic process, and the adult personality continues to undergo structural changes . . . It may be, in fact, that the psychology of adult development is as important for clinical psychoanalysis as is the psychology of early development (Emde, 1985, p. 28)

Transitioning to Adulthood

There are many different theoretical conceptualizations of the process of moving from postadolescence into early adulthood. Erikson's work in the 1960's was grounded in Hartmann's emphasis on ego development. "Psychosocial moratorium" is the term Erikson used to describe the period acknowledged by society to be necessary for consolidation, exploration of work roles and further education (1980, p. 111). During this period, "extremes of subjective experience, alternatives of ideological choice and potentialities of realistic commitment can become the subject of social play and joint mastery" (1980, p. 175). Erikson's conceptualization of adult identity involved

commitment to relationships of intimacy, parenthood (or generativity of another form), and engagement in the social processes of work and culture (1980, p. 166). He stressed the young adult need for recognition, the need to be appreciated through the stages of gradual growth while doing the work of consolidation, and the ego's need for support as it synthesizes aspects of identity (1980, p. 120). "Self-certainty" accrues from growing identity, consolidating after each developmental challenge, fortified by a sense of independence from parents as the source of childhood identifications (Erikson 1980, p. 154).

The young adult's investment in culture and societal institutions grounds the individual in his or her society. Embedded in this is the idea that some of the parent is retained in these investments. As Staples and Smarr have noted, the process of selecting models and identifications for identity formation, is a reworking of pre-Oedipal and Oedipal conflicts and ambivalences (1991, p. 418). Keniston (1968) spoke to a need for experimenting with identities as a sorting process leading to conscious choice of lifestyle, complete with recognition of its consequences (Staples and Smarr, 1991, p. 418). The more solid the sense of identity, the more surely the postadolescent is driven to establish intimacy in relationship (Erikson, 1980, p. 101). Unclear about one's identity, an individual will avoid intimacy, though often a superficial relationship obscures the avoidance (Erikson, 1980, p. 101). And the avoidance of choices, whether sexual or in terms of choice of partner or work, leaves the individual open to persistent regression. In cases where choices are actually repudiated, the young person is left in a state of identity diffusion (Staples and Smarr, 1991, p. 420). Blaine and Farnsworth noted that failure to commit leaves the "young adult" feeling immature and lacking (1991, p. 436).

Hauser and Greene elaborated on the centrality of “work” in the shift to adulthood, as work constitutes such a large part of identity formation, and serves as a confirmation of adulthood as responsibilities are shouldered (1991, p. 393). Work plays a major role in socializing one to the larger, more diverse adult population (1991, p. 394). As the individual evaluates his ability to influence and manage the surround, assessing his capacities in a more introspective and realistic manner, work is generally the main arena for this self-study (Hauser and Greene, 1991, p. 393). Michels agreed that a major task of these years is integration of a work identity, “which incorporates its precursors of play and school . . . yet tolerates the constraints of reality that require the work to be different from each” (Michels, 1993, p. 8).

Colarusso agreed with earlier theorists that intimacy is grounded in the early caregiving relationship, Oedipal resolution and the sexual experiences of the adolescent phase. Yearnings for another closeness (replicating the closeness of parent and child), drives efforts to deepen emotional involvement (Colarusso, 1995, p. 7). He noted that more loving sexual experiences stir intrapsychic change, including identification with the female partner, this enhancing ability to commit to partnership (1995, p. 7). Extensive exploration of another’s body offsets childish fears and fantasies of the genitals (Colarusso, 1995, p. 8). Integration around sexual behavior allows for stability in object choice and practice (Michels, 1993 p. 9).

Michels also tied adulthood to the perception of individual choice, with more opportunity for choice now available, particularly around the decision to be a parent. Within a loving partnership, there is frequently a strong wish to create life with this partner (Colarusso, 1995, p. 8), as well as motivation to meet the needs of the other.

Michels considered parenthood, which brings role reversal, to initiate another developmental theme and process, which will continue throughout remaining life (1993, p. 10).

There is a clear shift as one establishes a family of one's own, apart from the family of origin. While postadolescents are capable of passion, intimacy and capacity for commitment are often in formation (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 254). The authors noted the influence of changing roles for women, who now share extended years of education and in many cases, drive the dating process (1993, p. 252). Commitment to marriage is no longer scheduled into an expectable timetable, as in the past, and the structuring function of this usual event no longer exists (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 250). An even greater reordering of commitments is required with parenthood (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler, 1993, p. 267). Galatzer-Levy and Cohler considered this to be "the most central adult social role" (1993, p. 267).

Colarusso and Nemiroff have written extensively on the phases of adulthood, concurring that development is ongoing throughout the life course, and positing that more subtle transformations in psychic structure are involved in adult development (1979, p. 5). Central themes and issues of development continue into adulthood, an example being that of dependency, (infancy dependency modifies to "relative" dependency in adults) (1979, p. 6). The authors have conceptualized adult development with seven hypotheses:

1. The nature of the developmental process is basically the same in the adult and the child.
2. Development in the adult is an ongoing dynamic process.
3. Whereas childhood development is focused primarily on the formation of psychic structure, adult development is concerned with the continued evolution of existing psychic structure and with its use.
4. The fundamental issues of childhood continue as central aspects of adult life, but in altered form.

5. The developmental processes in adulthood are influenced by the adult past as well as the childhood past.
6. Development in adulthood, as in childhood, is deeply influenced by the body and by physical change.
7. A central, phase-specific theme of adult life is the normative crisis precipitated by the recognition and acceptance of the finiteness of time and the inevitability of personal death (1980, p. 1).

Following on the ideas of Mahler and Blos, Colarusso has divided the lifespan into five phases of individuation, the third phase covering the years between twenty and forty. He defined the third individuation as the,

continuous process of elaboration of the self and differentiation from objects which occurs in the developmental phases of the young Although it is influenced by all important adult object ties, at its core are object ties to children, spouse and parents, that is, the family, the same psychological constellations that shaped the first and second individuations” (Colarusso, 1995, p. 6).

Parenthood is at the center of the third individuation, providing another framework for reworking archaic ties and relationships, and thereby promoting individuation in each young parent (Colarusso, 1990, p. 4-5). Concurring with Benjamin’s thinking, Colarusso has defined a task of this phase as “developing a relationship of mutuality and equality with parents” (1995, p. 6). Existing psychic structure and a mature body make possible the positioning at optimal distance from the adult parents (Colarusso, 2000, p. 2). Self and object constancy are thereby modified. Movement away from primary objects occurs simultaneously with consolidations of new self and object definitions associated with having an intimate partner and bearing children (Colarusso, 2000, p. 4).

Shifting object ties, in particular, connections to parents, are described by Nemiroff and Colarusso to be a central aspect of change in the young adult. They noted a constant reappraisal of self in relationship to others, and an increasing grasp of the idea

of “interdependence” (1980, p. 7). “Changes in internal representations of the parent further shear from the self the image of parent as competitor or lover and lead to a heightened sense of individuation and authenticity” (Nemiroff and Colarusso, 1980, p. 8). Various dating or partner relationships during the twenties constantly reshape the idealized versus the real, in terms of a mate (Nemiroff and Colarusso, 1980, p. 8). Narcissistic transfer from infantile objects to a representation of an ideal partner constitutes a major act of separation (Nemiroff and Colarusso, 1980, p. 8). These authors believe the adult process of separation-individuation is grounded in the marital relationship (1980, p. 8). Sharpe specifically described marriage as the third stage for reworking separation-individuation (1990, p. 388). Sexual experience contributes to a better understanding of one’s sexuality and male/female differences, however, procreation is even more clarifying (Nemiroff and Colarusso, 1980, p. 10).

Capacity for a mature love relationship with a life partner, though under the influence of Oedipal resolution, is grounded in the separation-individuation process (Edward, Ruskin and Turrini, 1981, p. 106). These authors quoted Bergman (1971), who wrote that the relationship with the mother leaves a “residue of longing,” which underlies search for a love object (1981, p. 106). The initial love object in life is a gratifier of needs. Later, as the toddler becomes sensitive to disapproval, loss of love becomes a threat, so gradually the toddler recognizes a more active role in engaging the love object (Edward et al., 1981, p. 107). Intact boundaries allow for intimacy and generosity without fear of loss of self. Object constancy allows for acceptance of imperfections and difference in partner, and self-constancy allows for maintenance of self esteem despite the stresses of relationship (Edward et al., 1981, p. 107). While the intimate relationship

and marriage can provide some need fulfillment or attention to earlier deficit, needs cannot predominate in a healthy relationship (Edward et al., 1981, p. 107). Parenthood places new burdens on self and other configurations in each of the young parents, though important theorists as Erikson and Benedek considered parenthood to be another developmental phase (Edward et al., 1981, p. 111).

Winnicott's idea about "being alone in the presence of the mother" is also relevant to capacity for love and intimacy. He wrote that capacity to be alone is an indicator of mature emotional development (1965, p. 29), and is the product of layers of experience over time with the "good enough mother" (1965, p. 32). The origins of this capacity are located in early years, when paradoxically, the "experience is of being alone while someone else is present" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 30). The young child moves from a state of being dependent on "ego support" (being alone in the presence of another), to a state of relative maturity, having internalized the mother, or the "ego supportive environment" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 32). "The relationship of the individual to his or her internal objects, along with confidence in regard to internal relationships, provides of itself a sufficiency of living, so that temporarily, he or she is able to rest contented even in the absence of external objects and stimuli" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 32). Winnicott conceptualized healthy independence as an achievement of a state of relatedness to the environment, a state in which the individual and environment are interdependent (1965, p. 84).

Concerned with coherency of self, Stern cited a Loewald idea, that good integration process requires communication between the archaic and the current (1985, p. 19). The transition to adulthood requires reflection, introspection and assessment of

one's capabilities. A sense of continuity between childhood and adulthood is not a given, but an achievement born of ongoing effort to make meaning out of experience (Cohler and Freeman, 1993, p. 115). Erikson and Blos both privileged the concept of continuity, the need to remember one's past, make sense of the present and hold anticipation for the future. Cohler and Freeman believe that a focus on narrative, in the service of maintenance of coherence, as well as continuity, is necessary for a sense of wellbeing (1993, p. 128). "Course of life" involves a number of transformations, in which the past, each time, undergoes revision/reintegration with the present self and current experience (Cohler and Freeman, 1993, p. 153). While the work of integration is substantial, paths and patterns are highly individual. Common to all of these theorists is the understanding that postadolescents require support in the complicated process of integrating all of the threads of development in order to move into adulthood.

Concurrent Purposes of Autonomy and Connection

The drive to autonomy is at times intense, while at times the need for connection is predominant. Chodorow noted that ideals around autonomy emanate not only from our culture, but also in Freud's thinking (1999, p. 112). Chodorow understood the self to be intrinsically relational, and she reframed autonomy to include connection to others. "The development of psychic structure begins with this basic self-feeling and self-structure, which includes relatedness to and aspects of the other, and it continues through internalizations and splittings-off of internalized self-other representations to create an inner world consisting of different aspects of an "I" in relation to different aspects of the other (Chodorow, 1999, p. 115). She wrote that emphasis on separation detracted from

“the nature of the inner core of self, whose implicit relatedness is acknowledged in its very structure” (1999, p. 117).

Again, understanding the nature of an individual’s separation and individuation processes need not preclude appreciation of the emergent self. Her notion of “relational individualism,” (1999, p. 120), is well served by inclusion of these concepts. What Chodorow terms “mature dependence” (1999, p. 124), rests on reciprocity between two individuals who have, to some extent, separated and individuated, all the while maintaining their focus on connection to the other. As she writes, differentiation is a “particular way of being connected to others” (1999, p. 126).

Achievement of mutuality in relationship with parents is not possible without some prior comfort with one’s separateness and sense of individuation. The challenge is to achieve some efficacious resolution including both distance and the closeness of connection. Whether conceptualized in terms of structuralization or in more relational parlance, separation and individuation remain important concepts in the understanding of transition into adulthood. They are critical concepts in the analysis of transitions which are protracted or floundering, and inform understanding of successful developmental achievements. The parental perspective in separation-individuation process is clearly relevant, but beyond the scope of this study.

Descriptions of the Contemporary Postadolescent from the Literature

Within a less psychoanalytic framework, Arnett has written extensively on the development of a group of youths he termed “emerging adults.” He has detailed an overarching change in attitude since the 1950’s, when there was an eagerness to take on respected adult roles and become established independently (2004, p. 6). This eagerness

contrasts with current avoidance of adult roles, as the “obligations” of adulthood are associated with a foreclosure on freedom, opportunity, and carefree existence (Arnett, 2004, p. 6). Deeply ambivalent about achieving adulthood, many postadolescents fear an end to personal development, as if adulthood represented a termination (Arnett, 2004, p. 219).

Alongside this reluctance to move into adulthood, Arnett reported an optimistic expectation among these emerging adults that they will do better than their parents, have more fulfilling jobs and more successful marriages (2000, p. 278). “In emerging adulthood, virtually no one expects to end up with a dreary dead-end job or join the nearly 50 percent of Americans whose marriages end in divorce, or make mistakes that drive life into a ditch” (Arnett, 2006, p. 13). True to American values of self-sufficiency, this population reaffirms traditional criteria for achievement of adulthood; being responsible for one’s self, making one’s own decisions and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2007, p. 216). The stated optimism is hard to reconcile with the realities of current American culture. As a group, emerging adults are acutely aware of the riddling of problems throughout our society, in terms of crime, violations of the environment, the struggling economy. Yet, as reported by Arnett, they pursue happiness through multiplicity of life experiences, all with apparent hope (2004, p. 182).

Arnett has described college years in the United States as frequently serving the purpose of providing a time and space for young people to figure out what they want to do as a next step (2004, p. 122). The extended years of study can be an expensive period of excess, without necessarily providing preparation for a career. He cites “personal growth” as the most important factor in the college experience, allowing for self-

exploration without responsibility (2004, p. 140). According to Arnett's research, the majority of emerging adults are not concerned about a lack of career plan (2004, p. 153), and concern for paying of bills is minimal compared to previous generations (2004, p. 157). Many do not feel they know themselves well enough to commit to work, and there are few institutional supports to expedite this process; so a number of emerging adults fall into post-college jobs without planned process geared towards career building (2004, p. 151). In a weak economy, there may be a chain of jobs unrelated to a career goal (2004, p. 146).

Many of these young people have come from families that were split by divorce: many are still suffering effects of those ruptures. Arnett reported that these emerging adults are more likely to be depressed (2004, p. 60), and for some, their education has been compromised (2004, p. 61). Arnett quoted Lasch, stating that children of divorce cultivate a "protective shallowness, a fear of binding commitments, a willingness to pull up roots . . . incapacity for loyalty or gratitude" (2004, p. 62). Ambivalent relationships with parents continue for many years post the breakup (2004, p. 64). Arnett cites fear of divorce as a main reason for postponement of marriage (2004, p. 113), though this is not consistent with his report of optimism regarding future life.

Arnett's studies indicate that the work of identity exploration, which used to take place during adolescence, now occurs during the decade of the twenties (2000, p. 473). Regarding work, the search for goodness of fit in terms of a position that will mesh with one's personal make-up, serves identity exploration (2000, p. 474). With regard to dating, Arnett views the shift to greater physical intimacy as reflective of a search for a partner who will be a match, given one's emergent identity (2000, p. 473). Arnett

reported this period to be full of risk-seeking behavior, and considers this to be further identity exploration (2000, p. 475). Like Côté, he observes today's emerging adults to be highly influenced by the media, which he believes has intruded into identity formation in non-supportive ways, undermining self-regulation and relationship building (2007, p. 224-225.) Pursuant to extensive interviewing of emerging adults, Arnett concluded that many predict that they will be finished with identity exploration by age thirty, and at that time will be able to make commitments (2004, p. 102).

Arnett noted that in America, particularly after 1960, youths have taken more control over the timing of major events in their lives (1998, p. 301). Alongside the "freedom from social control" traditionally characteristic of postadolescence, is the fact that social norms are in flux for this age group (Arnett, 2006, p.15). In the context of the rebalancing of the sexes, there is new recognition of the difficulty, in a love relationship, of working out both people's happiness (Arnett, 2006, p. 8). Roles are much less prescribed. Relationships with parents are now generally "less hierarchical," and optimally, in the twenties, move toward greater equality (Arnett, 2006, p. 314). Arnett reports that emerging adults are alone, less connected to peers than in other developmental phases (2007, p. 221).

The largely unrestricted sexual landscape is very different for this group of young people, who need to make choices about sexual behavior and partners without many rules or norms (Arnett, 2004, p. 85). "Hooking up" is a widely accepted dating behavior, despite problems of STD's and AIDS. Birth control has changed sexual behavior, contributing to widespread cohabitation without marriage, removing some of the more traditional reasons for marriage (Arnett, 2007, p. 208). Emerging adults explore a

number of partners with the deliberate idea of clarifying characteristics of a good life partner (Arnett, 2004, p. 73). Technology provides new ways to make romantic connections with others. Establishment of one's own family through marriage and parenthood, traditionally, was the essential marker of adulthood (Arnett, 2004, p. 208). Arnett reported in 2006 that median age for marriage had risen to late twenties or early thirties, though there is a wide range of norm (2006, p. 5). It is not unusual for women to first give birth after the age of thirty, and motherhood may not include marriage (Arnett, 2006, p. 6). Arnett also reported instability in living arrangements within this group of young people (2006, p. 9), a factor of which may be involvement in more short-term partner relationships, with or without intention to marry.

There is considerable attention given to finding one's "soul mate" (Arnett, 2004, p. 100). As in the search for a life's work, ideals cause realities to pale in comparison (Arnett, 2004, p. 100). Emerging adults hope to use extended years of dating to deepen capacity for intimacy, and to find someone able to share intimacy, world-views and values (Arnett, 2004, p. 97). However, this is another arena in which the way to maintain all options is to delay commitment (Arnett, 2004, p. 101). Arnett's research indicated that by the conclusion of the twenties, most young men and women feel ready to commit to a marriage partner (2004, p. 106).

In agreement with Offer, who challenged the psychoanalytic position that adolescence is synonymous with turmoil, Arnett concurs that there is considerable health and normalcy in contemporary emerging adults (2007, p. 23-24). According to Arnett, delays in reaching adulthood are a result of long-term trends involving changeover to an information-based economy, which requires more education (2007, p. 27). Education

tends to raise levels of cognition and processing, resulting in greater self-reflection, self-awareness, and more thoughtful process (Arnett, 2006, p. 307). Côté notes that those with solid ego development along with self-understanding, can thrive on the lack of structure afforded in this decade, while others flounder in vast uncharted waters, (2000, p. 309). Influence of institutions is significantly decreased, resulting in emerging adults having more freedom to make their own decisions (Arnett, 2007, p. 214). In fact, this period of life carries the fewest social controls and the most freedom to concentrate on developing the self, a largely positive opportunity (Arnett, 2007, p. 213). Arnett recognizes many reasons for these young people to feel ambivalent about shouldering adulthood (2007, p. 27)

Côté, who has written on postadolescence from an even more sociological perspective, reported that there is growing consensus that “identity problems” are the greatest “symptom” of current American society (2000, p. 136). Côté attributed rampant narcissism in the culture to a climate of gratification and consumption driven by capitalism (2000, p. 6). He reported an “institutionalized identity moratorium – an imposed delay of adulthood – appears to be emerging as a permanent feature of the life course” (2000, p. 179). Arguing that the best way to shift a culture is to modify “coming of age processes,” he believes that corporate America has co-opted these processes in the interest of profit, so that many young people lack the sense of identity necessary to move into adulthood (2000, p. 162).

Young adults Robbins and Wilner wrote a book describing the “quarterlife crisis” of many postadolescents. Their research also indicated the crisis to be, fundamentally, a crisis in identity (2001, p. 7). The authors described an active reluctance to give up the

simplicity of childhood (2001, p. 46), as well as a dread of adulthood (2001, p. 52). They reported widespread use of medication to manage depression, and involvement in a search for what will be the most “meaningful” and “fulfilling” experience (2001, p. 9). Wider range of opportunity may seem to be a positive for today’s postadolescents, however, these authors conclude that it has proven to be problematic (2001, p. 64). With encouragement that these young people can be or can do whatever they wish, expectations are often too high (2001, p. 109), and contentment seems elusive. For some, the dream is constantly changing, and under constant scrutiny and assessment, many beginnings end in early disappointment (2001, p. 75). Everything feels inadequate, leaving a residual sense of doubt and drift (2001, p. 91).

“Post-graduation letdown” involves anxiety and apparent surprise that parental funding has come to an end (Robbins and Wilner, 2001, p. 111-112). Many young people interviewed reported “loneliness and isolation throughout my twenties” (2001, p. 115). College educated, and schooled in being analytical in their thinking, these young people fear making the wrong decision (Robbins and Wilner, 2001, p. 124). While the tasks around transition to adulthood remain essentially the same, the authors report a sense of feared disaster over possible poor choice, which suffuses the process with a new level of stress (2001, p. 136). Some young people reverse out of decisions so regularly that they are continually changing course (Robbins and Wilner, 2001, p. 144). At the time this book was published, 2001, there was frustration with the job market, despite many having a college education. These graduates reported being unprepared for many realities and changes in lifestyle, and in a number of cases, were unwilling to make the necessary adjustments (2001, p. 186).

Kenny and Sirin documented considerable risk for depression in this age group. Attachment theory describes a “secure base” for developing infants and children. In postadolescence, the “secure base” may most effectively be provided through internal working models based on attachment with parents, rather than the support provided through regular contact or monetary means prevalent in our culture (Kenny and Sirin, 2006, p. 62). The internal working model of attachment theory is a rough correspondent to the psychic structure described in more ego-based theories. Kenny and Sirin findings led them to suggest that further development of internal working models, in order to stabilize young individuals during the decade of the twenties, is important to healthful development (2006, p. 62). Additionally, their ideas are in line with theorists who believe that ongoing, but transforming, relationships with parents provide better support to achievement of adulthood, as opposed to complete separation from parents (2006, p.62).

Arnett described a different closeness and connection that evolves as changes in the parent/postadolescent relationship move the relationship closer to one of mutual respect and regard (2004, p. 58). Parents provide less supervision and are more affirming of young people’s views. Emerging adults consider their parents as individuals in their own right, and often regret prior treatment of the parents. Occasionally, the new view of the parent is filled with disillusionment, but Arnett believes that “for the most part, both parents and emerging adults are able and willing to adjust to a new relationship as near-equals” (2004, p. 60). Rebalancing often allows for more enjoyment of the relationship (Arnett, 2004, p. 70).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Proposed Study

The framework for this study is crafted around and shaped by a number of psychoanalytically oriented theories which attend to development. These include attachment, object relations and ego theory, as well as more current formulations of self and relational theory. All of these theories in some way include consideration of separation and individuation processes, some emphasizing these processes and others placing emphasis elsewhere. Development is understood to be an ongoing process throughout the life course. Separation of self and other, and individuation, are significant aspects of development with continually evolving elaborations. The search for optimal distance and optimal closeness between self and other is a lifelong process, however, the transition from postadolescence to adulthood constitutes a major structural consolidation of aspects of these developmental processes. Adulthood represents, among other things, achievement of independent function and an interdependence with respect to parental relationships, made possible by the accrued structures of separation and individuation processes.

Questions to Be Explored

The main question explored in this study is “What is the current experience of postadolescence in terms of parental relationships: how is this experience reflective of processes of separation and individuation?” A number of sub-questions shaped the study. How can the extenuated timeframe of postadolescence be understood in terms of psychic constructs between parent and offspring? What affects progression through this life

phase and what is it about the dynamic between a parent and offspring that is contributory? Current psychic configurations in postadolescents were explored: what is the evidence of structuralized self and other, capacity for mature interdependence? Beyond establishment of a separate home and employment, and the reified behaviors of “independence,” what is the complex story of the postadolescent process in terms of intrapsychic and intersubjective function? In cases of delayed adulthood, to what extent is this reflective of less psychic structuralization? In cases of successful transition into adulthood, how was the process reflective of good separation-individuation process and what contributed to accrual of internal structure?

Theoretical and Operational Definition of Major Concepts

The focusing of this study emanates from consideration of developmental process and the components of psychic structure which are involved in achievement of adulthood. Adulthood has traditionally been defined as a state of autonomy which includes commitment to a career or life’s work, (allowing for financial independence), and commitment to a marriage (which signifies a shift to primary relationship outside of the family of origin). In this study, movement towards and transition into adulthood is considered through the lens of psychic structure, the constructs in the mind which underlie psychological function. Components of this structure are internal images of self and other, mental representations of self-constancy and other-constancy. Representations are constructed in the process of separation, defined as achievement of an internal sense of boundary and separateness from the mother or primary caregiver, and individuation,

defined as the assumption of unique personal characteristics through consolidations of experience, cognition and affect.

Statement of Assumptions

This study rests on foundational assumptions which are grounded in the literature, and which indicate the chosen area of study to be critical to the understanding of current postadolescent experience. The assumptions are as follows:

1. Development is an ongoing process throughout human life, with separation and individuation processes interwoven throughout the course of development.
2. Adulthood is a universally recognized goal of development. Aspects of adulthood are achievements of autonomous function and mature connection with parents.
3. Achievement of adulthood is a highly individual experience with unique paths and timetables for each postadolescent moving towards adulthood, despite the fact that there is a broad cultural expectation for independent function.
4. Ability to achieve adulthood rests on structural achievements in the psyche which include clarity of representations of self and other, self-constancy and object-constancy, these being a product of the relationship with parents or other significant caregiver throughout earlier years.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Aim, Type and Design of Study

The aim of this study of young individuals between the ages of 23 and 29 was to capture a rich understanding of their experience as they consolidate developmental processes that allow them to move into adulthood. Post-positivist perspective allows for utilization of multiple methods of practice in the effort to grasp a fuller and more complex reality of individual subjects in their social world.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world . . . qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

Research done interactively in natural context is valued as a useful way to capture reality and to extend understanding of human experience. Additionally, qualitative research seeks to bring academic rigor to the process of elaborating on personal history so that, beyond verification of existing data or theory, subjective inner experience of subjects is accurately described and interpreted. Assumptions are that the individual, in his or her environment, is a good reporter of his or her experience, and further, that the one doing the research reports with accuracy and objectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000,

p. 18). This methodology is viewed as the most effective in securing a deep understanding of humanistic topics of study, and also encompasses an appreciation for the constraints on the method (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 18).

A number of years ago, operating from the position that qualitative research is a valid method of studying the social world, Glaser and Strauss crafted a specific type of qualitative research, grounded theory, in order to insure that a systematic schema organized and validated the study. Predicated on the belief that only qualitative research has the capability of illuminating a full understanding of human behavior, or allows for prediction of behavior, qualitative grounded theory provides a particular “stance” towards the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Grounded theory, as defined by the authors, is “discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (1967, p. 1). Closely interwoven with the data, the theory evolves from the data and also includes the data (1967, p. 5). While qualitative research is inherently creative, a specific process of research is imposed to generate new theory. Data collection results in emerging categories of information which undergo constant comparison and analysis, a process termed “constant comparative method of data analysis” by Creswell (1998, p. 57). The purpose and goal of this process is to generate theory.

In recent years, Charmaz has re-conceptualized grounded theory in light of postmodern thinking. Her interpretation of grounded theory moves away from the more positivist perspective of Glaser and Strauss and emphasizes that grounded theory is a valid research method aside from those positivist roots (2000, p. 510). She defines grounded theory method as providing “systemic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected

data,” adding that “analytic interpretation of their data” informs further data collection so that theory develops in process (2000, p. 509).

Charmaz embraces an open-minded attitude that allows for theory to emerge, while maintaining a close relationship between the data and resultant theory. She describes a structured framework for research that is reflective of positivism, but constitutes a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Lincoln contributes to the description by writing that the method must be hermeneutic and dialectic, focusing on the social processes of construction, reconstruction and elaboration (1990, p. 78). Charmaz conceives a “set of principles and practices” (2006, p. 9) within which flexibility, rather than dictates or strictures, characterizes the methodology. This version of grounded theory “explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (Charmaz, 1995b, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994, p. 10). This study of postadolescent experience utilized a framework of grounded theory as conceptualized by Charmaz as an efficacious method for capturing a rich understanding of subject experience and developing theory around the findings.

Participant Recruitment

Every person in the specified age group of mid to late 20s has their own unique experience of shifting relationships with parents that is reflective of post-adolescent developmental process. Anyone in the non-clinical population of this age group, with at least one living parent was considered to be a candidate for this study. Each of the participants had two living parents, with the exception of one who had only a mother still

living. Interviewees all had ability to examine, reflect on and articulate their lived experience, including their internal process, as they moved towards and into adulthood. The researcher selected participants who were in mid to late 20's, rather than younger people still in college and more likely to be dependent on parents for numerous supports.

The researcher began by notice postings describing the study in student areas at Loyola University Chicago's MSW Program, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Evanston Hospital. A request for participants was included in a yoga studio mailing to several thousand individuals in the Northwestern University area. Notices were sent to researcher contacts within Jane Addams College of Social Work's MSW Program, Jewish Child and Family Services, several Chicago-area elementary, middle, high schools and businesses. These individuals were asked to give participation information to young persons in their work setting who expressed interest in being interviewed for the study. Most of the participants resulted from these contacts in a snowball method. Participants were completely unknown and unconnected to the researcher. In several cases, at the conclusion of an interview, the interviewee offered to pass the notice on to friends and this yielded a small number of participants.

Description of Participants

The sample consisted of 20 young people, as described in the dissertation proposal: 12 were women and 8 were men. Their ages ranged from 23 to 29; one was 23, two were 25, three were 26, four were 27, eight were 28 and two were 29. All were Caucasian and could be considered middle class, though participants represented a wide range socio-economically and educationally. Eighteen participants had college degrees,

(and one is currently attending college as a slightly older student), nine had graduate degrees and five were in graduate school at the time of the interview. Nine participants were working full-time and one had a job lined up to begin as soon as a licensing examination was completed. Six participants were working part-time and four were full-time students. Three of the 20 interviewees were married.

Collection of Data

The data were collected by interviews conducted by the researcher. The logic of the methodology shaped the data collection (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). The sampling progressively became a theoretical one in that early participant descriptions, responses and elaborations, informed inquiry in later interviews. As leads emerged in the data, the pursuit of this area of inquiry advanced the data collection (2006, p. 17). Remaining interviews explored in these directions, filling out the descriptions of experience. Inherent to this method of inquiry is the reality that all narrative responses are to some extent reconstructions of lived experience.

One-on-one non-directive interviews were 75 to 95 minutes in length and were audio-recorded. Eighteen interviews were face to face; two were scheduled to be face-to-face with out-of-state residents, but schedule conflicts arose in their visits to Chicago, resulting in the interviews being conducted on the phone. The interviews occurred over a four-month period and were held in the researcher's home and office, participant homes and offices, various library conference rooms.

All interviews began with the same question: "As you have moved through your twenties, how have your relationships with your parents shifted?" Additional questions

exploring the subject's individual experience evolved from the subject's narrative. As the researcher is a practitioner of psychoanalytically based clinical social work, the skills of observation, interaction and attunement to subjectivity were utilized. All researchers come to the point of observation with unavoidable influences of past history and social interactions. Impressions, reflections, reactions and thoughts were recorded in memo form shortly after each interview by the researcher, facilitating recognition of researcher participation in the data collection process. The interviews were transcribed into complete documents by the researcher and audio-recordings erased immediately.

The interview process included a thorough explanation of the protections to privacy and the "Individual Consent for Participation in Research" form. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, and were asked if they had any questions regarding the study or their participation in the study. Signatures were obtained on the consent form and each participant received a copy of their consent. Participants began with a simple statement of demographical information and then proceeded to speak to the initial interview question. Subsequent questions flowed from the interview content and material. At the conclusion of the interview, all participants were encouraged to contact the researcher with any additional comments or reactions. Participants were informed of possible future contact from the researcher to address member checking: all interviewees agreed that they could be contacted for the purpose of verifying the write-up of interview content. A number of individuals stated that the interview had been "interesting" for them, prompting them to think about things they had not previously examined.

Data Analysis

Essential aspects of grounded theory methodology are early efforts to organize data thematically and a constant analysis of data (2000, p. 515). Codes, and theoretical categories were developed directly from the data as collection took place. Flexibility was maintained in terms of coding so that the categories reflected the data, rather than data being manipulated to fit pre-existing categories (Charmaz, 2000, p. 511). Subsequent interviews reflected this early and open coding process in order to fill out sections of information. Line by line coding assisted the researcher in focusing on the interviewee's reality described in the transcription. The process included the researcher's constant attempts to make meaning of the data, without closing down any areas of inquiry that were indicated in the material. Data were constantly compared between participants and between initial codes. Charmaz stresses the need to remain open to new leads or directions that may be embedded in the data (2006, p. 46). "Initial codes are provisional, comparative and grounded in the data" (2006, p. 48).

"Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). The data analysis process moved from the initial concrete coding to a more conceptual, "focused coding" process. A refined and integrated system of categories was developed from focused coding and these categories held the proto-forms of the emergent theory. This second phase of coding involves analyzing initial codes for relevance and clear significance (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46), while being mindful of "possible theoretical meanings" (p. 71).

Memo writing was used to deepen exploration of the data and support synthesizing the information. A free-form process of collecting thoughts alongside the

research process, “memo writing aids us in linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517). Memos provide a place to wonder about the data and codes, a place to study and record relationships between data and categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 73). Charmaz states that “grounded theorists look for patterns,” and memos are used as an ongoing tool for pondering these possibilities (Charmaz, 2006, p. 82). Memo writing produced another level of thinking prior to drafting findings and theory.

The research proceeded by moving back and forth between the data and categories so that the categories evolved clearly. Theoretical sampling at the later stage of interviewing allows for “conceptual and theoretical development” of the categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 101). Member checking, was used to confirm write-up of data, further verifying categories. Though Charmaz acknowledges that the term “saturation” has been subject to much interpretation (2006, p. 113), the researcher felt that at the conclusion of the twentieth interview, the data gathering process was no longer yielding new insights. Logical ordering of the categories of data provided a framework for the drafting of the write-up.

The goal of “engaging the world and constructing abstract understanding about and within it” is best served by use of grounded theory, which encompasses “both positivist and interpretive inclinations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 127). Theory born of the study of how interviewees view their experience, why interviewees perceive their experience as they do, cannot help but be interpretive (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). The data and analysis of those data are considered to be “social constructions,” requiring a process of serious reflection and assessment around researcher and participant interpretations (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Charmaz grounded theory embraces “interpretive theorizing,”

probing the data for connections and investigating implicit meanings; exploring the meanings of these experiences which, perhaps, the participants are unable to fully express (2006, p. 146). She believes that it is this theoretical understanding which makes the data significant (2006, p. 147).

A particular analytic rendering results from a particular researcher's involvement at all stages of the project (Charmaz, 2006, p. 148). The lens of the researcher is reflected in processes of recognizing conditions under which experience occurs, in demonstrating relationships between concepts, in predicting consequences (Charmaz, 2006, p. 148). While this research process is interactive and interpretive, the literature review was used to hold the analysis. Theoretical understanding is situated in relevant theory, and enhances existing theory. "Grounded theory leads us back to the world for a further look and deeper reflection – again and again" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 149), using this data and data comparison to formulate interpretation and abstractions which move understanding forward (Charmaz, 2006, p. 181).

Use of Member Checking

Member checking was utilized in this research process to confirm and verify the accuracy of the write-up of interview material. Eight individuals were contacted by email or phone, and reminded of the mention of "member checking" at the time of their interview. Six participants responded, with five expressing interest and willingness to review a portion of the study findings. These five included participants at various stages in the separation and individuation processes. Each of these individuals received a section of the write-up that included material quoted from their interview with the

research. Feedback from the several people that sent back comments was positive, but did not contribute to further insights.

Statement on Protection of Rights

Each individual agreeing to be a participant in the study was informed of key aspects of the consent form at the time of the initial conversation with the researcher. Information about the purpose of the study, the use of the data and benefits of the study were described to each participant, all prior to beginning the interview. The researcher discussed the fact that exploring one's developmental process may be emotionally stirring, and stated that participants had the right to withdraw, without consequences, from the study at any point. The researcher had a list of referral resources, in the event that the participant felt the need to discuss their reaction to the interview with someone other than the researcher. These resources will also be available to a subject who might request a referral in the future. The list of referrals includes community resources and private practitioners.

Participants were informed of the protections to their privacy and confidentiality, and had an opportunity to discuss the informed consent form prior to signing their agreement to participate in the study. Participants received a signed copy of their informed consent form. A set of signed originals will be kept in a secure location at the home of the researcher for five years. The data, which is identified by code rather than participant name, will be kept in a secure, but different, location in the home of the researcher for five years.

Audio-recordings of the interviews were erased immediately after transcription. The researcher is the only one with knowledge of the information linking participant identities with data. Data were handled only by the researcher. Data were combined to describe the experience of the group, not of individual participants, though individual words or phrases were included to support thematic findings. Identifying information was omitted from the findings and several personal details were altered to insure the privacy and confidentiality of the participant.

Limitations of the Research

This study is limited by the specificity of the question asked. Current experience of postadolescence is examined in one aspect, in terms of processes of separation and individuation from primary caregivers. The contribution to knowledge of developmental process is within this narrow range. An additional limitation is that the small sample size precludes findings from being representative of all young people in this phase of life. Results are not generalizable to larger populations, though it is arguable that this type of description is valid and critical to a full understanding of human development. Another limitation inherent to the interview conducted in the field is that the data consist of subjective response of young people as constructed within an interactive process: the data reflect that process. Furthermore, the data represent a portion of the full range of data, (including quantitative), that could be collected and presented.

This study did not include parental experience and perspective on the separation and individuation process of their offspring, though it does indicate that area for potential future research. The findings include parental attitudes and behaviors as portrayed by

offspring. The study does not purport to have researched actual parental behaviors. The research done for this study does provide a foundation for additional exploration of developmental process in young adults.

CHAPTER IV

ORGANIZATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study is about developmental processes, and so the organization of findings follows a similar progression; with chapters on separation and individuation in less accomplished forms, process that involves effortful engagement with separation and individuation with attendant progress towards autonomy, and separation and individuation in a fairly accomplished form, able to support transition into adulthood. While a rough continuum can be delineated, more of the complexity of both developmental processes and the inter-subjective nature of the processes between parents and young adults is contained within the following three chapters.

As the bulk of the data concerned separation, each chapter will elaborate on that process first and more extensively. The two developmental processes of separation and individuation do not always move in exact tandem, though the data did indicate that progress in each area was often similar in individuals. These processes are not linear, and generally involve both surges forward, and regressions, some of these being temporary and some broader and more intractable. All participants in the study demonstrated areas of function which reflected separation and individuation in more accomplished forms and less accomplished forms. While aspects of functioning were discussed in three

progressive chapters, it is essential to note that individuals cannot be categorized so discreetly.

It's also critical to bear in mind that memory of all past experience, including the messages that offspring received from parents, is reconstructed in the interview process. The processes of separation and individuation proceed in an inter-subjective manner and reflect constant intertwining of input and reaction from both offspring and parent. This research only included the experience of the young adult, and it is, more precisely, the participant's perception of their experience with parents which has been recorded. Psychological experience is not objectively measurable, but subjectively experienced and reconstructed in the interview process.

The degree of intricacy of the inter-subjective process between parent and offspring was evident as participants talked about their level of autonomy being vastly different from siblings', though exploration of differences between siblings could not be covered in this study. Additionally, it should be noted that the degree of self-awareness in each young person varied widely. In cases where it was evident to the researcher that comments were reflective of a substantial lack of self-awareness, or represented an overtly defensive position, the comments were not included in the findings.

Major Concepts in the Chapters on Findings

Chapter V details the experience of young adults in cases where parental messages around separation and individuation have not been clear, or cases in which parents have not been supportive of these processes, resulting in less developmental progress towards autonomy. Maintenance of dependency through excessive provision or

sustaining the hierarchy of parents over offspring makes advancement to autonomy very difficult for young people. Given the ambivalence inherent to separation process, lack of parental support, or conflicted support, leaves the young person confused and often immobilized. Preoccupation with the family of origin, or maintenance of the same level of involvement between parents and offspring tends to hold young people in a stage more appropriate to adolescence. (In this study, use of the word “involvement” refers to psychological involvement, and indicates a form of relating that preserves an earlier form of the relationship between parent and offspring.) While these dynamics continue through the participation of both parents and offspring, young people experience considerable shame when they do not make developmental progress, and have significant anxiety around lacking the “tools,” or psychic structure, to function independently.

Chapter VI elaborates on developmental process that is proceeding for participants, but retains an uneven quality: these young people are demonstrating areas of autonomous function but also aspects which reveal reluctance to relinquish involved ties to parents. Even in cases where participants were fairly clear in their wish for autonomy, there are many details to be worked out with parents; how much parental inquiry is tolerable, what topics of conversation are permissible, in what venues are parental opinions still appropriate, what will contact consist of, how frequent will those phone calls be and who will make them. It can be a complicated struggle to re-organize patterns of inter-relating and craft new forms of being together. Around the interaction, the young adult’s concepts of self and other are continually being reconfigured. Clarity of self structure as separate and individually elaborated accrues with the progression of development.

Chapter VII describes participant experience that is indicative of good separation and individuation, cases in which considerable mutual relatedness with parents is possible and demonstrated. Relationships have been transformed by gradual removal of the dynamics of dependency, leaving room for autonomous function. Developmental process has gone fairly well, and solid internal representations of self and other have allowed these young people to move forward with stability in their work and relationships. There is evidence of capacity for mature interdependence with parents. This chapter details experiences that have promoted separation, and parental support of the experiences that have contributed to the young people developing ability to navigate the world on their own. The result is an earlier consolidation of adulthood. With a solid sense of themselves as independent and capable of managing the challenges of life, these individuals are able to embrace the opportunities and uncertainties of adulthood with enthusiasm.

Cultural Valence and the Larger Environment

Clearly certain cultural and ethnic groups have more expectation for continuing parental involvement into adult life. Several of the participants in this study talked with awareness of their cultural norm for involvement, and were able to articulate how this “obligation” feels to them.

There’s definitely an enmeshment, I think, with the transitioning from adolescent to adulthood. I think it’s part of the culture—we’re very involved in each other’s lives. We spend a lot of time together; decisions are made as a family. And for me, now I’m just trying to be more and more autonomous and not rely on my family.

Another young person stated,

I think my awareness of the culture in which I was raised, in this nation and on The North Shore, makes me recognize the importance of, and want to assert my autonomy with my parents from time to time. What's the norm for these social circles? I don't think it's normal. And so it's hard to fight that. Every once in a while, I'll hear my mom say "this mom is like this." And I'll say, "yeah, but she's fucked. Just because a crazy person does this, that's not OK."

These young people are sometimes able to discuss the expectation with humor, and generally, their sense of loyalty to parents and culture is intact. However, they also conveyed varying degrees of stress around managing parental expectations for a "closeness" that sometimes does not feel good to them and encroaches on independent living.

The experience relayed by the interviewees is current lived experience, which cannot help but be reflective of the larger surround of our culture and the difficult economic conditions in the United States today. While the exact effect of economic conditions on developmental process cannot be assessed, and it is not the purpose of this study to consider degrees of causation, the extreme difficulty that many young people are experiencing in establishing careers given the lean job market requires mention. In a very general sense, it is difficult to feel oneself to be "OK" out in the world on one's own, when nothing in the surround is going well. It is a discouraging time for many in this group. One young person said despondently, "I guess I want adulthood to be better than it seems like it's gonna be."

Several young people felt that graduate study is now mandatory to be prepared for future job markets. One participant thought that educational institutions have structured degrees in such a way that undergraduate diplomas are less useful, almost requiring

graduate study. Extended education often involved a higher degree of dependence on parents for a longer period, even in cases where young individuals took out loans or found fellowships for their graduate study. The support entails obligation: “Because I’m not making money I have to respect their decisions, their thoughts. It’s very hard, very hard.” Referring to fluctuations in parental involvement, another noted, “Going back and forth between working and being a student, it’s confusing.” One young woman groaned she could “wallpaper her lovely apartment with diplomas,” not having a job at which to hang them. She and her fiancé, currently a student, already have five diplomas between them. A shifting climate around planning and preparing for a career has complicated establishment of autonomous functioning and is frustrating many young people.

Some of the jobs available to young people do not provide a sufficient income to cover living expenses. A number of parents are still contributing to offspring expenses as offspring approach the age of thirty. Sometimes this is done on an “as needed” basis and sometimes parents have constructed a gradually diminishing financial scaffolding for their young adults. A participant described transitional support:

It was hard and my parents helped a lot with that to start off. They still gave me some money once a month so I could get used to the budget I was living in and that lasted about a year.

Most interviewees reported intermittently feeling like an adult, at those times when they are able to feel self-reliant. “This morning I have to get up and I have to go to work and I have to make money and pay my rent. You know, I feel like an adult.” Those participants who have not been able to find employment that allows for basic financial independence are unable to feel very adult-like.

It was also evident that the realities of the current economic situation can obfuscate the difficulty of psychological separation, providing a ready excuse for dependency. A participant who turned down a job in her own field in order to work for her father attributed the more dependent choice to external conditions, saying, “And due to financial reasons, it’s very difficult to separate. It’s very difficult.” There clearly were parents of interviewees who were overly empathetic, lowering expectations to an unhelpful degree, as well as some interviewees who, in their struggle to move forward, were too quick to assign responsibility to the current surround.

Another aspect of the larger environment is technology that allows for constant communication between parents and offspring. The exact significance of technology in terms of separation process is also beyond the scope of this study, however, it should be noted that the ability to contact others at any juncture of the day can and does contribute to dependency or anxious over-reliance. One young adult noted, “Cell phones have made such a difference. I can be in my car driving somewhere and I’m bored. I can call my mom and have her entertain me for 10 or 15 minutes.” In some cases, young adults are still checking in with parents numerous times a day, rather than managing the day’s tasks and frustrations with self-reliance.

CHAPTER V
STUGGLING TO SEPARATE AND INDIVIDUATE

It's clearly laid out to me that they will always be there to support me. As far as when they'll stop helping me, it's not as clear.

There is little dispute that parents love their offspring and generally parents wish the best for their offspring regardless of age. The process of separating and individuating from parents is understood to be embedded in all interactions from birth through the life course, and further understood to be the result of inter-subjective process, with both parent and offspring contributing to the process. It seems logical to assume that parents, as a part of parenting function, would have the primary role in structuring these processes, whether done in a highly planned manner or more unconsciously. Whether or not the particular terms of separation and individuation were used to describe the processes, all young adult participants had, at this point in their lives, some frame in which to talk about their experience of the processes, and an opinion as to whether or not they had moved through the processes sufficiently to feel equipped for adulthood. The cultural expectation for transition into adulthood as they moved through the twenties was very clear to each of them. While participants did not speak of consolidations of developmental process, each participant had intense awareness of being at a juncture at

which they were “supposed” to be shifting into a new stage characterized by independent function.

Provision, in Lieu of Support, Is Not Helpful.

Some young adults spoke philosophically about the effects of affluence, and specifically about provision. When the parent continues to be the provider, offspring struggle to build a self-image of efficacy: the parents remain the ones with the goods. Psychologically, the parents continue to have the resources, power and strength.

I think parenting that was done to our generation was done with the best of intentions of providing children with everything that they wanted, but it was done with those intentions. It was done in such a way that it didn't force children and adolescents to develop the tools that we would suddenly need to be able to make decisions and to execute decisions for ourselves. I think it's probably left a lot of people in our generation in a state of confusion and without really the tools to figure out where they want to go.

There is always tension in the life-long process of separating, however, it is particularly intensified for the young adult due to expectations for a major shift to autonomy. In instances where individuals were experiencing particular difficulty in separating from parents, a reoccurring area in which they expressed struggle was in the area of financial support. Provision of this type of support carries the message that the young person is unable to be autonomous and leaves the young person feeling somehow deficient.

Yeah, I feel that they've enabled me. To the point that I've gotten so comfortable with taking that I'm at a point where I can't be more secure. I feel unsettled in not having the security at this point. It makes me reach out to my parents more, where I wish I was able to stand on my own two feet more.

A mid-twenties participant who decided to return to school for a master's degree reported that this decision became, “one of those instances” in which, “my dad feels like,

you are still my daughter. I still want to support you. I'm happy you want to continue your education and I want to make that easier on you." The statement from one participant, "They absolutely adore what they're doing to help us," expresses an attitude towards giving that seems to apply to many parents today. In a more affluent society, some parents do have the time and financial means to be supportive. This component of relationship with an adult child can be interpreted as generous and caring, but additionally reveals parental behavior to be emanating out of parental needs and wishes, rather than being focused on what is best for offspring.

Parental need to feel gratified by their ongoing ability to provide varied supports to young adult offspring was evident in a number of interviews. These provisions take the form of jobs, money, vacations, gifts ranging from sweaters to cars, babysitting, and less concrete forms such as advice. A 27-year-old who described his family as "very close" [enmeshed], said that it had helped to move downtown, "where they can't just pop in." However, he added sheepishly, "At the end of the day, the car that I'm driving is not mine." He and others are troubled by the regressive pull of these situations in which there is great temptation to continue to take from parents. Speaking of an airline ticket, one said, "I kind of take it grudgingly." Another participant said,

I've always had a credit card of hers, and it was just intended for emergencies and I never used it that way [only for emergencies], and I had tried to give it back to her and she wouldn't take it.

(It should be noted that this woman's mother had taken back her credit card at the time of the interview). In the above quote, several vacillations and mixed messages are embedded in the interaction conveyed. Both parent and daughter were ambivalent about severing the dependency inherent to provision of a credit card. Some instances of giving

described by participants were infantilizing. “She’s helped me a lot financially. I mean, I wish she didn’t as much as she did, but she cannot see me suffer at all.” The message to this young woman was that she couldn’t even manage her own affects. Several young people talked about the obligation incurred when they continue to take things from parents, and felt varying degrees of resentment. One participant felt provision was a type of duping.

OK, here’s the candy bar kids, and nobody really told us that we weren’t going to be exactly like our parents, making all that money right off the bat and no, the credit cards aren’t going to last forever.

Dependency frequently involves this type of naiveté.

The Hierarchy Is Maintained

In cases where separation has been difficult, to the point of making transition into adulthood seem impossible, there was evidence that parents had enshrined themselves as the experts on life, or reified the hierarchy of, “we’re the parents, you’re the child.” One young woman stated,

I think it’s nice to know their job won’t be done until I die. I mean, that’s kind of the way they put it. “You know, we’re going to be your parents until the day we die.” Even if we don’t need something like living at home or taking money, they are always still there. It’s a good feeling. So there’s security in that, there’s always that thing that “we’re the parents and if anything happens, we’ll put ourselves aside for you first.”

A number of young adults still view parents as being their fallback in the event of a large problem. Another participant relayed,

Yeah, if anything like that happened, they would take care of me. I don’t want that to happen, but I do have them as the ultimate fallback. I mean they would always be there to take care of me if I really needed it.

The sense of an open option to return to a state of being cared for makes the struggle for autonomy very conflicted for some.

I guess the sense of security, knowing if something did come up, I could always move back there, I could always probably borrow some money from them, stuff like that, but obviously I would not want to.

One participant described his attainment of adulthood, “They did a really good job,” in such a way that it was homage to his parents, and not his achievement at all.

In a more hierarchical relationship, offspring are frequently not identifying with efficacious aspects of the parent and internalizing strengths through an identification process. The structure that would support a shift out of the hierarchical relationship is not being accrued: the lack of this process maintains the dependent position. A participant, who was struggling to progress out of dependent relationships with his parents, talked about a successful father with three graduate degrees, a father with whom he was not able to identify. A single interview did not allow for exploring the reasons for inability to use the possible parental identifications, but defensiveness and conflict were evident in the narrative. When asked if his father had any characteristics he would like to have, the young man stated, “Probably not. He’s a funny guy, he’s a smart guy, he’s savvy. Maybe those all come in time, maybe not funny and smart.”

Having capacity to use others through identification is critical to building psychic structure through internalization process. Another young man whose father was “working more than he was at home” during his childhood, remained closer to his mother and was unable to use his father for good separation process. “I didn’t really identify with him when I was young because I didn’t really know what to identify with.” A greater paucity, in terms of potentially useful parental qualities, was described by

another: “Seeing my dad in his mid-forties, he actually might be 51, and it’s still not really adult behavior coming out of that.” Ambivalence around identifying with a parent was evident in one participant who remains very angry with a parent. Conflict in any form renders the process of identifying with parents problematic.

Parental Conflict Over Separation-Individuation Undermines the Process

I think if it were up to them, they would prefer to be as involved in my life as they’ve always been. And I sort of have to need that [involvement] out.

In reference to her future married life, one participant said,

My mom’s dream, in her world, would be buy the lot next door, knock down the house, live in one gianormous house, which isn’t really realistic but that would be her ideal. Live in the same spot and be like one family.

The parental wish to remain merged makes the process extremely difficult for a young person, who is already inherently conflicted about separation. In less extreme situations, there were varying degrees of parental reluctance to give up attachments more appropriate to earlier developmental phases, avoiding progression through separation and individuation. This reluctance sends a conflict-ridden message to the offspring. One participant reported having “growing up issues” and “anxiety at every birthday.” The press of expectation from the larger environment, for advancement into a phase of more autonomy, is an opposing pressure. The inconsistency of parental messages and expectations (both parental and societal) can create painful confusion and conflict, slowing or stalling developmental process, even prohibiting growth.

Frequently young adults were struggling to assert their independence, but were working against a parental tide of maintaining the old relationship. Several participants,

who are approaching age thirty, reported that parents had not altered their stance toward them. “I think they still treat me like a kid.” And from another, “My parents will take as much as they can get in terms of maintaining the same sort of relationship.” And from another,

He doesn’t treat me any differently. To my dad, I’m always going to be 6. When he’s 90, I’m still going to be 6 years old. He still has a very take care of my little girl mentality. That willingness to accept the child is always there.

Still another reported, “I’ve always had to push back against my mom a bit, in terms of independence. And that really hasn’t changed much.” Many comments described the struggle to feel like an adult specifically in terms of the parent’s position. “And when I’m not with my parents, I feel more adult-like: when I’m with them I feel more child-like.” Another described,

When I’m in the house, I’m the kid and they’re the adults. It’s weird. It’s almost like I walk through my parent’s front door and I start regressing, lie down on the couch and yell, “Mom, what’s for dinner” kind of thing. That does still happen for me. And it’s strange to do that but it feels almost natural, to let go and let them do things for you, let them be the parent.

Several participants talked about their old rooms in their parent’s home as being preserved as the room of their adolescence, a likely reflection of a parental wish to hold onto the previous phase. A young woman noted with evident longing to return, “And our rooms are identical to how they were in high school. We still have our posters up, we still have all our things.” Another interviewee described her mother’s lack of awareness that her offspring could or should have a life apart from her. “It’s hard for her, like how could they [adult offspring] not want to come home for dinner. Like ‘what are you doing?’” The young adults interviewed were able to understand the parental perspective with generosity. One noted, “A lot of her self-worth is based on her role as a mom. She

always wants to feel needed.” At some point, the “understanding” of the parental position may reach a level that constitutes caregiving of parents. Speaking of a daily phone call at 8:15 in the morning, a participant described attempting to curtail her impatience, stating, “I know she needs this.” The participant detailed the challenges of managing this level of daily involvement, saying, “Sometimes, it just gets out of hand” and, “We need to have some time to ourselves.”

In cases where an entire family was stuck in an earlier developmental phase (than ages of offspring might indicate) it is particularly difficult for a young adult to break out of this familial surround. There is risk of isolation as the other family members remain intact as a group. A participant described this situation,

My parents enjoy having everyone [adult children] at home. We’ll all sit out in the living room and watch movies and TV together and sometimes play games and make dinner and little stuff like that that I like to participate in.

Another participant, engaged to be married, described her struggle: “But it’s hard to transition. Being in that [parent’s] house, I feel like a teenager. Just being in that house.”

Speaking of her mother, a young person said, “It was really important to her that we have a really close good relationship.” A number of participants used the word “close” to describe their family of origin: in each case the level of involvement was high. Contact involves daily phone calls, perhaps multiple calls a day. One participant stated that she was relieved when she became engaged, because her mother now calls her fiancé five times a day. Description of the involvement generally revealed dependency in function, as when a participant talked about packing, either for a trip or a move: “So I can

call her [mother] and whatever she's doing, she'll go through it with me. Because she's used to that. She knows I need that detail help."

One participant began his interview stating, "I live 2500 miles away from my parents. Two time zones." Young adults working to separate from parents described earlier college choices designed to create physical distance, and selections of job locations to do the same. In each case, the progression to autonomous function was particularly complicated and the distancing an attempt to accomplish psychological separation, though duration of distant living did not necessarily correlate with good separation process. Parental reaction was sometimes not supportive of the effort to separate, as was the reaction described by this young woman: "He thought I was going to be far away and I wasn't going to have anyone to depend on and I wasn't going to have anyone if I needed them. Three and a half hours was too far away." In several cases, after a period of great physical distancing, young people realized they didn't need quite that much distance to maintain independence, as described below.

The next time I went home it had been like 14 months, because I had left the country and I had to work. And I think that was hard on me and hard on my family, and one of the more difficult times in our relationship because we were so disconnected. I never did that again. I made sure I got home.

Some parents are beginning to talk about a plan for reunification with adult offspring: "When you get settled, we might move closer to you." Alternatively, several participants stated their wish to maintain physical proximity to parents, with stated motivations ranging from wanting their own children to have close relationships with grandparents, to a child-like need for physical proximity which suggests lack of object constancy. "I can't leave her, my mom. If I tried to move away like my brother did, I would be like 'no, I have to be near my mommy.'" Another participant spoke longingly

of his distant family of origin. “It’s been hard recently, going back and forth and being so far away when all the rest of the family is so close.” A number of comments revealed a worldview and focus pitched backwards towards the parents, as if parents were still the center of their universe.

Several participants, each of whom is struggling to “feel” like an adult, described mothers who continue to worry about them in ways that indicate maternal fear that the young adults are not safe on their own. Speaking of her mother, one participant said,

She’s a huge worrier, a huge worrier. If I’m going somewhere, if I’m going out of town for the weekend, she wants me to call her when I leave, call her when I get there, call her before I leave there and call her when I get home.

A young man said, “She’s kind of a worrier. She really is a worrier. That relationship I don’t think has changed as much.” Another stated, “If there maybe are a few days when I go without talking to them, to my mom, then she thinks something is wrong.” It is not helpful when a parent attempts to manage their own anxiety by ensnaring the young adult in over-involvement, or by over-controlling the young adult. One participant had to make a covert trip to Chicago to arrange for an apartment before breaking the news of her plan to move to parents. The young woman described her mother’s attendant realization,

And when I moved to Chicago, she realized that the rope was going to be longer and that she wasn’t going to have as much control. Yeah, I wanted to be able to come and go as I wanted, and kind of be off the radar.

Parents can be unsupportive of separation by the subtle contribution to guilt in the young person when he or she is attempting to separate. “She’s really sad that I’m not around more. It’s always hard.” Another participant reported with obvious guilt,

I think that my mom might sometimes feel that I don't necessarily go to her first when I need support. I do go to her, just not necessarily first in line. Sometimes she voices that [her wish to be the main support]."

The same young woman reported, "They really want to be part of our daily lives, both sets of parents, which can be challenging." In several cases, pressure to produce grandchildren (so that parents can actively care for them), was an attempt to insure ongoing involvement, precluding separation process as a part of family function.

Maintaining Dependence

There are days when I'm scared out of my mind. And my parents are like "you're on your own—and we can't do that." And there are days when I resent them not doing that earlier on. Yeah, I feel that they've enabled me.

For some young adults, there was evidence that dependency is actively sustained by both offspring and parent. "I cannot complain about not having money with her, without her trying to give it to me."

Another participant said,

I think there are both aspects in my parents and I keep holding on to. It's hard. It's definitely moving towards the [mutually] related end of the spectrum, but they are still definitely in the caretaker role. I don't know whether it's because I'm not ready to be there developmentally or whether they're not ready to let go.

Frequently the young person has made forays out into the larger environment, but the wish for dependency survives, sometimes in the parent as well. "I like to go home and not have any responsibilities and my mom can cook dinner. And if she wants to go to the mall and I find a sweater, maybe she'll buy it for me." In some individuals, these descriptions indicated a rapprochement process, while in others, the described return home sounded like more intractable regression. "I've gotten away from having to be with friends constantly and more just want to relax [at home]. You know, I don't need to go

out all the time.” This participant had essentially moved back home, leaving her city apartment unoccupied. Those who were aware of their dependent yearnings voiced unease with the feelings: “And like dependency’s scary.”

Several participants talked about returning to work for their fathers: “It’s definitely helped. He knows a lot of people and that’s helped me move forward.” Despite the description of helpfulness in the last quote, the young people working for parents remained broadly dependent on them, beyond financial matters. In cases where the primary relationship of the young person continues to be with the mother, it is impossible for development to proceed because of the dependency inherent to that relationship. In less extreme cases, but where dependency was still present, several mothers are interwoven into offspring function so that whatever the task the young adult is facing, the mother is built into the task accomplishment through anxious discussion of all the details. For one young person, the mother was still central to decision making. “I have a really hard time going along with something, so her helping convince me to do this as a career was a really big thing to me.” One participant described this period as a “gradual weaning off,” referring back to the most primary form of mother/offspring dependent connection in infancy.

Maintaining Over-involvement

Several participants reported major life decisions which virtually insured that they would remain extremely, if not over-involved, with parents. One participant had decided to pursue a second graduate degree, though she has two very young children. She understands the cost in terms of independence, knows that this will require extensive

daily interaction with her parents who will provide the necessary childcare and support. Another participant is engaged to marry her parent's "adoptive" son (an international sponsorship). A vivid expression of her wish to remain in the family of origin, she essentially has bought back in as the wife. Another participant accumulated so much debt that she had to make the decision to move back home in order to be able to retire the monetary obligations. Motivations are complicated and it is impossible to attribute direct links between these young adults' decisions and their conflict around autonomy, however, it is of interest that some of their choices have precluded that autonomy.

It is sometimes painful to leave the closeness of childhood behind. The draw of maintaining a high level of involvement, sharing time and activities together when those experiences have been fun and precious, can be strong. "We were involved with sports and we did all of that together. We read *Anne of Green Gables* together. I was so much closer to my dad when I was younger because we could do all of those activities together." This young woman experienced moving forward with a valence of loss, which certainly contributes to her ambivalence about moving into a more autonomous state. In cases where childhood did not include much sharing of activities or particularly warm interactions, there is less attendant sense of loss, as in the case of a participant whose mother worked in another part of the country during much of his youth.

Separation Anxiety

I could have easily been on prescription medication to deal with my anxiety but I'm not. I'm thinking about myself enough for the whole population and that's pretty much what my whole life is about, [working on] separation and individuation.

Several participants reported feeling nervous about the level of separation that is required in order to transition into adulthood; nervous to the degree that it meets criteria for separation anxiety. One participant described the prospective marriage to her partner of several years in ambivalent terms.

And this prospect of getting married is in my plans for the next couple of years. But that's kind of a scary thing too because once I get married, I don't personally think I can go stay with my parents all the time, so I'll basically have to create my own life, which is kind of a big, big step, which makes me really nervous about getting married.

The prospect of independent function can be terrifying for those whose separation from parents has not occurred. "There are days when I'm scared out of my mind. And my parents are like, 'you're on your own and we can't do that.'" Another participant described inability to manage her anxieties about independent function which included frequent "sobbing" phone calls to her mother.

Some of these young adults found their way back home, (for various stated reasons), however, back home they experienced feeling, "kind of in limbo" or experienced deep shame about their inability to move forward. "The more my friends have kind of moved on, I've ended up spending a lot of time at home." Separation reluctance, if not anxiety, was also seen in several participants who articulated never wanting to live anywhere else than Chicago. "I don't want to leave Chicago, mostly because of my family." And one participant, who has established himself in more independent living, talked about the anxiety he now feels without parents involved in his process, as in the past.

I remember that was a hard time thinking, what if I don't get a job, what would I do? And that just kind of unknown was really hard. Where I didn't really have that when I first came out of school because I felt confident that if I couldn't

find a job right away, my parents would make sure I was alright while I found a job. I could fall back—be dependent on them if anything bad happened. And now it's changed.

Rapprochement Process or Regression?

Back at home, in cases where there is not clear parental support to separation, a broader regression may become intractable. Mothers can resume doing the young adult's laundry and cooking for them. "I admit since it's not my house, I don't have that sense of cleaning it up. My mom will cook a lot. I don't really cook dinners." Child-like functioning has been reinstated. Another stated, "I think until I'm officially married and moved out she [my mother] still considers me a kid." It's noteworthy how readily the role of the "kid" has been embraced by the "young adult": a sense of relief was palpable.

A number of young adults are painfully worried about their struggle to move forward into more autonomous function. Asked if he thought about adulthood, one participant replied, "I think about that constantly. I honestly think about that all the time." Even a participant who is living very independently reported,

I've just turned 29 and I was like "gosh, I'm 29, like next year I'm going to be 30." I kind of freaked out. Like a lot of my friends are married and a lot of my friends have kids. So in some ways, I feel like I'm a little bit behind.

Most young adults today are very aware of "being behind" previous generations and talked about varying degrees of "panic" due to being "in a very different place than adults were a generation ago." Another described feeling "late in the game."

But babysitting is still the bulk of what I'm doing. And that doesn't make me feel very adult. So it's a hard one for me. Even though I love children, I'm 27. I want to have my own children at this, you know, in the next couple of years. So it's hard to feel like I'm still a teenager, going to my babysitting job.

And those who are unable to find full-time employment are battling a constant sense of failure. Speaking very defensively, a young woman said,

If doing what I need to do means coming home and having everyone think your daughter is a failure, that's fine because I know I'm not. Although people still view me as a non-adult—which is interesting because they don't know what I'm doing. They just give me crap, really trying to regress me, you know, pushing me back into that. Because why else is an adult back at home. “You must be a child, rather than what's in between.”

A poignant area of findings was the degree of shame felt by young adults who are struggling to progress into independent living. Several participants stated they prefer not to reveal to others that they have had to return home. A participant whose credit card debt resulted in a move “home” stated,

People hide it, are in denial about it. If they are at home, they are embarrassed and kind of feel like they shouldn't be. I would love to be able to move away, to be able to afford to. Right now, I'm trying to do the most responsible thing, which is to live at home.

With the acknowledgment of having moved back home, one participant apologized to this researcher, as if she had let me down with this piece of datum.

Preoccupations and Persisting Childhood Dynamics with Family of Origin

I'm totally in my family's world, and I'm kind of a little nutty and crazy, and I'll forget about him [fiancé], and I'll feel so bad, that I'm not engaging him.

Preoccupations with the family of origin, of parents specifically, make commitment to career or partner very difficult. As described in the current literature on young adulthood today (Robbins & Wilner, 2001), several participants talked about not wanting to give up options, foreclose on anything. In some cases, psychological preoccupation with parents underlies the avoidance of commitment. The quality of

preoccupation is varied and sometimes reflects unresolved Oedipal strivings, as in the case of one young woman who said of her father, “He interests me.”

Several participants expressed or conveyed considerable anger towards a parent; the unresolved nature of which complicates the working through of separation process. More detrimental to separation process was a lack of clarity in roles and boundaries between parent and offspring.

Like my dad, everyone knows this, my dad and I have more of a brother/brother relationship than a father/son relationship. Like the brother you look up to and learn from, but I think he’s, I’ve always known everything about him, like I think I know the name of every girl my dad has had sex with. We would be up late at night and I’d be doing my homework on the couch and we’d go out to the garage and do a couple of hits and things would go from “how’s school going?” to deep stuff like what life is and what he is getting out of life and he doesn’t really still feel like an adult, and him telling me that, and kind of giving me license to feel the same way.

Young adults continue to want and need their parents to maintain clarity in the role as parent.

The closeness with my mom sometimes borders on being too close, like a friend rather than a parent. And then there are times when she is very parental and very giving and I feel taken care of in a healthy way.

Another participant, speaking of being the oldest sibling in her family, said, “I was just like a second mom.” Because of the role conflation, these participants did not think of parents as resources: there was not sufficient attention to their developmental needs, making their own progression forward extremely difficult. When parents were clearly parenting, it was a relief: “Yeah, there are times when my parents are a little bit more parental and I think things are smoother.”

A shift in the parental stance that involves including the young adult in the parent’s personal “adult” material was described by one participant as “parental over-

sharing” and was not helpful to these young people. Being used as a confidant confused the appropriate boundaries between offspring and parent and muddied the separation process, which requires clearer concepts of self and other. Use of the adult child as an intermediary in the parents relationship, when discussed by study participants, was described to be less tolerable as they grew older and developed more awareness of the inappropriateness of that usage.

Expectations, conscious or unconscious, that offspring will live to correct or improve an area of parental regret regarding their own life is another type of boundary violation which burdens the development of the young adult. “She [mother] kind of relates a lot in that way, in who I am now and who she could have wanted to be if she had had those kinds of opportunities.” And, “By the time he [father] was 25, he had two kids. So one of our jokes was always, like every day that I live that I don’t have two kids, I’m like winning.” Another spoke directly of the way his parent lives “vicariously” through him, the father’s own ambition having fallen by the wayside.

Several young adults described encroachment of parents into their thinking or feeling; “She kind of knows what I’m thinking before I do.” The lack of clear psychic boundaries between parent and offspring was also expressed as “her ability to tap into that piece of me without my knowing.”

Like we’ve got a joke where she’s got weird medical problems like one leg is longer than the other and she’ll give me a call and something will be hurting and I’ll say “Me too. I was having that same headache.” And she’ll say, “This is weird.” So I feel like we’re really in tune with each other.

Separation, which results in two psychically distinct individuals, has not really occurred in this instance of parent/offspring sharing of bodily feelings and states. More subtle examples of poor psychic boundaries were around cognition; cases in which the

young person's thinking was saturated with that of a parent, as in a participant who said that people are happiest at age thirty, but "everything is downhill from there." Need for neutral turf to maintain separateness was noted: "it's just kind of simpler because we both have our own sort of stuff, our own thoughts."

"Adult Helper" to the Parents

In cases where young adults have had to deal with a parent who was or has become significantly compromised in terms of health or mental health, the process of separating from that parent becomes very complicated. There may be a sense that the parent has abandoned them, or that the parent has become the young person's responsibility by virtue of the actual need to care for that parent. In families where parental function becomes impossible and the caregiving function shifts prematurely to the young adult, separation can become suffused with guilt.

I feel like I'm supporting him: I'm trying to support him emotionally. And even though my heart's still there and I want to be able to help, I have to find a way to do it in the context of "this is my life and I'm going to try to help from afar."

In another set of circumstances, one participant described a situation in which family life had changed dramatically, in a way that resulted in an abrupt de-idealization.

That was a weird shift. I always looked up to her and thought of her as a successful woman who kind of knew how to get stuff done and here she is doing data entry and stuff that's making her feel not successful.

The young adult, still needing support to ongoing developmental processes can feel bereft.

Young adult offspring continue to care for parents in ways large and small, even when parents are essentially functional. Care can range from providing an empathetic

ear, “She just needs someone to vent to,” to assuming a distinctly parental role. A participant relayed, “I’ve tried to help her. She really didn’t have any friends. I did actually take her to dinner with some ladies. I’m more like the mom now.”

In one case, this dynamic was longstanding and has not modified over the years.

I do feel a need to be there for my dad on some level, you know, talk to him about stuff, you know, give him a few laughs. I try to be the funny kid at the table. And I sort of have that role because I was always trying to make my dad laugh.

Young adults who are practiced at attending to parental needs continue to do so, but generally with increasing conflict and sense of burden. Consciously or unconsciously, they realize that this type of engagement with a parent undermines their strivings for autonomy.

Facing Adulthood with Trepidation

When a girlfriend and I have had a pregnancy scare—like—I use protection—I’m not an idiot—but it hasn’t been a pregnancy scare—it’s like a maturity scare. Like I’m cool with a baby but like it just would require me to – I know my friends would go crazy—but me with a baby—like I wouldn’t be able to figure out elaborate pranks and stuff like that. The part of my brain that sort of thinks of ways to make my friends laugh and kind of mess with people would start thinking of ways to save money on heating costs.

Young adults today often express fear of adulthood, often because they are lacking the psychic constructs of independent self and other which render autonomy possible. Frequently, the young adult feels the deficit but is unclear about what is lacking, and is unaware of how to secure the necessary resource. This is an extremely confusing and painful quandary. These individuals would like to move forward but feel completely lost and unable to see their way to more solid functioning. Their desperation is evident in statements about what would make them feel like an adult. Several

individuals mentioned that certain acquisitions, particularly owning a home, would make them feel more adult-like, due to the responsibility involved. “I really try to think of moving forward, rather than laterally or backwards, whether it’s my job or buying a house or having a family some day.” For another, it was greater financial compensation: for others, having “a kid” was counted on as the event that would make them feel more adult. In the event of future parenthood, “Now I gotta grow up.” One participant was clear about her wish to avoid adulthood: “I would like to have stuck at 26 or 27 and I would have been just fine.” Use of self-talk was acknowledged by several in this group and evidences the internal conflict, examples being, “No, no, no, you’re an adult now” or, “Stop feeling like you’re a kid.”

Individuation Is Risky

In some ways I wonder what the flip side would be, if I had developed my own ideas about the world that were different from my parents. I always wonder, am I not trying hard enough to think outside the box? Am I not, should I be exploring things that are outside of what feels natural to me? Everything I do feels natural to me and am I missing out on something in life just by listening to my gut. What’s your opinion on that? I don’t know if you’re a therapist.

Regarding particular struggles to individuate from parents, some participant’s report of experience revealed discomfort with any conflict with parents, individuation from parents having the potential to create conflict. A participant reported not having any conflict growing up as an achievement: it was clear that his parents remain too powerful to cross, that there would be consequences to contesting these parents. There certainly were instances in which offspring are constitutionally like a parent, and less individualization might be expected, but there were also participants who received messages from parents that individuation was not acceptable. One participant described

with clarity the expectation for conformity to parental values and a defined mode of presentation.

For the other individuals who have not individuated in any major way from parents, the reason for this was largely outside of their awareness. “I certainly went along with however probably how my parents hoped it would go, but I can’t think of a time when I felt a lot of pressure to do that.” One individual talked with perplexity about an ex-fiancé’s criticism of him “as only doing what my parents, brother and sister would expect of me. I kind of just like following in that same line.” In a materialistic society, sometimes individuation is conceptualized in terms of financial success.

I want to differentiate myself from my parents. I have dreams of being successful, both from a doing good for society and a making money perspective, which is a little different from my parents. We were raised in a middle class family. When it comes to success I’m aiming higher.

Sometimes conformity was merely an expectation: “It’s kind of how I was raised.” Several young adults talked about parents who only recognized their own way of doing or thinking about things, demanding conformity. “I’ve done it longer and this is how I do it.” Another stated, “He’s very problem-solving oriented, so he’s always trying to give you advice on what to do and how to do this, what things to think about.”

Descriptions revealed an active process of shaping the young person to replicate the parent or parents. One participant talked about being “kind of left alone as long as he was making the right decision,” suggesting that deviation from parents as the ultimate authority was not particularly safe.

A number of participants conveyed that they were still aware of wanting parental approval, and comments sometimes reflected a higher degree of dependence on approval from other. “I think they know what’s best for me so I would hope they would tell me if I

was doing something stupid.” Several young people are clinging to the undifferentiated mass of childhood friends who continue to remain tightly connected. “Sometimes I still feel like a kid when I hang out with some of my friends. These are kids that I’ve known, some of them, since grade school. So I don’t necessarily think that that’s ever going to change.”

CHAPTER VI

GRAPPLING WITH THE WORK OF SEPARATION AND INDIVIDUATION

But at the same time, I don't know how people who are forever supported by their parents are going to be able to make their own way in the world. If their parents are always bailing them out or, I mean, I'm really grateful to my parents that they had that expectation that I wouldn't move home after I graduated, that I had to find a job and I would be doing this on my own. I knew that they had expectations for me that when I was 22, when I finished college, whatever I chose to do I would be on my own.

Clarity in expectation for independent living was one of the best parental supports to separation and individuation process. Some young adults were very aware of the expectation: it had been a family mantra for many years. Several participants could not recall hearing the expectation articulated, but parental thinking was clear and this was transmitted to offspring and internalized: "I mean a lot of it seems to me was unspoken." In these families where expectations were clear, "It was never an issue. I never expected them to give me any money. I never expected them to be paying for part of my apartment or paying for anything. And I didn't need the money."

Most young people interviewed had some level of parental support through college years, but a couple participants described graduation as the end of any financial assistance.

As soon as I graduated college, I didn't have a job, so it took me three months of living, two months of living at home before I started, before I got hired. That

period was pretty stressful. I mean my parents had paid a lot for me to go to school and I didn't have a job. So there was a little bit of tension between us.

They were always in the background supporting but there wasn't a lot of hand-holding. So in terms of finding a job after college, and everything like that, I was really on my own. They would ask how it was going but they didn't do much for me. My mother would always help me if I asked, but they definitely were a little bit more removed.

And I will have to have my own health insurance as soon as I graduate. And God bless Obama. I hope he pulls that off, otherwise I'm screwed. Because I'm a frequent flyer at the hospital. I'm a boy. I'm a boy who likes to ski. I tend to break bones and stuff. So I use it.

They obviously don't want me to rely on them because that's obviously not going to be sustainable in the future. So, I also don't want that.

These individuals had less conflict about independent function, having understood for a long time that many parental supports would cease. And parents were together and unified in their stance: one participant described, "They make all their decisions as a team." (In these homes, the offspring's old bedroom had often been converted into a study or office.) In general, these clear expectations were not perceived as abandonment, and the young adults felt that if they were in serious need of support, it would be available to them.

I know my parents would provide a safety net if it were needed. They weren't offering it. They would be more than willing to offer it if I needed it. And they knew that I wouldn't ask for it if I didn't need it. So, there was a safety net but also the expectation that I would do things on my own.

Also helpful to young people was a clear shift in parental expectation that the young people would make their own decisions about their future path. A young woman described her parent's attitude.

Especially now, they are very much like, "it's your life. Do you want my opinion?" Like, "we will tell you what we think, but as far as what you do, it's up to you." It's nice, because I have friends that have parents who say, "you NEED to do this." My parents would never say that.

Parents who shifted to providing more of a “sounding board” for postadolescent offspring supported independent thinking and function. An example was,

I was thinking about a lot of options and called my parents to talk about that and just sort of talked about it to my dad. And he was like “this is what it sounds like you are saying. Is that what you’re saying?”

While parents likely did have qualms about some of the plans being discussed, such as long-term employment in an undeveloped nation, they were nevertheless able to explore the subject with offspring, helping young people to clarify their own thinking.

Yeah, I think they did [worry about the postadolescent’s plans], but they really left it up to me. Which was, they’ve always been really supportive of what I’ve wanted to do and I’m always doing things that are a little bit crazy.

Another world traveler talked about her father with gratitude.

It always looked kind of like he was confident. And I thought, “if Dad thinks I can do it, than I guess I can.” Because if your parent is freaking out, you have to wonder, “am I not capable of doing all this stuff?” But he never, he was good at hiding the anxiety about letting go. It was never visible.

Parents were most helpful when supports were only provided as needed. A participant described the thoughtful attunement.

I think the level of involvement has sort of fluctuated over my whole life. At different times when they needed to be more involved, they were, and at other times when they didn’t need to be, they sort of sat there and let me do my own thing.

Some participants reported that their parents had always respected offspring thinking; that parents had never been over-bearing in terms of believing parental opinions were superior. One participant talked about his parents pulling back as he moved through the twenties, this having increased his self-confidence. “Yeah and now they trust me to make my own decisions and to make them correctly. And I think, especially, after I turned 22, they really began to trust me more.”

Another young person stated, “Sometimes if they don’t agree with the decision that I make they’ll let me know about it, but they let me make the decision.”

Level of Parental Involvement Dates Back to Homework

I would say my parents really taught me to take responsibility for myself, whether it was a school project or something going wrong and them not taking responsibility. I think that my parents definitely emphasized that you’re responsible for your actions and let things go to the point until you saw the consequences. They wouldn’t bail you out.

An interesting but expectable finding was a correlation between parental non-involvement in homework during younger years and better separation process. This was a primary forum for independence building, in which children and adolescents had the opportunity to learn to develop their own relationship with their work. Young people also experienced full ownership of the grades earned. “And even if I did poorly in school, which I did occasionally, they just pretty much said ‘it’s your life.’” Conversely, over-involvement in homework was later reflected in more difficulty with separation.

Parental involvement in schoolwork parallels the continuum of parental support to the separation process.

I mean she’s done it pretty much all my life. With schoolwork, if I found it too hard, or if I didn’t want to do it, she would do it. So she didn’t ever want to see me unhappy or sad, so she would do it for me. That really got me a little screwed up. And I don’t know if, academically, that’s why I don’t continue.

One participant said several times that her father “graded” things, the implication being that he was the expert on her work. Another described a mid-range of parental involvement in schoolwork: “She [his mother] would always help me set up a schedule for studying for exams.” Also in this mid-range were parents who edited papers, even

continuing to review papers via email when the student went to college. A helpful level of support was described by one participant: “If I was having trouble understanding what the teacher was looking for, she [mother] would help me break it down and understand it. ‘This is how we need to approach this.’”

Several young adults who are now functioning with a good deal of independence, described parents who were “very hands off and let me take care of it [school work].” “I think they assumed I was doing fine and I usually was.” As one participant noted, “I was always competent to do it myself.”

Academic ability is a tremendous asset and allows for easier independence around work. However, clear parental thinking and practice of non-involvement in schoolwork was also very beneficial to young people. One participant described the clarity of his parent’s thinking: “Sometimes I would try to get some help on my homework but they had the principle of ‘we’re not doing your work for you.’ If I needed help then I should establish the relationship with my teachers.” Having acquired ability to locate resources for himself in the environment, it is not surprising that this participant was one of the more autonomous individuals interviewed.

Use of Significant Others to Support Separation

So she [his wife] is planning on finding a job and she’ll have to be the breadwinner for both of us. So the dependence has shifted where we’re planning with each other to support each other through tough times where it would have been the parents in the past.

While some young people interviewed had crafted their major decisions with focus on situating themselves for the future, independent of others, some interviewees spoke almost of a “transfer” of intense involvement from parents to a partner, fiancé or

spouse. Certainly there were individuals who had met the “right” person and had made a free-standing commitment to that person: “It doesn’t feel like my relationship with my parents has changed in any significant ways since I met her.” For others, commitment to the other was also in service of bridging them away from parents.

So I’ll be in a state of flux and probably do enjoy having some sort of anchor. And I guess, getting back to what you’re studying, I refuse to get that from, to draw that sort of stability from my family.

Another young person stated, “And I have no doubt in my mind that if [the partner] was not in the picture, I would probably be back home. Which scares me.”

Another described an either/or relationship: “But I think I’d be spending more time at home if I didn’t have a girlfriend. Just because I wouldn’t have anything to do.” One young person has chosen to marry a man who is intensely involved with her parents.

“They had a very close relationship with my fiancé before I even came along with the dating. They had a close relationship with him.” Her decision to marry this man really precludes separation from her parents. Two participants noted individually that they each date people who they know to be incompatible, realizing from the beginning that the relationship will not last. It’s possible that these choices forestall commitment or relinquishment of close parental ties, though a single interview with participants was not sufficient to draw this type of conclusion with certainty.

Several participants talked about the usefulness of living with friends after college.

I feel like those relationships helped me individuate more than any kind of romantic relationship I’ve ever had. We all felt like we were in it together so we spent a lot of time together. We’d make family dinners, make a Thanksgiving turkey, that kind of stuff.

The conscious building of social resources beyond the parents was very supportive of healthy developmental process and feelings of self-reliance.

Mentors Promoting Separation

In the broader culture, much of today's corporate and organizational structure is lean. Mentors, as well as apprenticeships and training programs have virtually disappeared in many types of organizations, leaving young adults deficient in useful experiences with other non-parental adults. One very independent young woman had learned to seek out and utilize these types of resources. "I've also always had the benefit of people in my life who sort of pushed me in a good directions." However, in today's environment, many young people don't have this type of relationship, which provides critical support to self-reliance in the larger world, easing the shift to autonomy. Exact measurement of this condition in terms of contribution to overall separation-individuation process was not included in this qualitative study. A number of participants described peer support groups as fundamental to their being able to reduce parental ties allowing for more independent function.

Learning Hard Lessons--More Realistic Thinking

I was always hoping, I always wished they would have the big answer. But then I learned that there are no big answers or truth. People who on paper are very similar to me think much different things, and that sort of disappointing logic really helped me in terms of being able to deal with, I don't know, uncertainty.

The young adults who demonstrated a separation and individuation process that has advanced further, were realistic about the current job market, and clear in their intent to work and be financially independent aside from external conditions. One stated, "But

really, with this economy, I'm applying for everything that I'm qualified for. There's more of a pressure to get a job and pay the bills than find the perfect job. You know, I'll get there." These individuals gave up the less realistic history degree that wasn't going to provide employment opportunities, relinquished the dream of being a professional skier. The press of student loans was a big motivator for those who incurred them: "I wanted the job because I had student loans to pay off."

Clear that they would not be relying on anyone else, these young adults have been building more mature perspectives about the realities of adulthood, this in contrast to the young people described in studies written several years ago who were still seeking a career that will be "fun" or "fulfilling" (Robbins & Wilner, 2001).

I guess I'm actually coming to terms with the fact that most people don't have work where things are perfect - the type of work that they're doing, the type of organization they're working in, their co-workers and that sort of thing.

Several participants described having idealized adulthood as a time when things would be easier, "a more stable place." "What I've found is a whole lot of transitions," and their transitions include adjusting to realizations, less fantasized thinking and acceptance of "some good and some bad."

Transitional Phase

Several young adults talked about returning home to live for a short-term period following a job overseas. While each one described the time for reconnection as a very positive experience, "a time of getting to know them [parents] in a different way than I had previously known them," these young people were all aware of "chomping at the bit" before long, as eagerness to be out on their own resurfaced and drove their next foray into

the world. These experiences had the cadence of true rapprochement and the achievement of independent function in these individuals substantiates this. “It was kind of difficult when I first moved home because I felt I kind of digressed. But we got over that [digression].”

For some participants, re-crafting the parental relationships sounded more stressful.

There are definitely lots of hardships, the changing roles with parents. It’s not that smooth. But, for the most part, nothing stands out in my memory as a horrific part of that transition, and we’re still transitioning.

I think I’ve definitely crossed a threshold and there are days when I move forward and there are days when I take ten steps backwards.

Developmental process is never linear, though for others, there was more fluidity to the process of transforming the parent/offspring relationship to one that is loving but no longer retains the dynamic of dependency.

When I graduated I had a job so I didn’t really need, I mean I’ve been lucky in that respect. But now that I’m in school [again], they are helping me more. But I have a fellowship to pay for school so they don’t have to pay for the whole thing. But, I’d say it depends on your own personality, their personality and also the relationship you have with each other. And my personality is that I’m very independent and theirs is more like they are flexible and willing to help where needed.

Parents generally have interest and concern regarding how their young adult children are faring. One participant quoted her mother, “ ‘I don’t want to be intrusive but we just care about you.’ I’d be like, ‘I know . In my time I will tell you when I have information.’”

Rebalancing the degree of contact requires attention from both parties, and usually some resigned acceptance on the parent’s part around a reduction in contact. After describing his battle for autonomy, one individual went on to say,

That said, I still come back here every once and a while stay in their house, let them take me to dinner, you know, I love my parents. And if that makes them happy and I enjoy spending time with them, I can [spend time with them].

Several participants noted a shift from asking what they should do about something to “informing” parents of what they were doing. “I do consult them. I don’t know to what degree I really take their advice into account. If it seems like good advice, I pay attention.” Availability of parents to young adults is important to their emergent sense of autonomy, even if not accessed. A young man who has established his life in a location apart from his parents said, “And I did always have the sense that I could go back home if I needed to.” Knowledge that the “secure base” survives in some age-appropriate form remains an important support.

After extended education, the young adults interviewed were very eager to get to work. “I’m knocking on the door of 30: I just want to feel like, ‘hey, I’m earning my own money.’ I’m looking forward to next year for that.” Another student said, “I’m really ready to be working fulltime, making an income. I’m tired of this. I feel like I’m not in control as much as I will be when I’m working.”

A Shift in Relationships with Parents—Towards More Mutuality

I like that we have more of an adult to adult relationship. I’m comfortable asking them for help but they don’t ever talk down to me.

Several participants talked about the enjoyment of a transformed relationship with parents, getting to know them in a new way, sharing more in terms of jobs, work experience, responsibilities. “Topics of conversation have shifted. My mom actually graduated from the same school in 1997, so my relationship with her has grown a lot through talking to her just about med school and medicine.”

Another participant said, “We have specific things that we always do together. We go to the fitness center.”

A young mother noted, “We can be on a different level now because I do get what it is to parent now, which I never got before. So, it’s a whole nother [sic] thing that we relate on.”

Young adults still may need support and encouragement, however, in the cases where parents treated offspring as adults, the young adults were free to craft the new relationship without feeling defensive or feeling the need to keep pushing back against regressive relating. Interviewees had numerous positive comments about this shift in the parental relationship. “They treat me with respect.” “It’s a comfortable level of involvement on both sides.” And, “It’s been an evolving thing.” Clear conveyance from parents that offspring are viewed as adults builds confidence in the new developmental phase. “Just having more adult conversations, I don’t feel that hierarchy anymore.” Another described this with gratitude, “As I’ve gotten older, they’ve been really good about respecting my space, respecting that I’m an adult.”

Part of what is underlying the rebalancing of these relationships is that identifications with parents are being internalized in the young people. The range of parental characteristics available for identification purposes includes those which are solidly supportive to offspring moving forward, and some which do not promote the healthiest process forward. Individuals who are less sophisticated psychologically may not be fully aware of identifying with less helpful parental qualities. Several participants described identifications that included an anxious management of affect. A young woman noted,

My dad is kind of a workaholic, always on the go, run, run, run, run, doing a bunch of things at once. And I don't think I started multitasking like that until recently, or at least recognizing that in myself.

Another participant explained, "We're both always really busy with lots of things happening at one time." A young man portrayed anxious functioning as a shared trait with parents. "I'm very cautious. I like to plan ahead. It comes from both my parents, trying to think about how everything effects. How's this going to effect? And then, worst case scenario, checking to make sure."

Reluctant Adults

I'm a reluctant adult, I guess. I don't want to be old yet. But at the same time, I'm not somebody who likes to go out and party and like get drunk at the bars. I'm not holding onto that, I'm really not. I don't know, I guess I'm not quite ready, so I'm, I'm struggling right now.

Even young people who have successfully transitioned from school into the work force and are living on their own are equivocating over the societal expectation for adulthood, some saying things like,

There's not enough preparation for kids leaving college. It's just such a hard transition. I feel like a lot of people aren't prepared for a lot of things. You're kind of on your own. It was a really hard transition for me.

I think a lot of people in my generation are in same sort of boat where they're hitting in their late twenties what they should have been hitting right after college. They went out to get a different degree or I don't know. So many of my friends are so, juvenile is not the right word, but so youthful and still crazy. Maybe they don't want to take on the world as a more mature individual.

A mother of two reported, "Sometimes I feel like we are playing house. What is going on here?"

Some hedging is apparent in a newly married woman: “We still make the differentiation between real adults and adults. We’re adults but we’re not quite really adults yet.”

Reluctance was evident in most of the young people interviewed. “Thirties is the new twenties” has become a mantra for some, as they seek comfort in the broad delay of their peer group. One individual talked about inability to shift his self-definition.

It’s funny. I don’t know that I’ve ever used the word “man” to refer to myself. I don’t know why. Yes I consider myself an adult but I have some difficulty with that transition of referring to myself as a man.

Another described a shade of denial: “There is a little bit of a disconnect there. I don’t really understand that I am an adult and have all these responsibilities.”

Several participants noted reluctance on both sides: a participant, clearly not fully convinced, described her mother: “I think she has shifted and is more accepting of the fact that she can’t always be the person to do things for me. I think she’s learned that I need to feel like I’m taking care of myself.”

A young man prevaricated,

At a macroscopic level it seems like it [able to move towards adult goals]. Microscopically it doesn’t seem like that’s happening. It seems like I’m not, whatever, I don’t know when I’m actually over the fence and in adulthood. Would a characteristic of that be I’m focused on work and I don’t mess around?

There is concern that as adults, it will no longer be appropriate to “mess around,” and that new responsibilities will have to be shouldered. “Thank God that my only responsibilities are animals that don’t have complex emotional needs. It feels good not to have children at the moment.”

Individuation in Process

The messages I got were, “you’re absolutely going to college. You’re almost definitely going to get a graduate degree in something. And it doesn’t matter what: just do what you love and that’s the way to do it. Actually my mom tried to really nurture things that really helped me to figure out who I was as an adolescent.

The young people who were fairly well along in the process of separating from parents talked about clear parental messages to develop talents and build their lives around things that were important to them. A young woman described, “They were from the start, ‘figure out what you want to do and do it.’”

In most cases, the parental encouragement to individuate was within a certain framework of more mainstream functioning, but offspring had the sense that their parents were “accepting” rather than trying to mold them. There may still be instances in which a participant has to “let them [parents] know this is me,” (insist on parental recognition of their right to be different from parents), but generally the young adults in this transitioning group felt there was space to pursue personal interests. “As far as doing what I wanted to do, as long as it wasn’t illegal or immoral or something like that, I had free rein essentially.”

One individual noted that “genetics” may play a role in individuation, as he has realized that he has some similarities to his parents that were “hard to prevent.” A conscious process of assessing characteristics was evident in his comments.

CHAPTER VII

SEPARATION AND INDIVIDUATION ACHIEVEMENTS ARE MORE DEFINED

Unambivalent Parental Messages in Support of Growth Towards Independence

They always kind of let me figure stuff out for myself. I think I've been more autonomous than some of the people I know.

Young adults who are functioning well with a good deal of independence have been making their own decisions for a long time (thoughtfully supported by parents). Parental framing of choices, and encouragement of offspring selecting from alternatives (for instance between participation in sports or dance) predated adolescence. As young adults, these individuals are comfortable assessing their options and exploring different avenues. They have confidence in their own ability to know themselves and make judgments about what makes sense for them to pursue. They have developed "passions" apart from their parents. They had greater and earlier clarity about career choices. A solid sense of self has accrued which allows for independent function. And, of course, success allows a young person to more easily feel effective and enlivened to move forward developmentally. Discipline, enjoyment of school and favorable academic experience are components of solid developmental process and were very supportive of

progress to autonomous function. The young people in this group have had substantial success in terms of their work and relationships.

The participants demonstrating more effectuation in separation-individuation process had a self-image of themselves as independent that was longstanding. “I really, always, for as long as I can remember, thought of myself as a very independent person. ‘I can take care of myself. I don’t need anyone to support me financially. I’m pretty emotionally stable.’” Another reported “I’ve always been, not really rebellious, but I cut my own territory, or I don’t give it up easily. So I’ve been pretty independent.” These young people have been “fending for themselves” for much of their life, (within the relative comfort of middle class life). Parental attunement and capacity to support growth towards independence was evident. One young woman recounted her mother talking with amusement and appreciation of her daughter’s independence since the days of her early childhood. This participant characterized herself as someone who is both independent and determined. “I’m just kind of going to do my own thing, on my own time.” This participant recalled, as a child, wanting to go to school “so badly” that her mother, (who was able to hear her daughter and make a thoughtful decision), started her a year early. Another participant remembers fantasizing about future independence.

I was one of those kids who idolized the independent people. I wanted [to be] the person who could live in an apartment on their own, halfway across the world, have a job where they’re not sitting in an office, not dependent on anyone else to take care of things; the people who sit in the café and not feel like they needed someone to be with. That’s what I wanted to be.

Another young woman stated, “I never wanted to be emotionally dependent on my parents and I never really wanted to be dependent on them for anything.”

Experiences That Have Promoted Separation and Individuation

In several cases, opportunities to travel during college years had stimulated plans to seek employment overseas after graduation. “You feel so free, you feel so independent. You suddenly realize there is this huge world around you, at least for me, because I grew up in such a small place.” In a tandem process, the young people were able to seize on opportunities and parents had supported these experiences of moving out into the world, despite parental feelings of concern or wish to maintain proximity.

And they had no frame of reference for that. My family was born and raised on the south side of Chicago, and they stayed there and they’ve never moved from there. They don’t get it. I was like an alien. When I was able to talk to them about it [working in Kenya], they understood that while they would not have chosen it as something for me to do or chosen it for themselves, that it was an important experience.

In these cases, the young people were the ones to locate the opportunities in programs like Teach for America or the Peace Corp, and they described being on their own as hugely beneficial experience.

I lived in Japan for two years. I taught English there as a foreign language. It was probably the best two years of my life; I traveled, I spent every dime I made. Didn’t feel guilty at all. I came home and had no money, but it was an extremely enriching experience, and yeah I loved it.

Several participants described missing their parents to a degree that surprised them. Despite moments of being home-sick, being “out of their comfort zone,” (“it’s a really, really humbling experience [not being able to communicate]”), these young people reported learning a lot about themselves and seeing their parents from a very different perspective when they returned. These individuals also noted, subsequent to this experience, that parents thought of them differently, appreciated the skills they had developed on their own, and treated them as adults.

I really felt like when they came to visit me, they were able to see me as, “OK, this is our daughter who is living, surviving in a foreign country. When she came here she didn’t speak the language, she didn’t have friends, but she met people, she established relationships with people, she has her own apartment.” I had an apartment for the first time. I had a salary. They were able to see me in my own element.

Two of the interviewees who had lived on other continents pointed out that they came to call those places “home.” It is significant in that they considered “home” to be where they were, not where parents were living.

Young adults functioning most independently reported feeling like adults after graduating from college, going to work and assuming responsibility for their own expenses. “Not feeling kind of responsible to report back to them [parents] about how I was using my money” was noted, as was buying one’s own first car. “Opportunities to “run things” promote feelings of efficacy, as reported by one participant who has returned to school but continues to “run a non-profit organization in New Orleans.”

These participants described making friends in the workplace with much older people. “All of a sudden I saw my peer group as the other teachers. Some of them are 60 years old.” Associations and identifications with older colleagues fuel a general sense of mutuality with adults. And pursuit of interests has resulted in one participant moving around the country: “I do move so often, and that’s kind of typical of a lot of people my age, to move from job to job and also place to place.” In each new situation, this person has increased self-sufficiency and independent function.

Employment that required young people to be in charge of children or adolescents was particularly supportive of the shift to feeling like an adult.

I think the period that I did that [taught high school], that is what really separated adulthood for me. There are very few jobs where you get so much responsibility right from the go. There’s no difference between a teacher who

is well experienced and well versed. She has just as much responsibility as one who is in her first day. So you just sort of get – I think the responsibility for the students' learning really made me feel like an adult and separated that for me.

This person was fully aware that as a young teacher, she needed to make a clear shift to being part of the faculty, and was mindful of the fact that she could not relate to the students on a peer level in any way. In response to her assuming the adult role, the students confirmed and reaffirmed her adult status. “They just assume I’m an adult. I’m standing at the front of the classroom and they think, ‘OK, there’s the adult.’”

Another high school teacher described taking seven students to Europe. “Wow, OK. I’m only 25 and I’m responsible for all these kids. If I don’t feel like an adult, I better act like one because I really am in charge.”

A participant who works with adolescents in a therapeutic setting talked about the insights into her own parental relationships gained as a result of observing adolescents with their parents. Need for clarity in her role has helped her make the shift to feeling like an adult, as has the opportunity to work with others as “the professional.” The experience has been both “intimidating” and “incredible,” also making her “feel like she’s a lot older than she really is.” “Sometimes it’s hard because they’ll [the adolescents] be talking about things that I understand, and I get it. It’s a conversation that I just had with my friend the night before.” Ability to feel like an adult allows for successful management of the job, while success at her job substantiates the sense of herself as an adult, despite the small differentiation in age between the adolescents being cared for and herself.

Autonomous Functioning

I think if I had asked them for assistance with graduate school, they would have been more than happy to provide it. But I, again, it was kind of a pride thing, where I've already graduated from college and they've already helped me, and I'm going to do it on my own. It was a decision, not to ask them for help.

Well it feels good to me now because I'm pretty satisfied with the way my life is now and I consider myself an adult, so I guess I have a positive association there. Now I did have the benefit of being able to find a job I wanted relatively young, and just having a relationship I enjoy. I think that, you know, if I was still looking for those things five years from now, maybe I would be a little concerned about the future.

Considering the transition to adulthood, another delineated, "it was kind of like I was *a real person*. They weren't supporting me anymore, like they had for 21 years. So I finally felt like I was an adult." Becoming a *real person* was how this person characterized her achievement of autonomy.

Another quality shared by those operating independently was ability to be more thoughtfully self-aware.

I know that I am [an adult], but there's a huge difference between being 21, when you think you're an adult, and being 26 (I'll be 27 in a month). And I know I'm kind of green and I've got a lot to learn. But I feel much more mature.

This young person was realistic about her gains and her ongoing need to learn and be supported in her further development. Another ego strength that supports autonomous function is cognition, particularly cognition that is very independent of parental cognitive function. Both ego strengths are evident in the quote below.

You know, even when I start sounding like my mom, I'm able to step back. "You know exactly what you're doing here." Which is what I've done, constantly re-evaluating things, thinking about things with kind of that bird's eye view. As opposed to my mom who gets caught up in the moment.

As in all other endeavors, a process of reflecting and objectively assessing, usefully informs one's progress.

Useful Identifications with Parents

Beyond the defensive positions that often characterize adolescence, there is less resistance to identifications with parental qualities. Internalizations of positive parental qualities contribute to psychic structure and a stronger sense of self.

I'm very much like my mother. When I was younger, I would have been insulted to be, but now that I'm older, I find it so rewarding that she did rub off on me in those ways. She's a very giving person.

A number of participants talked about identifying with each of their parents in different ways, pulling characteristics from both. "So I've kind of picked which ones, which scenarios when I use my mom and scenarios when I use my dad." It was interesting that some of the stronger identifications ran across gender, young women more identified with fathers and young men more identified with mothers. Some young people talked about conscious avoidance of certain parental traits: "If anything, I would consciously try to avoid some aspects of my mom." Some identifications were very deliberately selected and incorporated, while some seemed less mindful; "like my dad's listening and hearing, that may just have rubbed off on me after a while."

A number of participants credited their mothers with their appreciation of family and nurturance: "My nurturing side comes from her. We love children and animals."

Identifications around pushing one's self to succeed came from both mothers and fathers.

I'm just like him. When we have a goal, we want to accomplish it. And we're both perfectionists, which can be a great thing but it's also difficult. Because you're always trying to be your best and when you don't meet that, you disappoint yourself. So that can be bad. But I would say I'm a lot like my

dad. My dad is not emotional like my mom who doesn't have as much. I guess my dad and I are similar in that we set a goal and we're going to accomplish it. We're on a mission.

And another young woman described a similar cross-gendered identification.

There are things which I think, I guess I really admired about him as a kid, watching him set those goals and achieve them. And it probably does have a lot to do with me being able to say, "I have this goal, these are the steps I'm going to take to make it happen," because I watched him do that not only with work and with running. So I think those characteristics are things I took from him and I feel like we have in common.

Speaking of his mother, a young man described common determination:

Yeah, I think we both have—and this comes from my grandmother—my dad has it a bit but it's a different sort of bullheadedness. So, if we want to do something and someone tells us we can't, we're just going to silently, silently proceed. We say "OK." I tend to argue more than my mom does. My mom's just "OK" and goes on, carries on if she thinks it's right, and does it and things turn out well.

Some identifications, like the one described above and the one to follow, may originally take root in constitutional commonalities.

I have a lot in common with my dad, just the way I think about things. We both have certain kinds of minds that are really logical and mathematical. And so we have, we can communicate with each other easily in that way.

Another young man said, "Going into social work is a big result of what my mom did, but it was just because I'm interested in it and it was readily available to be talked about in the house."

Parental modeling of autonomy in function was extremely useful to this young man:

My mom is one of four, and they [her siblings] all call my grandmother 47 times a day and my mom just, like got away. She went to college and she went to med school and she just got away, because everyone's so much in each other's lives. I don't know if she consciously made this decision, and I don't know if that's autonomy, but she definitely saw the lack of autonomy. And probably that's

played a role in why we have independent relationships. She saw what it was like not to have that.

Having parents who could be characterized as highly functional can be a fertile seedbed for traits which will lead towards success. One person noted, “I figure I have 46 years of combined legal experience. Having two parents as lawyers, I know how to argue.”

Those with ability to use parental identifications to build their sense of self may have additional input in cases of parents remarrying. One participant, who spoke of significant internalizations from his father, also spoke of his stepfather. “My mother got remarried when I was 10, so he is essentially a second dad, and he’s vastly different from my dad and has that sort of, that quiet isolationist nature that I sometimes identify with more.”

One individual recounted years of parental instruction to not depend on others. While this is not the primary way to cultivate independence, mindfulness and articulation of agency, rather than expectation that another will provide function, was central to the parent and was useful to this interviewee.

And this is part of what my dad instilled in me in terms of what it means to be a man—responsibility—that sort of stand up, and sometimes you have to do the hard thing because it’s the right thing to do, and you take care of the people who are important to you. And you don’t count on someone else to do something, if you’re there and you can do it, just do it because you can’t count on the fact that someone else will do it for you. Things don’t happen automatically. And I think there’s some sort of old fashion, gender role stuff there, in that “be a man thing,” but I think it applies to women too.

Seeing Parents as Own People

A commonality in the young adults who have essentially separated from parents is capacity to see their parents as individual people in their own right, apart from the role of

parent. This includes an appreciation of parents being from another generation with differing ways of thinking about things.

The older generation was raised to think, “find something safe that you can do and stick with it.” Everyone views things through the lens of the world in which you were raised and we were raised in different worlds and she thinks differently about it.

Disagreements with parents include offspring understanding of the generally more conservative parental perspective. Young adults are able to view parents with more objectivity: “She had a really rough upbringing. That was really difficult for her. Yeah, and now that I understand that, it makes me more understanding.” Another described his father with balanced consideration: “He’s a really good person but it’s sometimes lost in translation—lost from, sort of, his own baggage. What he does is generally good but there’s complexity.” (Contrast this with another person of the same age saying: I guess I’ve started to maybe realize that they’re not perfect.” Early idealization is just beginning to undergo transformation). Increased perspective allowed another to portray her mother with fairness:

And also, the bigger picture is that she’s always been a good mom in terms of being a mother. I needed help, I know she’s there to help. And if I ever had a crisis, she wouldn’t say, “well sorry, I’m going on vacation or I have my own things to do.” She’s very selfless in that way.

These young people are able to appraise their upbringing from parental viewpoint. “I mean, when I was in high school, they were way too involved, but they had my best interests in mind.” Another participant reported, “When I tried to put myself in their shoes—I don’t know what it’s like to be parents—but if I had a kid who was doing what I did [living in Africa], I would be freaked out too.”

Young adults can be more insightful and analytic of their parent's relationship: "She's very left brain. And then my dad is very much the opposite. They do compliment each other very well." As participants in the work force, offspring are able to consider parents more in terms of parental employment. "My dad's rational by profession. It's his job."

Another young person reported:

The topics of conversation have shifted and I've gained further insight into what her life is outside of the home. It's funny, my mom has this very non-academic demeanor at home. It's just the mom who's kind of flaky. So it's fun to realize how difficult the stuff she manages every day at work is, and how much more she knows than I do, and to call her and ask her about it. It's also just been really interesting seeing how much we have to work and how much she had to work and how impressive it was, how present she was throughout our childhood.

Mature Connection

Mature connection between offspring and parental figures is made possible by offspring acquiring sufficient psychic structure, part of which is object constancy, to assume a position of relative autonomy. Comments from young adults contained in this chapter reflected their capacity to be independent based on unconflicted internalization of a regulating other. "I'm pretty independent. I'm pretty happy being by myself. I've always had that contentment, sort of being separated from people." Another said, "I don't get lonely when I'm alone. I mean I can be alone for however long and I just keep myself occupied." The comments also implied a self-constancy ("I've always had that contentment").

Achieving a more mature and balanced connection with parents allowed these young people to access parents when needed for support, without reengaging a more

regressive relationship. Things between them were generally handled in a business-like way: relational issues were articulated and talked out to mutual satisfaction. There was awareness on the part of young people that parents might need help with certain things, and in the future would certainly need offspring assistance.

When you're an adult, you have your own problems but also what other people need help with. Whether they're your friends or your parents, it's a certain part of maturity that you step up to the plate when they need you.

Another stated, "Four years from now I'm probably going to want to move closer to my family of origin especially because they're getting older."

Young adults who have shifted to more mutuality in parental relationships characterized these relationships as very fulfilling, in one case as a "more fulfilling relationship." Several participants talked about having more in common with parents as a factor in improving the relationship. "It's much better. I like my relationships with my parents now and I can only imagine it's going to get better." A young man reported,

My parents are the least in-my-face people on the planet. It's fantastic. So, and the funniest thing, because of that, because they're like that, because they're so unobtrusive, it makes me want to spend more time with them. And so every time I go home, I enjoy it. Part of that is since I've been 18, I haven't really lived at home. I've always been on my own in a bit of a way, so there's no need for me to create distance.

The described "one to one relationship where it's person to person" is clearly gratifying to young people. They appreciate the respectful listening, the cessation of advice giving, inclusion in new areas of parents' experience. "They involve me more now like in their own lives, as opposed to when I was in college. I would ask how their job was going but they weren't very explicit, or [I was] sheltered I guess."

Having acquired areas of expertise, which are valued and acknowledged

by parents, these young people take great pleasure in being the “expert,” as when a young physical therapy student’s mother broke her arm and became reliant on her daughter for “advise, comfort and support.” “Just being in the field meant I could help nurture her, where it’s been the opposite for twenty-odd years.” Parents visiting a daughter in Japan tracked her closely: “OK, she can speak the language, so we better hang on to her, because if we don’t we’re out of luck.” Another participant described more parity in relating with parents.

But I think I have put a lot of myself back into her. Becoming an adult and learning some things and having some different life experiences, I can come back and inform, on some of her choices, open her up on some of her experiences now. It’s back and forth, and this is the same thing with my dad.

Still another young person elaborated on the achievement of mutuality in their relationship.

It’s almost like a peer to peer at this point. Like this week I helped my mom with her resume and helped her write her cover letter, and she does the same for me. It’s more like she respects who I am as an adult and values me being able to help her with certain things.

Embracing Adulthood

I’ve never seen it [adulthood] as the end of anything, honestly. Because I feel like I can still do so many different things. I think when my dad graduated college there was a lot of pressure on him to do one career or maybe two careers. Whereas now I feel like there’s a lot more flexibility and people can try stuff and do a lot of different things in their life. Already I feel like I’ve had a lot of opportunity to do a lot of different things. It seems like I’m going to like it [international development work]. If for some reason I decide I don’t like it, I’ll do something else.

This type of attitude requires comfort in moving around in the larger world, autonomous and self-reliant. When this individual was asked about the possibility of

moving back to Chicago, her reply was, “If this is where things took me.” Her work will drive the decision, rather than any archaic need for proximity, and she faces her open options with relish. Another participant noted, “I see people, friends that are getting close to 30 or early 30s and who are freaking out about it. And I don’t understand what that’s about.” While even the most high-functioning of these young people admitted to days when they did not feel very much like adults, generally, they were enthusiastic about having achieved adulthood.

I’m kind of looking forward to getting older and seeing what life has to throw at me and how I’m going to deal with it, having kids and getting married and all that good stuff. I’m kind of excited for it. Being married is a universal hallmark of adulthood: and getting married is as adult as you can be.

In cases where internal structure reflecting achievements in separation and individuation process is evident, it is not surprising that the young adults have settled into careers and are in significant relationships, along with having established independent living. Because developmental process has gone well, they are happy and have positive outlooks.

This is my sixth year of teaching. I got my masters degree two years ago in library science. So I hold a bachelors degree and I hold a masters degree. Also, in my twenties, I was fortunate to be able to work and live abroad. So I feel like I’ve had a very productive decade.

Another said, “I think 2010 will be the best year of my life. I’m starting a new job. I’m way more independent. It’s taken me years to get here, finish PT school. This year’s going to be very interesting.”

A participant spoke with obvious enjoyment of her work: “I’m really excited about the projects I have going on now. I feel like I’ve been really fortunate to get to do

a lot of interesting things.” She has pursued these “interesting things,” and also had good parental support to do so.

These young people are confident of their efficacy, that they have ability to steer events to successful outcome.

I guess I’ve tended to have faith. I just let things come, let things play out, see what happens and react to that and you’ll be fine. You may not end up at the top of the world but you’ll end up just fine.

Another said,

I’m totally grateful for my safety net, but where I am now, even if the safety net went away, I finally have something that’s marketable. It’s a strange way to describe yourself, but that’s what you are on the open market.

Individuation

Several of the well-individuated young people spoke of being encouraged by parents to seek out what interested them, to figure out their “dream” and go after it. Individuation for another was a bit more hard-fought. “There was no pressure to become a lawyer. They always said ‘we think you’d be a great lawyer.’ There was no pressure to, but I think they had their fingers crossed that I would kind of find my way there.” He described having to earn their recognition for his vastly different choices, and appreciated the fact that they have given him their honest opinions.

Young people do continue to have some level of wish for parental approval, though, ideally, they have outgrown the need for it. The process of these young people defining their own thinking, establishing their own worldviews, has been characterized by respect, rather than conflict.

We differ on a lot of –we have different political views and I think that they and I understand that. But we both understand each other from sort of a basis point that allows us to not see that as conflict. We’re all very respectful.

These young individuals are not necessarily individuating in radical ways from parents, but there is a sense of flexibility and acceptance to the process. Given freedom to craft one's own life enlivens forward developmental process. One young woman talked about the shift in terms of relationships, friendships in college being more "limited-ish," and the world of potential relationships opening up tremendously as one moves into the broader world.

Being an adult means making our own decisions. And that autonomy is kind of cool. And the decisions you make are what you want to do—yours. You don't have to please, well you can please, but you don't have to please others.

Focus on the future, and awareness of the promise in the larger environment is evident in the animation of these young people. They are not hindered by preoccupations of the past or anxieties about the uncertainties in the expanding arena.

CHAPTER VIII

THEORETICAL EXPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study, in its reconsideration of separation and individuation processes, uses a theoretical construct that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Employment of terminology from intrapsychic theory is not meant to repudiate relevant interpersonal and intersubjective processes. The study's theoretical perspective rests on the idea of a two-person psychology and draws from a number of developmental theories. Processes of separation and individuation are considered to be co-constructions between parents and offspring that involve constant revisions and repositioning. Formation of psychic representations is a product of shared experience, whether the representations are termed "evoked companions" or "internal working models" (Stern, 1985, p.118), internal objects or representations of self and other. Receptivity and understanding of the other's experience is very much a part of separation and individuation processes. Intersubjectivity is a critical field for "having two minds make any kind of contact about their shared ongoing experience" (Stern, 2008, p. 181). Ability to move out and explore the world depends on past experiences of self and other and the resultant psychic structure. The more psychoanalytic theories of Mahler and Blos predominate in the literature review of this study, but other developmental theories that augment understanding of the

young person's path to autonomous function, and mature connection, are significant inclusions.

A number of authors emphasized the psychological turmoil associated with the expectation for transition into autonomous adult function (Hauser and Greene, 1991, Staples and Smarr, 1991, Michels, 1993, Blaine and Farnsworth, 1991). Data from interviews clearly supports the conclusion that a number of young people, in the latter years of their twenties, are floundering in the processes of separating and individuating from their parents. These individuals are painfully aware of inability to progress forward. This information represents finding number one.

Finding Number One: A number of today's young people approaching the age of thirty are continuing to struggle with separation-individuation process, and are conflicted and pained by their inability to progress.

Participant narratives detailed in Chapter V articulate a sense of being "unprepared" for the tasks of adulthood and resultant confusion, anxiety and shame. These young people are often preoccupied with worry about their predicament; describing a diffuse sense of inadequacy, but inability to identify what they are lacking, or what they can do about it. While some participant comments indicated a wish for additional parental support to separation-individuation process, most of the postadolescents were not particularly blaming of parents, as the young people essentially felt personally responsibility for failure to move forward.

Arnett proposed that delays in reaching adulthood are attributable to the change-over to an information-based economy which requires more education (2007, p.23). Most participants in this study did feel the press for advanced education and they did

describe their personal sense that additional schooling is something that forestalls transition into adulthood. They highlighted the dependency and obligations involved, and the regression of returning to the old pattern of, “Study, study, study, OK, now I need to go celebrate have a good time” with fellow students. However, the findings of this study indicate that delays in reaching adulthood are essentially of a more structural nature, as some participants had significant achievements towards autonomy while still in school, and others retained significant dependency after their education.

Though Arnett’s research, cited in the literature review, was done within the last decade, the tone of reported experience in this study has shifted and includes more realistic outlook. The optimistic expectation Arnett described in emerging adults, that they would not end up in unfulfilling jobs or fail in their marriages (2006, p. 13), has modified significantly as reported in 2010. This study found far more participant worry about ability to achieve financial independence, uncertainty about capacity to commit to a lasting relationship. It is likely that the eroded employment markets and economic slowdowns are reflected in these worries. Given the small sample size, this study does not attempt to provide a comparison to earlier research in terms of attitude towards adulthood; however, the shift in timbre in these participants was noteworthy. And again, while the economic climate is impeding ability of young people to establish careers, the findings of this study indicate that a more significant factor is deficiency in internal structure. The structural deficiency is experienced as a vague inadequacy, and resultant shame and anxiety is significant.

Finding Number Two: Parental conflict over separation-individuation process undermines developmental progression forward in their offspring.

There was extensive evidence that many parents of young adults are not supporting separation and individuation processes. Participants detailed ways in which parents impede their efforts to separate, making an inherently ambivalent process more difficult. Messages from parents were reported by the young adults to be mixed or openly re-enforcing of dependency on parents, conveying that the parent was a necessary component of offspring function. Participants described parenting that reflected attention to the needs of the parent rather than the needs of the young adult. While young people did not necessarily think in terms of unconscious parental motivation, there was evidence of parents wishing to remain in the parenting role despite infantilizing effects on offspring. Reliance or dependency on the parent as the authority or provider maintained a form of relationship more appropriate to childhood, and it was evident that participants experienced their parents as maintaining the more authoritative role. There were strong indications that a number of parents were colluding in the preservation of these dominant roles.

Certain narratives reverberated with over-valuation of parents, calling to mind Blos's idea of a persisting "rescue fantasy" (1962, p. 153) and Gould's concept of "illusion of absolute safety" (1993, p. 65). As these unconscious fantasies survive, older and less developed representations of self and other are held in place. Separation is fraught with anxiety and individuation is negatively impacted, as one must remain loyal to the compelling figures of childhood. Blos and subsequent writers noted the overwhelming sense of loss that accompanies developmental process with perseverance

of parental over-valuation, (Blos, 1980, p.61), yet another complication for the struggling young person.

The data collected from the participants suggests a lack of parental clarity about what is actually supportive to the postadolescent, even in instances where parents were consciously attempting to support the progression to autonomy. Embedded in this is a broader lack of understanding about developmental process regarding the family as a whole, with reported failure of families to move through and beyond earlier developmental phases characterized by more dependency and over-involvement, appropriate when offspring are children. While beyond the scope of this study, it was clear that a number of family groups have not progressed developmentally, and further, that parents may be vaguely unaware of the general stagnation but do not have effective ideas about supporting better development.

Finding Number Three: Unconflicted parental expectation for separation and individuation included a clear shift in parental stance with the postadolescent, which supported transition to adulthood and capacity for relationships of mature connection.

The most useful parental position regarding their postadolescent offspring involved less day-to-day engagement while remaining a supportive resource in instances of extreme need. Essential elements of this stance were respectful treatment of the young person as an adult, a withdrawal from the directive decision-making function, cessation of the provider role. An anxiety-free parental position substantiated parental affirmation that the young person was able to move out into the larger environment and function autonomously. While this optimal position included some flexibility to respond to varying situations, there was mutual understanding that support is available on an ad hoc

basis. Parental capacity to maintain this position of “separate yet connected,” promoted separation-individuation process in the postadolescent, essential for transition into adulthood.

Finding Number Four: A period of distanced autonomy is useful in progression to achievement of a balanced interdependence or mature connection with parents.

Blos understood postadolescence to be closed out with consolidations of reworking of structure, integrations around sexuality, resolutions of past trauma, coherency and continuity to sense of self, clarity of self and other. Internal objects provide a “sufficiency of living” underlying ability to “rest contented even in the absence of external objects” (Winnicott, 1965, p. 32). It is these well structured constructs of self and other that Colarusso refers to as the structure that allows for optimal distance from, and mature relatedness with parents (2000, p. 2). Colarusso together with Nemiroff state that this shift in object ties, the rebalancing of the connection with parents, is a primary area of transition to adulthood (1980, p. 7). The research in this study demonstrated that a period of distance, involving greater independence in function, was a useful step in the progression to capacity for mature connection, which includes more interdependence between adults.

The stories of participants in Chapter VII reverberate with enthusiasm for life, echoing a descriptive phrase of Mahler’s, “elated investment in the exercise of the autonomous functions, especially motility to the near exclusion of apparent interest in the mother at times” (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 69). This free and joyous exercise of one’s selfhood is a hallmark of healthy development and consolidates the autonomous self. A period of autonomous function in postadolescence allowed young adults to return to

fulfilling relationships with parents, the mature connection privileged in the literature pursuant to Mahler and Blos.

The rebalanced dynamic between parent and offspring generalizes to a sense of mutuality with other adults, which provides broad reaffirmation of oneself as an adult. An essential goal of development may be more specifically defined as achievement of capacity for mature interdependence with other adults. Solid separation and individuation process, with attendant accrual of internal psychic structure, allows for achievement of this capacity.

Finding Number Five: The research in this study indicated that the space to individuate begins with acceptant parental attitudes early in the life of offspring. An elaboration of self that includes capacity for autonomy and mature connection with others requires freedom to find one's own path to selfhood.

Encouragement to “follow one’s dream” and approval to “figure out what you want to do and do it” characterized parenting of the most successful adults interviewed. This calls for a reconsideration of the current parenting style of loading a child’s schedule from an early age with lessons and activities deemed “important” by the parent. Whereas “molding” prohibited individuation, a solid sense of self resulted from recognition and appreciation of individuality. Time and space for unprogramed exploration of interests and abilities allowed young people to work their way to individuality and a commodious expression of self.

Young people demonstrating good individuation contrast with the emerging adults described by Arnett who do not know themselves well enough to make decisions about jobs and careers (2004, p. 151). The indecision, lack of confidence to make

important decisions, stagnation extensively reported by Robbins and Wilner (2001, p. 144) can be understood as lack of self-knowledge which is indicative, in part, of poor individuation. Côté descriptions of poor identity construction also reflect lack of self-knowledge (2000, p. 179). The internal structure which accrues around individuation process is critical to adult function.

Findings of Levy, Shaver and Blatt (1998, p. 417) indicated that individuation process is “facilitated by attachment rather than detachment.” Parental provision of emotional support, as needed, feeds internal representations of parents as nurturing, this being associated with autonomy balanced with connectedness. These authors emphasized the father’s role in individuation, noting the usefulness of two primary figures to provide sources for constructive qualities. A number of participants described useful identifications with mothers and fathers, in terms of work and career issues. However, it is important for parental support to include mindfulness of promoting individuation, rather than a more sculpting process which may be predicated on parental needs.

Finding Number Six: There was a paucity of support to many of the participants. The current surround for many postadolescents does not offer sufficient support, in terms of training or mentoring relationships, in which a nonparent can provide developmentally appropriate guidance.

Some of the young people interviewed who are earnestly grappling with transition into adult function are utilizing others to support that process. Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (1993) wrote of many “essential others” during this phase of development, mentors, social institutions, idealized teachers and educational organizations. However, for a

number of young people interviewed, there were few individuals or organizations to provide necessary holding function as they moved towards adulthood.

While extended education provides holding for young people, increased use of technology in learning diminishes the opportunity for deeper relationship with instructors. The lean and flatter structure in many organizations means declining opportunity for experimentation with roles, exploration of skills, mentoring relationships. The work place, in general, has become more isolative; screens and cubicles replacing more interactive engagement with other adults. Only several participants noted significant mentor-like relationships with adults other than parents. These “other-adult” relationships had provided transitional support and linkage into the larger environment, allowing these participants to consolidate internal images of self as independently functional in that larger environment. A number of participants articulated various needs and wishes for more support in the larger environment to their ongoing process.

Finding Number Seven: Internal structure remains undeveloped in a number of young people struggling to transition into adulthood.

In some participant narratives, it was evident that representations of self and other have not solidified as separate and individuated. The boundaries between self and other can remain unclear in postadolescent years. The research of this study indicated that symbolic internal representation of a reliable object was not always well formed. Developmental lags in psychic structures of functioning ego were evident. In conflictual relationships with parents, young people were not able to utilize the process of internalizing useful identifications with parents. Young people may be attempting to separate and individuate, however, without a psychic construct of self as fully

boundaried, fortified with autonomous ego functions and an individual elaboration, these individuals are prone to regression, intensification of separation anxiety or a state of stagnation. While some behaviors or outward accomplishments may suggest independent function, true autonomy can be elusive and mythical when not supported by psychic structuralization.

Internal Structure Accrues Over the Course of Development

Separation-individuation process as detailed by Mahler et al.(1975), in which co-existing wishes to remain involved and to disconnect characterize progression to autonomy, is an overarching theme of development. Mahler specified two tasks of the separation-individuation phase, attainment of some form of object constancy, (an internalized other allowing for self regulation), and achievement of a definite “individuality” that has continuity over the course of life (1975, p. 109). These components of psychic structure are newly formed in the toddler and become solidified over many years. Data collected in this study indicate that young people struggling to progress into adulthood retain poor internal representations of a regulating other, poor internal working models, a poor sense of self as individuated and efficacious. Lack of ability to manage the tension around autonomous function evidences the poor structure (Mahler et al, 1975, p. 109). Autonomous adulthood requires reliance on one’s intrapsychic resources. Some postadolescents continue to require the physical other as an integral component of function.

Blos’s theory is also useful in considering the difficulties of these young people. He described the loosening of ties to parents as essential for independence in the larger

world, (1979, p. 142). Blos descriptions of stalled adolescence, cases in which separation process for whatever reason has been avoided or compromised, were applicable to several participants who now approach age thirty. Qualities of aimlessness, indecision, procrastination, expectant waiting were evident in some participants. The text of Robbins and Wilner's book (2001), which documents the experience of people in the decade of the twenties, is replete with these descriptions.

Blos emphasized the infantile sexual ties to each parent must be renounced in order to terminate adolescence (1979, p. 324), allowing for stabilization of drives, and for libido investment to shift from parent to ego (1962, p. 156). Without disengagement from parents, the necessary tasks of commitment to job and a partner can be delayed. The work place and engagement in a mature partner relationship are the critical areas in which drive and ego organizations are reworked, consolidated and integrated, the core work that brings adolescence to a conclusion. Some participant narratives revealed that participants remain too involved with parents to do the psychic work of adolescence. While it is common for internal structures to be partial and uneven in adolescence, some of the participants in this study are unprepared to do the synthesizing work of postadolescence as structures remain partial and uneven.

Blos also wrote that individuation can be stalled by remaining identifications with the "omnipotent mother," so that no personal goals or achievements can measure up to the grandiose standard, (Blos, 1979, p. 152). Gould noted that the "illusion of safety" under the parental umbrella includes a sense that one must remain loyal to the "primary reference group"; that one will be rewarded for following the "right" way as delineated by parents (1993, p. 64). Postadolescent participants who had not individuated from

parents remain in these less developed forms of relationship to parents, parents being too powerful to contest or cross.

Mahler (1975, p. 98) reported on internalizations of identifications with parents in the later months of the third year as an essential offset to feelings of vulnerability that accompany increased awareness of separation. This process is echoed in the transition into adulthood, with internalization process increasing psychic structure, in cases where the young person is able to use the parent in this manner. As a primary mode of structure building (Benjamin, 1990, p. 186) identifications are indispensable. Erickson concurred that identifications fortify identity and “self-certainty” (1980, p. 154). Participants who were unable to utilize parents, either due to parents being inappropriate and unreliable, due to conflict in the relationship, or because parents were too idealized and perceived as having unattainable qualities, were floundering as the result of deficient structuralization.

Arnett reported less hierarchy in relationships between parents and current emerging adults (2006, p. 314). Balanced mutuality in relationships between parents and young adults is a goal, the achievement of which signifies good developmental process. It is important to qualify the parent-postadolescent relationship, as results of this study indicate that the “parent as friend” dynamic is not useful as a source of identifications. The participant who described ability to identify with three parents, two biological and a stepfather, all clearly in the parenting role, exhibited solid psychic structure that has carried him in successful autonomous function. As described by the majority of participants in the study, other sources for identification, beyond the parents, were fairly limited.

Participant stories contain the history of the durability of the basic psychic structures first formed in early life and reworked in adolescence. While the details of that history cannot be known after a single interview with participants, psychic constructs in partial or unelaborated form were evident. Parental ambivalence about separation and individuation process, as reported by participants, saturated many of these stories. Much of the interaction around these processes with offspring appeared to be beyond the conscious awareness of parents, contributing to the young people's struggle. It is not reasonable to expect all parents to conceptualize developmental process in terms of the formation of internal constructs, however, healthy development requires that the goal of offspring autonomy be supported with some clarity, beginning in early childhood. The presence or absence of unconflicted expectation for autonomy is foundational to developmental process.

It is obvious that clear and longstanding expectation for autonomy simplifies a difficult path for young people; clarity meaning that stated expectations and unconscious process in the parents are fairly consistent. Unconscious parental ambivalence around offspring transitioning into adulthood can contribute to sustained postadolescent functioning. The parent-offspring relationship may retain aspects of over-involvement, or the same push and pull dynamic characteristic of adolescence. The working through of developmental tasks best addressed in the larger environment is then compromised, impeding progression to adulthood. Accrual of relatively full and consolidated psychic constructs was found to be essential to successful transition to adulthood. Achievement of a mature connection with parents, balanced and interdependent, involved two discrete adults with solid internal representations of self and other in counterpoised interaction.

CHAPTER IX

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

This study does not purport to translate into percentages the portion of the postadolescent population that is able to transition into adulthood, or the percentage of those who are stalled in the process. However, in a sample of 20 participants, many problems were evident and a number of people were struggling. This is not a startling revelation, but something we know with varying degrees of vagueness or clarity. However, the extension of a developmental phase and delay of progression into the next phase of life deserves serious thought and consideration. It is critical to assess underlying causes and attempt to identify what would constitute effective support to better process. This study focuses on the concept of internal psychic structure as necessary to transition into adulthood, and reports on the inadequacies of those internal constructs in a number of young people today.

It is important for parents to hear the young person perspective that postadolescents often feel they are battling to separate and contending for the space to individuate. There was a clearly articulated wish for more support to this process, so some reconsideration of the intrapsychic, interpersonal and intersubjective process is essential. Additionally, parents need to be mindful of developmental process in its

entirety. Transition to adulthood is part of a larger developmental picture, in which earlier process is foundational to individual function and personality style. Much of parenting involves reacting to the day-to-day issues. However, if the goal for offspring is independent adult function, parenting needs to be thoughtfully structured from the beginning to provide the most supportive environment to nurture ongoing separation and individuation processes. Outcome (the resulting internal structure) requires organic integrity and will reflect all prior stages. Successful separation and individuation are the culmination of many years of thoughtful parenting. For those parents who plan on substantial involvement with adult offspring, perhaps a reappraisal of how to craft that involvement, in a way that does not overly challenge ability to progress developmentally, is in order.

Postadolescents have reached the point developmentally at which the work of internalizing identifications, consolidating a work identity, locating one's place in the larger culture, are perhaps best accomplished with the support of others beyond the parents. It is important to think about opportunities for young people to rework, integrate and solidify ego structures and images of self and other. Many workplace environments may well become more bereft of supports. And positive experience in the work environment is important as a confirmation to self-efficacy. How will the cultural surround compensate for the increasing paucity of consolidation experiences in much of the work place? It is important to be mindful about the implications of the direction of culture in order to foster the crucial developmental transition into adulthood.

Clinical Implications

It is imperative from the clinical perspective to hear and attend to the articulated struggles of those in the critical developmental phase of postadolescence. It is also important to understand the affect around that struggle, the anxious and shameful preoccupations with feelings of inadequacy, and the confusion about what is lacking. A clinical formulation that includes assessment of the durability of structuralization is essential. In an environment of diminishing support to postadolescents, it is important to consider ways to respond. Clinicians need to be mindful of promoting development without stirring ambivalence around regression: recommendations around degrees of parental involvement should be carefully considered. While assisting parents in greater understanding of the inherent conflict sustained by their involvement would be useful to many struggling offspring, parents are generally not included in the treatment of a postadolescent. Nor would inclusion in the treatment be appropriate or supportive of autonomy. However, awareness around these issues on the part of clinicians who work with those adults who are struggling to understand the growth and development of their adult children is critical. It is essential for clinicians working with young children and families to be mindful of separation-individuation process, and to support goals around autonomous function.

Psychotherapy provides an ideal opportunity to restructuralize, however this population is not the easiest to engage. Children and adolescents are taken to therapy by their parents. Postadolescents generally have limited finances and many have too much shame or worry about themselves to initiate engagement in an intimate discussion of their struggles. In a developmental phase characterized by a drive to autonomous function, for

some the very idea of therapy may run counter to the need to do things independently. It is important to normalize their struggles and to provide access to services that are tolerable to the young person vulnerable to shame and anxiety about the self.

Indications for Future Research

In the course of doing this study, a number of people noted the detrimental effect of technology on separation process. Given increasing reliance on technical instruments that facilitate constant contact between individuals, this would be a meaningful area to explore in depth. Additionally, a study of what specifically has interfered with the acquisition of internal structure could expand on this research. A comparative study of birth order within a sibship, in terms of separation-individuation process, would contribute to a better understanding of family function.

It was also beyond the scope of this study to explore the parental perspective and experience of separation and individuation process in offspring. Some frustration around offspring resistance to pursuit of autonomous function would likely be expressed by parents. Given the theoretical assumption of a two-person psychology, this study would be nicely balanced with exploration of the parental perspective.

Learning differences or extremely compromised academic performance did not happen to be overtly present in the sample for this study. As so many of the years of being a child and adolescent are devoted to being a student, this experience is foundational to personality and a sense of self-efficacy. It is likely that extremes of success or failure in the academic arena impact capacity for autonomy and sense of autonomy. As our society requires even more advanced education, those for whom

learning is compromised, may struggle more with separation and individuation processes, if these young people are not carefully guided in their learning, or into other avenues of autonomous function.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITEMENT NOTICE

PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Are you interested in being interviewed, (75-90 minutes), by a PhD candidate about your personal experience as you have separated from your parents and moved through postadolescence towards adulthood? Participants must be in mid to late twenties.

The purpose of this study is to collect descriptive data from participants about their unique experiences of separating and individuating from their parent (s) or primary caregiver, in order to produce information about this developmental process today. Focus will be on how these processes come together in the decade of the twenties, and how they have supported the transition into adulthood.

For more information, please call the researcher:

Jennifer Thompson 847/804-2184

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Individual Consent for Participation in Research

INSTITUTE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

I, _____, acting for myself, agree to take part in the research entitled: What is the current experience of postadolescence in terms of parental relationships: how is the experience reflective of processes of separation and individuation?

This work will be carried out by: Jennifer W. Thompson (Principal Researcher) under the supervision of Joan W. DiLeonardi, Ph.D. Emeritus (Dissertation Chairperson)

This work is conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Clinical Social Work; 200 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 407; Chicago, IL 60601; (312) 726-8480).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to collect descriptive data from participants about their unique experiences of separation and individuation from their parent (s) or primary caregiver, in order to produce information about this developmental process today. Focus will be on these processes in postadolescence, and how they have supported the transition into adulthood. The study involves research through the collection, analysis and summary of data. Findings will be written up in a dissertation document, which will satisfy the dissertation document requirement of the researcher's Ph.D. program at the Institute for Clinical Social Work.

PROCEDURES USED IN THE STUDY AND THE DURATION

The data will be collected in 75- 90 minute interviews which will be audio- recorded to insure accuracy. Interviews will begin with a question about the young person's relationships with their parents, current and past; and additional sub-questions may evolve in the interview process. Scheduling of interviews will be at the convenience of the participant in terms of time and location. A signed copy of the consent form will be provided to the participant following review of the form.

Benefits

Associated benefits to participation in the study are the opportunity to consider individual life experience in the context of a discussion about developmental process, as well as the opportunity to participate in meaningful research. Findings will contribute to increased understanding of developmental process in postadolescence/young adulthood today.

Costs

Interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the participant, in terms of time and location. The only cost to the participant will be of their donated time.

Possible Risks and/or Side Effects

As the interview will cover life experiences and your thoughts and feelings about developmental processes, you may experience the interview as emotional or stirring of internal content. You may discuss any reactions with the researcher at the time of the

interview. You are free to decide not to participate in the study or may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The researcher will have a list of referral resources at the interview, or could be contacted subsequent to the interview for resources, if you were to feel you would like to discuss the interview experience further.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Audio-recordings of interviews will be erased after transcription. Numeric codes will be attached to transcriptions, these transcriptions to be handled solely by the researcher. Identifying information will be omitted from findings and personal details may be altered to insure the privacy and confidentiality of the participant. Data will be secured and inaccessible to anyone but the researcher.

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 this institution from responsibility for carelessness.

I may cancel my consent and refuse to continue in this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. 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 Jennifer Thompson (Principal Researcher) at 847/804-2184 or Joan W. DiLeonardi, Ph.D. Emeritus (Dissertation Chairperson/Sponsoring Faculty), at 312/726-8480.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact Daniel Rosenfeld, Chair of Institutional Review Board; ICSW; 200 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 407; Chicago, IL 60601; 312/726-8480.

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 _____ (Name of subject) and believe that they understand and that they have agreed to participate freely. I agree to answer any additional questions when they arise during the research or afterward.

Signature of Researcher

Date

REFERENCES

- Adatto, C. P. (1991). Late adolescence to early adulthood. In G. Pollack & S. Greenspan (Eds.), *Course of life: Volume IV: Adolescence* (357-375). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Arnett, J. J. (1998). Learning to stand alone: The contemporary American transition to adulthood in cultural and historical context. *Human Development*, *41*(5/6), 295-315.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, *55*(5), 469-480.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). High hopes in a grim world: Emerging adults' view of their futures and "Generation X." *Youth & Society*, *31*(3), 267-286.
- Arnett, J. J. (2001). Conceptions of the transition to adulthood: Perspectives from adolescence through midlife. *Journal of Adult Development*, *8*(2), 133-143.
- Arnett, J.J. (2003). Conceptions of the transition to adulthood among emerging adults in American ethnic groups. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *100*, 63-75.
- Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Arnett, J. J. (2006). Emerging adulthood: Understanding the new way of coming of age. In J. Arnett & J. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (3-19), Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Arnett, J. J. (2006). The psychology of emerging adulthood: What is known, and what remains to be known? In J. Arnett & J. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (303-330), Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Arnett, J. J. (2007). Suffering, selfish, slackers? Myths and reality about emerging adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *36*, 23-29.

- Arnett, J. J. (2007). Socialization in emerging adulthood: From the family to the wider world, from socialization to self-socialization. In J. Grusec & P. Hastings (Eds.), *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research* (208-230), New York: The Guilford Press.
- Arnett, J. J. & Ramos, K. & Jensen, L. (2001). Ideological views in emerging adulthood: Balancing autonomy and community. *Journal of Adult Development*, 8(2), 69-79.
- Avery, R.R. & Ryan, R. M. (1988). Object relations and ego development: Comparisons and correlates in middle childhood. *Journal of Personality*, 56(3), 547-569.
- Benjamin, J. (1988). *The bonds of love*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Benjamin, J. (1990). Recognition and destruction: An outline of intersubjectivity. In S. Mitchell & L. Aron (Eds.), *Relational psychoanalysis: The emergence of a tradition* (181-210), New York: The Analytic Press.
- Bergman, A. & Hapaz-Rotem, Ilan. (2004). Revisiting rapprochement in the light of contemporary developmental theories. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52(2), 555-571.
- Beyers, W., Goossens, L., Van Calster, B. & Duriez, B. (2005). An alternative substantive factor structure of the Emotional Autonomy Scale. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 21(3), 147-155.
- Blaine, G. & Farnsworth, D. (1991). Personality development in the young adult. In S. Greenspan & G. Pollack (Eds.), *The course of life: Volume IV: Adolescence* (435-451). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Blatt, S. J. & Lerner, H. (1983). The psychological assessment of object representation. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 47(1), 7-28.
- Bloom, M. V. (1980). *Adolescent-parental separation*. New York: Gardner Press, Inc.
- Blos, P. (1979). *The adolescent passage*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Blos, P. (1962). *On adolescence*. New York: The Free Press.
- Blum, H. (2004). Separation-individuation theory and attachment theory. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52(2), 535-554.
- Bolker, J. (1998). *Writing your dissertation in fifteen minutes a day*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

- Brandt, D. (1977). Separation and identity in adolescence—Erikson and Mahler—Some similarities. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 13, 507-519.
- Bynner, J. (2005). Rethinking the youth phase of the life-course: The case for emerging adulthood? *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(4), 367-384.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp 509-535). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Chodorow, N. (1999). Toward a relational individualism: The mediation of self through psychoanalysis. In S. Mitchell and L. Aron (Eds.), *Relational psychoanalysis: The emergence of a tradition* (109-130). New York: The Analytic Press.
- Cohler, B. & Freeman, M. (1993). Psychoanalysis and the developmental narrative. In G. Pollack & S. Greenspan (Eds.) *The course of life: Volume V: Early adulthood* (99-157). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Colarusso, C. A. (1990). The third individuation: The effect of biological parenthood on separation-individuation processes in adulthood. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 45, 179-194.
- Colarusso, C. A. (1995). Traversing young adulthood: The male journey from 20 to 40. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 15(1), 75-92.
- Colarusso, C. A. (2000). Separation-individuation phenomena in adulthood: General concepts and the fifth individuation. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 48(4), 1467-1490.
- Colarusso, C. A. & Nemiroff, R.A. (1979). Some observations and hypotheses about the psychoanalytic theory of adult development. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 60, 59-72.
- Côté, J. (2000). *Arrested adulthood*. New York: New York University.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Edward, J., Ruskin, N. & Turrini, P. (1981). *Separation-individuation*. New York: Gardner Press, Inc.

- Emde, R. N. (1985). From adolescence to midlife: Remodeling the structure of adult development. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 33S, 59-103.
- Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle: A reissue*. New York: W.W.Norton Company, Inc. (Original work published 1959)
- Freud, S. (1957). Thoughts for the times on war and death. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Frie, R. & Reis, B. (2001). Understanding intersubjectivity: Psychoanalytic formulations and their philosophical underpinnings. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 37(2), 297-328.
- Gabbard, G. (1994). *Psychodynamic psychiatry in clinical practice*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, Inc.
- Galatzer-Levy, R.M., & Cohler, B.J. (1993). *The essential other*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geleerd, E. (1961). Some aspects of ego vicissitudes in adolescence. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 9, 394-406.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gould, R. (1993). Transformational tasks in adulthood. In G. Pollock & S. Greenspan (Eds.), *The course of life: Volume VI: Late adulthood* (23-68). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Hauser, S. & Greene, W. (1991). Passages from late adolescence to early adulthood. In S. Greenspan & G. Pollock (Eds.), *The course of life: Volume IV: Adolescence* (377-405). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Hendin, H. & Gaylin, W. & Carr, A. (1965). *Psychoanalysis and social research*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books.
- Isay, R. (1991). The second separation stage of adolescence. In S. Greenspan & G. Pollock (Eds.), *The course of life: Volume IV: Adolescence* (453-467). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Kaplan, L. (1978). *Oneness and separateness: From infant to individual*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Kenny, M. & Sirin, S. (2006). Parental attachment, self-worth, and depressive symptoms among emerging adults. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84, 61-71.
- Lear, J. (1990). *Love and its place in nature*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Levy, K. N., Shaver, P. R. & Blatt, S. J. (1998). Attachment styles and parental representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(2), 407-419.
- Lincoln, Y.S. (1990). The making of a constructivist: A remembrance of transformations past. In E.G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialogue* (67-87). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mahler, M. & Pine, F. & Bergman A. (1975). *The psychological birth of the human infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mann, C. H. (1985). Adult development-individuation, separation and the role of reality. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 21, 284-296.
- Michels, R. (1993). Adulthood. In G. Pollock & S. Greenspan (Eds.), *The course of life: Volume V: Early Adulthood* (1-14). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Mitchell, S. & Black, M. (1995). *Freud and beyond*. New York: Basic Books.
- Moore, D. (1987). Parent-adolescent separation: The construction of adulthood by late adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 23(2), 298-307.
- Nemiroff, R. A. & Colarusso, C. (1980). Authenticity and narcissism in the adult development of the self. *Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 8, 111-120.
- Pine, F. (2004). Mahler's concepts of "symbiosis" and separation-individuation: Revisited, reevaluated, refined. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52(2), 511-534.
- Robbins, A. & Wilner, A. (2001). *Quarterlife crisis: The unique challenges of life in your twenties*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.
- Ryan, R.M. & Lynch, J.H. (1989). Emotional autonomy versus attachment: Revisiting the vicissitudes of adolescence and young adulthood. *Child Development*, 60, 340-356.

- Settlage, C.F. (1990). Childhood to adulthood: Structural change in development toward independence and autonomy. In R. Nemiroff & C. Colarusso (Eds.), *New dimensions in adult development* (26-46). New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Sharpe, S. (1990). The oppositional couple: A developmental object relations approach to diagnosis and treatment. In R. Nemiroff & C. Colarusso (Eds.), *New dimensions in adult development* (386-415). New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Staples, H. & Smarr, E. (1991). Bridge to adulthood: The years from eighteen to twenty-three. In S. Greenspan & G. Pollack (Eds.), *Course of life: Volume IV: Adolescence* (407-434). Washington DC: U.S. Government Office of Printing.
- Steinberg, L. & Silverberg, S. (1986). The vicissitudes of autonomy in early adolescence. *Child Development*, 57, 841-851.
- Stern, D. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology*. United States of America: Basic Books, Inc.
- Stern, D. (2008). The clinical relevance of infancy: A progress report. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 29(3), 177-188.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- White, K. M., Speisman, J.C. & Costos, D. (1983). Young adults and their parents: Individuation to mutuality. *New Directions for Child Development*, 22, 61-76.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc.