THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUATION PROCESSES IN THE LAUNCHING OF
CHILDREN INTO ADULTHOOD

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Denton, Texas
August, 1999

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which levels of individuation and separation in adulthood would predict adjustment to the empty nest transition. Two-hundred and twenty-seven adults (M age = 48) who had experienced the empty nest within the last year completed a battery of scales assessing individuation from family of origin, spouse, and children as well as measures of adjustment, role strain, coping, and sex role attitudes. MANOVAS and hierarchical regression analyses suggested that levels of individuation from one’s family of origin, spouse, and children differentially affect one’s adjustment to, and coping with, the experience of launching of the youngest child from the home. Empty nest parents who are less differentiated from their own parents, from their spouses, and from their children reported a more negative impact of the empty nest in terms of more overall stress and role strain, more negative mood, and less life satisfaction than did empty nest parents who were more differentiated with regard to parents, spouse, and children. Results regarding the impact of individuation on empty nest adjustment regarding sex role attitudes were less clear cut, and may reflect cohort differences in work role opportunities for women and a parallel redefinition of the work role/parent role dichotomy for men. The data also suggest that women and men experience the empty nest transition differently, with women experiencing more distress and negative mood, supporting the notion that women, who
define themselves in a context of relationship may experience more distress at a time when significant relationships are in flux. However, additional results which indicated significantly more proactive and adaptive coping strategies for women as compared to men suggest that women can meet the demands of the new definitions of themselves and their relationships in a relatively positive and adaptive way. The results suggest that present as well as past experiences of separation and individuation impact how one experiences and copes with the empty nest. The findings lend support to the importance of early, successful individuation experiences as possible precursors of how successfully individuals negotiate other developmental experiences involving separation and loss.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One area of research that has received considerable attention by researchers in the field of psychology is the role of separation and individuation processes in human development and psychological adjustment. Although separation and individuation processes have been conceptualized by theoreticians and researchers from a wide range of theoretical perspectives, the basic premise suggests that an important developmental task for every individual is to progress from a dependent being into an independent person. According to Mahler (1963), separation and individuation processes involve the ability of an infant to act independently of the mother and to cognitively view himself or herself as a separate person. Josselsen (1980) has defined the experience of individuation as a "sharpened sense of one's distinctness from others, a heightening of boundaries, and a feeling of selfhood and will" (p. 191). As such, separation and individuation theory has provided a powerful theoretical framework in which to view the process and development of an individual's identity and the formulation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. While the initial research focused on separation and individuation processes from the mother during infancy and early childhood, a second thrust of research has concentrated on the separation and individuation processes that occur during the period of identity formulation in late adolescence. More recent theorists have begun to conceptualize separation and individuation processes across the life span;
however, little is known about the role and importance of the separation and
individuation processes in adulthood. Theoreticians who view separation and
individuation processes from a life span perspective hypothesize that life transitions that
involve renegotiations of an attachment or a loss of a relationship will raise similar issues
experienced in infancy and early childhood. The purpose of this study is to investigate
separation-individuation processes in adults during a specific life event that involves both
a renegotiation and loss of an attachment relationship, the launching of children from the
parental home.

Separation and Individuation Theory

Considerable attention has been devoted by theoreticians and researchers from
various theoretical perspectives, including psychodynamic, family, and life cycle systems
which has resulted in the conceptualization of separation and individuation processes in
several different ways. The traditional psychoanalytic perspective proposed by Mahler
(1963; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975) focused on the separation and individuation
processes from the mother during infancy and early childhood. Mahler suggested that an
infant not only becomes more behaviorally independent but undergoes a “psychological
birth” in which the infant progresses psychologically from a relatively undifferentiated
sense of self and other, to a more differentiated and sufficient representation of both the
self and important others. This final stage results in the foundation of the child’s growing
independence, the consolidation of a separate identity, and the capacity to relate to others
and the world in an adaptive manner. Thus, as the child comes to internalize the parent’s
provisions of security, the child becomes more separate as a psychological entity and is
able to tolerate more interpersonal separation. According to Mahler, separation and
individuation are viewed as two complementary processes that are intertwined but not identical. Although Mahler emphasized that the separation-individuation process is never finished in that it "reverberates throughout the life cycle," she placed the principal psychological achievements of this process within the period from about the fourth or fifth month to the thirtieth or thirty-sixth month.

The work of Peter Blos (1979) extended the ideas concerning the separation-individuation process in infants to the period of adolescence. Blos proposed in adolescence, a "second individuation" occurs which is similar to the "first individuation" described by Mahler. According to Blos, the purpose of adolescent separation and individuation is to achieve separateness from the internalized parental objects conceived in infancy and to reformulate a sense of self. In order to become psychologically independent, the task of the adolescent is to disengage themselves from both internal and external influences of parents, shed dependencies, de-idealize parents, and reformulate a psychologically separate sense of self.

In contrast to Blos' conceptualization of the second individuation as a process involving the "shedding of family dependencies" which emphasizes the need of the adolescent to disengage from family ties, recent research in developmental psychology suggests that both connectedness to family and individuation are important to healthy psychological development during the adolescent years. For example, Grotevant and his colleagues (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985) proposed a relational model which emphasizes the significance of the family context, in particular, communications between parents and adolescents that contain both qualities of individuality and connectedness, as a significant contributor in promoting the adolescent's
identity exploration and role-taking skills. In addition, relational theorists (Gilligan, 1982, 1990) have suggested that women construe the world differently from men, and thus experience the parent-adolescent separation process differently from men. Gilligan argues that young women do not dichotomize separation and connection. Rather, separation and connection are seen as coexisting with one another. According to Gilligan, since women hold a conception of the self that is in relation to others, even separation and individuation occur within a context of relationship. Thus, separation is not in opposition to connection but involves a redefined ability to respond to and to connect to the other. Furthermore, individuation involves the renegotiation and reframing of relationships due to an increased awareness and consideration of others. Similarly, Josselson (1988) states, "Separation-individuation implies continued, renewed, often strengthened, but revised connectedness. A more clearly delineated sense of self makes new forms of relatedness possible" (p. 98). According to Josselson, individuation requires a reworking of family relationships so that the independence of the adolescent occurs within the context of close familial ties.

Another psychodynamically oriented theoretical model on identity development is contained in Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory of human development. According to Erikson he proposed eight hierarchically arranged life stages which follow both biological and social forces. Each stage consists of developmental tasks which must be mastered as well as a "psychosocial crisis" or a tension experienced as a result of the new demands of the social environment in the new stage of development. In the Eriksonian model, individuation or identity formulation is the primary developmental task of adolescence that includes autonomy from parents, sex-role identity, internalized morality.
and career choice. A failure to formulate an identity successfully results in identity confusion, characterized by an inability to commit to a single view of oneself. Identity confusion influences the individual's capabilities to master subsequent demands for commitment within intimate relationships as well as occupational choices. Based on Erikson’s theory of adolescent development, Marcia (1966) described four distinct styles of coping with the psychosocial task of establishing a sense of identity including identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity-diffused. Persons identified as identity-achieved are described as having undergone a crisis period and emerged committed to an occupation and an identity; individuals in the moratorium status are currently in a crisis period and are actively struggling to make commitments. Persons in a foreclosure status have avoided the experience of crisis by prematurely and uncritically committing to goals and values held by significant others; and identity-diffused persons have neither entered a crisis period nor made significant commitments. Marcia's (1966) contributions enabled Erikson's concept of identity formation to be operationalized, tested, and refined.

Family systems theorists also conceptualize the individuation process as a central construct on an individual as well as familial level. According to Bowen (1978), the individuation process is an essential developmental task where an individual builds a separate emotional identity in adolescence and early adulthood in order to develop the capacity for intimacy within a new family structure. Moreover, each family system may also be described as possessing a level of differentiation ranging on a continuum from poorly differentiated to well differentiated. A poorly differentiated individual and family are thought to regulate interpersonal interactions in such a way as to block psychological
separation and autonomy of family members, what Bowen refers to as an "undifferentiated ego mass." In this family system, family members are highly reactive to each other, with boundaries between self and other being blurred or fused. Well-differentiated individuals and family systems are characterized by emotional connectedness, yet also allowing for individual separateness. In this family system, family members function as part of a group while maintaining individual identity. As a result, well-differentiated families offer an environment that encourages and facilitates adaptability for coping with life stresses and events.

Separation and individuation theory has also been used and extended to describe a developmental process in adulthood. Colarusso (1990) defines the "third individuation" as a continuous process of elaboration and differentiation of the self that occurs in early (20 to 40 years) and middle (40-60 years) adulthood. Colarusso maintains that the third individuation, although similar to the first and second individualizations in that it has as its core the parent-child relationship, is inherently more complex, because it involves relationships with children, spouses, and aging parents.

A basic assumption underlying the extension of separation-individuation theory to adolescents and adults is that difficulties with the separation process in the early years may not only affect later adjustment but create a greater difficulty in coping with life events that involve separation. The implication is that the child with early separation difficulties will experience separation events as more difficult and will have fewer emotional resources to cope with these separations. In contrast, the child with a solid sense of self and other will perceive separation events as less threatening such that later adjustments will be easier.
Separation-individuation Theory as applied to Adolescence

Based on the theoretical assumption that a satisfactory separation and individuation process in late adolescence suggests positive adjustment and adaptation, researchers have employed various measures of separation and individuation in order to understand empirically the relationship between adolescent separation from parents and personal adjustment in love and work, vocational identity and career decision making.

Much of the literature has defined adjustment for late adolescence as to how well the adolescent adjusts to the college environment. First, Hoffman (1984) developed the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI) which assessed four dimensions of parent-late adolescence independence or psychological separation: emotional independence, functional independence, attitudinal independence, and conflictual independence.

Hoffman found that greater conflictual independence (that is the absence of guilt, anger, and resentment in the parent-adolescent relationship) was related to better adjustment for females, and less problematic love relationships for both males and females. In addition, greater emotional independence from both parents was found to be related to less academic problems for both males and females. Finally, greater attitudinal independence from both parents (the degree to which the parents' and adolescent's attitudes, values, and beliefs are distinct) was found to be negatively correlated with personal adjustment for both males and females.

Using the Psychological Separation Inventory, Lapsley, Rice, and Shadid (1989) among samples of college freshmen and upperclassmen, freshmen reported more functional and attitudinal dependencies on both parents and more emotional dependencies on mothers than did upperclassmen. Lapsley, Rice, and Shadid (1989) also reported
similar findings to Hoffman that separation and adjustment were related, although separation did not predict adjustment across the board. Among both age groups, higher levels of functional and emotional independence from mother were positively associated with personal-emotional adjustment. However, only among the upperclassmen sample were emotional and conflictual independence from mother and conflictual independence from father positively associated with academic adjustment. Important sex effects emerged which indicated that women showed more functional, emotional and attitudinal dependencies on mother and emotional dependency on father than did men; however, there were no sex-related patterns of college maladjustment which suggests that these dependencies did not represent poorer adjustment in females. These results are consistent with previous findings by Frank, Avery, and Laman (1988) who found that young adult women were more emotionally connected to both their parents than were young adult men. Lapsley, Rice, and Shadid argue that these sex differences lend support to the relational theories proposed by Gilligan (1982) and Josselson (1988) which hypothesize that women may define themselves in a context of relationship, and therefore themes of attachment and connectedness may be more representative of female development than issues of autonomy, separation, and individuation. Women may be more sensitive to relational issues and consequently, report more information and concern over relationships with parents than do males.

In a recent study, Kenny (1993, August) combined both measures of attachment and separation-individuation and found that close parental attachments appear to be most adaptive for the entering college student when combined with parental figures which support individuation. Specifically, college women who described themselves as
securely attached, present conflictual independence (absence of guilt, anger, and resentment in their parental relationships, but still possessing attitudes somewhat similar to their parents) are also likely to describe themselves as adjusting well academically and personally to college. Family anxiety surrounding separation, in conjunction with parental marital conflict, was associated with psychological symptoms for first-year college women.

Conflicting results concerning the relationship between separation and adjustment using the Psychological Separation Inventory were obtained in a study by Lopez et al. (1986) who reported that functional, emotional, and attitudinal independence were negatively correlated with college adjustment in women, while male college adjustment was negatively related to conflictual independence. Male undergraduate students were significantly more independent of their parents than were female undergraduates and that those women in their study who were more independent than other women were less likely to be depressed. These findings, however, must be viewed with caution due to a small sample size and thus may not accurately reflect the relationship between separation and adjustment.

Moore (1987) hypothesized that the way in which adolescents construct the meaning and experience of leaving home may influence the way in which their actual experience of the separation will be assimilated into their self-conceptions and their renegotiated relationships with parents. Employing adolescents' ratings of both the importance of separation and their attainment of those components, the results suggest that the way in which late adolescents define and achieve separation is associated with their psychological well-being and with their perceived relationships with their mother.
and father. Specifically, late adolescents who viewed separation as self-governance appeared to be advantaged over those who did not construe separation as self-governance. Moreover, late adolescents who construed separation as emotional detachment from parents and whom appeared to be at a disadvantage compared with late adolescents who did not construe separation as emotional detachment. Results from this study also suggested that late adolescent males and females have different experiences with regard to parent-adolescent separation. Late adolescents, particularly adolescent males, who viewed separation as emotional detachment appear to be unsuccessful in maintaining positive family ties during the separation process, especially with regard to the mother. Males, but not females, who rated emotional detachment as more important relative to their peers reported greater loneliness, lower self-esteem, lower ego-identity achievement, and greater difficulty leaving home. Sex differences were also found for the component identified as disengagement, defined as a movement (psychologically and physically) away from parents. For females only, disengagement was viewed as an important component of separation. For males, the importance of disengagement was associated with feeling abandoned by the mother when disengagement was viewed as an important component. Finally, sex differences were also apparent when separation involved getting married and starting a family. Females who emphasized starting a family as an important component of the separation process felt less abandoned by their fathers. For males, ratings of the attainment of starting a family that were associated with feeling abandoned by parents and of abandoning parents when starting a family were rated a relatively unimportant component of separation. This investigation underscored the differential experiences of the separation and individuation process in adolescence.
and suggests that women may have more of an ability to maintain positive parental ties while renegotiating their adult relationship with parents.

In another study, Allen and Stoltenberg (1995) used relational theory to investigate gender differences in the separation process of late adolescents. Employing a relational perspective of female development that emphasizes a sense of self organized around making and maintaining affiliation and relationships, rather than separation as a developmental goal, Allen and Stoltenberg (1995) hypothesized that late adolescent women would form significantly more types of social support, be more satisfied with its quality, and would view the family as more cohesive and more socially desirable than men. In addition, because differentiation is emphasized less for women, women would exhibit more difficulties and disturbances in their ability to differentiate self from others. The results of this study indicate that while neither men nor women exhibited disturbances in the separation from parents, women reported more social support and satisfaction with its quality and viewed the family as more cohesive and interpersonally supportive than men. These results underscore the importance of need to consider differences between men and women in their views and experiences in the separation-individuation process during early adulthood.

In conclusion, empirical research that has attempted to examine the relationship between separation and adjustment in late adolescence lends some tentative support to the notion that the separation and individuation construct is a useful tool in the understanding of personal adjustment. Differing results may have occurred because of methodological problems such as small sample size. Nonetheless, the results from these studies are consistent with recent theory that both connectedness as well as individuation is
important to healthy psychological development (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1988). Furthermore, findings of sex differences lend some support to the theory that the process of separation and individuation may be fundamentally different for males and females (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1988).

Separation/Individuation, Family Systems and Adjustment in Adolescence

Five studies have used family systems theory to examine the role of the family in the separation process and adjustment. First, based on family systems theory, Fleming and Anderson (1986) found that adolescents who perceived themselves as being more fused or triangulated within their families were more likely to experience poorer college adjustment, lower self-esteem and sense of mastery, a greater number of health-related problems, and lower grades than more emotionally independent peers. Fleming and Anderson suggest that their results support a basic theoretical idea of intergenerational-family systems theory that an individual's dysfunction arises from the degree of individuation or unresolved attachment to the family of origin. Another study by Rice, Cole, and Lapsley (1990) also examined the relation between adolescent separation-individuation, family cohesion, and college adjustment. Using factor analysis and structural equation modeling, they found that the process of gaining independence from parents was negatively correlated to family cohesion and unrelated to successful adjustment to college; however, the affective response to separation was unrelated to family cohesion yet strongly related to college adjustment. In this study, then, positive feelings about separation were a more important predictor of adjustment. While the findings concerning the role and importance of the family structure in the separation
process for adolescents are mixed from the findings of Fleming and Anderson (1986) and Rice, Cole, and Lapsley (1990), both studies indicate that perceptions adolescents hold concerning their family interactions and their affective responses toward separation are important predictors of future adjustment.

Hoffman and Weiss (1987) examined psychological separation from parents, parental conflict and dominance, and parental symptoms and their relation to the common presenting problems of college students. A direct relation was found between degree of interpersonal conflict in the family and intrapersonal distress among family members as reported by the student. Results from the study indicated the greater the conflictual dependence of the student on either or both parents, the more emotional problems the student reported, both for him- or herself as well as for the parents. In addition, when comparing men and women, women appeared more sensitive than men to any conflict with their parents and experienced higher levels of distress than men. Students' problems were correlated with both parent's problems but only when the student was emotionally dependent on the other-sex parent. For example, the investigators found that only when men were more emotionally dependent on their mother than on their father, their presenting problems were significantly correlated with both parents' symptoms. Conversely, only when women were more emotionally dependent on their father than on their mother did their presenting problems correlate with parent symptoms. The authors hypothesize that it may be that men who are more emotionally dependent on their mothers have greater difficulty than those dependent on their fathers separating from their family and if there are family problems or conflicts, these men are more likely to be enmeshed in them. Similarly, the female adolescent who is more highly attached to her
father than her mother may also have greater difficulty disengaging from family distress when it exists. These findings underscore the importance in considering family dynamics in understanding the separation and individuation process during adolescence and in examining gender differences in the parent-child dyadic interaction.

A study by Lopez, Campbell, and Watkins (1988) employed canonical correlation to investigate the relationships among measures of family structure, college adjustment, and separation as measured by the Psychological Separation Inventory. The results supported basic assumptions of structural family theory and suggested that psychological separation of college men and women are differentially affected by inappropriate family structure. Lopez, Campbell and Watkins found that in families exhibiting high levels of marital conflict and other dysfunctional family interactions (i.e. parent-child role reversals, coalitions), males showed angry-rebellious relationships with parents, whereas females exhibited angry-dependent relationships with parents. Secondly, families in which high levels of marital conflict occurred within an otherwise sound and well-differentiated structure were associated with higher psychological separation scores for both men and women. In conclusion, their results suggest a relationship between families which contain marital distress or inappropriate family structure and conflicted, distant relationships with parents among men and with conflicted and more dependent parent-child relationships among women.

In another study, Allen, Stoltenberg and Rosko (1990) studied the impact of divorce on the process of adolescent psychological separation from their parents. It was hypothesized that freshmen undergraduates from divorced families would be: (1) more differentiated from their family than the intact group as evidenced by a view of
themselves as being more separated on a cohesiveness/separateness continuum and their families as less socially desirable (2) equal to freshmen undergraduates from intact families in motivation and energy for school (3) a more heightened sense of self-esteem than the intact group resulting in taking increased responsibility for good things happening in their lives and (4) a more cohesive self-picture than the intact group as evidenced by commitment to age-appropriate goals and a more adequate sense of self. Although adolescents from divorced families appear to be more separated from their families than those from intact families, the evidence suggests that older adolescents from divorced families tend to adjust to this situation in a manner that does not limit their academic adjustment and functioning, self-esteem, or sense of adequacy. No support was found for the hypothesis that adolescents from divorced families would have a more cohesive self-picture as evidenced by commitment to age-appropriate goals. These findings should be taken cautiously because of the idiosyncratic operational definitions and measurement of such abstract constructs as self-esteem and "cohesive self-picture." Nevertheless, this study emphasizes the importance and impact of familial and environmental context in the understanding of the process of separation and individuation within adolescence. In addition, these findings suggest a bi-directionality between parent and child in the separation and individuation process.

Separation, Individuation and Career Development in Adolescence

In addition to the application of separation and individuation theory to adjustment in late adolescence, constructs of separation and individuation theory have been employed to examine empirically the relation between psychological separation and the
career development process. Separation and individuation theory has been used to study the career development process based on the assumption that the primary developmental task of late adolescence, separation and individuation, occurs simultaneously with the implementation of career decisions. Moreover, it has been suggested that career decision making may be a part of the larger developmental process during adolescence of separating from parents (Bloom, 1987). Lopez (1989) examined the contributions of family interactions to the attainment of a clear vocational identity. In his study, the most prominent predictors of vocational identity for men were conflictual independence from mother, an absence of marital conflict, and to a lesser degree, conflictual independence from father. In contrast, for women, only conflictual independence from the father was a prominent predictor of vocational identity. Moreover, emotional independence was not a prominent predictor of vocational identity for either men or women.

In a related study, Blustein (1988) found that autonomy was related to holding positive beliefs about exploration of career decision making. However, in contrast to these relatively positive findings, a subsequent study by Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, and Palladino (1991) exploring the relations between psychological separation (using the Psychological Separation Inventory) and measures of career indecision and career decision-making self-efficacy found no significant canonical relations among their sample. In a second study, however, Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, and Palladino (1991) employed both measures of separation and attachment to study the relation to level of vocational exploration commitment and the student's tendency to foreclose (the tendency to hold a closed and subjective approach to career exploration, one which is intolerant of the ambiguity inherent in the process). The data revealed a significant
relation between the conjoint influence of both separation and attachment variables and
the career decision process, but a significant correlation was not found for the
independent measures of separation and attachment. Blustein et al. concluded that the
process of vocational commitment appears to occur with individuals who experience both
independence from and attachment to their parents. This study, in conjunction with the
more integrative approach taken by recent theorists, underscores the complexity in
understanding the separation-individuation processes in adolescence and perhaps all
human development as well.

Separation and Individuation Processes in Adulthood

The role of adults in a separation and individuation process has been viewed from
the parent perspective in terms of how the adult's relationship with his or her child or in
what way the overall family functioning influences or affects the child's ability to
separate and individuate. Essentially no empirical research has been conducted on the
potential separation and individuation process during mid-life, primarily since it was only
until recently that the separation and individuation process was conceptualized as a
developmental task not only of infants and adolescents but for adults as well (Combrinck-
Graham, 1985). With regard to adulthood, Baltes and Silverberg (1993) observed that
such concepts like independence and autonomy are rarely used when referring to normal
developmental psychology of adulthood. They suggest that most traditional
developmental researchers do not believe that these developmental issues are
developmental issues for the adult; it is assumed that these developmental issues have
been left behind, outgrown, or adapted to as such. For instance, in Erikson's (1963)
model, the developmental task of identity formulation is assigned to adolescence,
followed by the establishment of intimate relationships in young adulthood. For the middle-aged adult, it is assumed that these developmental tasks have been completed, and the adult moves away from a focus on self to larger concerns for society and future generations. Implied in traditional developmental theories is that adulthood consists of stabilization, not growth. Baltes and Silverberg (1991) argue, however, that the “dialectic dynamism between autonomy, affiliation, and generativity is played out in adulthood, too” (p. 64). They maintain that in adulthood, the need for autonomy an individuation coexists with the need for communion and interpersonal connectedness that they subsume under the construct of “interdependence.”

La Sorsa and Fodor (1990) have argued that much of the separation and individuation literature has focused on the adolescent, while ignoring the fact that many mothers themselves may be confronting their own developmental issues at this time. Based on interviews of mother-daughter dyads, La Sorsa and Fodor suggest that both the mother and daughter may experience a crisis of separation and self-definition. In accordance with recent theories of female development, the authors maintain that separation and individuation processes may be more difficult between mothers and daughters since adolescent daughters must identify with the same person from whom they must separate. According to the authors, several similarities between adolescents and mid-life mothers exist: both are facing the challenges of separation, autonomy, and loss; both are experiencing physical, psychological, and social changes; both mother and daughter are facing new options, decision-making, and risk-taking involved in deciding what to do with the rest of their lives; and both may be beginning university studies. One must view these theories cautiously in that generalizability to other cohort, socio-
economic, and age groups may be limited. Nonetheless, La Sorsa and Fodor (1990) hypothesize that the fact that the adolescent daughter and the mid-life mother are confronting these issues simultaneously may complicate the mother’s ability to cope with an adolescent daughter while dealing with their own issues.

Sullivan and Sullivan (1979) conducted one of the first studies to focus on the interactional nature of the separation-individuation process and to investigate not only the changes within the adolescent but also within the parents as well. In their study two groups of parents and adolescent sons were assessed during high school and again after they began college. One group consisted of adolescents who were to leave home to board at college. The second group of adolescents was to remain at home and commute to college. Results indicated that separation results in changes in the attachment relationships of adolescents and parents. Adolescent males who left home reported an increase in affection, communication, and satisfaction in relation to their parents. They also reported increased independence. These results suggest that leaving home may facilitate the process of becoming functionally independent of his parents while strengthening emotional ties to them. The effect of separation was also positive for mothers, in that they showed an increase in affection without an increase in dependence. However, separation was somewhat problematic for fathers whose sons were over 200 miles away in that they had more difficulty perceiving their sons as independent after separation than before. The findings of Sullivan and Sullivan (1979) are significant because of the positive findings of intergenerational effects of separation on all members of the adolescent-mother-father triad, suggesting that separation is a reciprocal process. This study constitutes one of the first studies of separation and individuation processes
that empirically demonstrated the importance of conceptualizing the separation/individuation construct as a part of a developing relational system throughout the life span. In addition to advocating a life-span approach to the study of separation and individuation processes, Sullivan and Sullivan’s (1979) research is unique in investigating separation and individuation processes from a life event specific perspective which included and valued the experiences of the parents in this life transition. Furthermore, they provided empirical data for gender differences in separation and individuation processes during the experience of launching children into adulthood.

An additional pioneering study by Bartle and Anderson (1992) examined the relationship between parent's level of individuation from their parents and adolescent's level of individuation in both parent-adolescent dyads and randomly selected unrelated parent-adolescent dyads. According to the correlational analysis, significant correlations were found only in the mother-adolescent dyad. Specifically, the more mothers were individuated from both parents, the more their adolescents were individuated from both parents. Unfortunately, however, this study did not consider whether there were any sex differences between a mother-daughter dyad and a mother-son dyad. In addition, only the mother's individuation from her mother was significantly related to the level of individuation in the adolescent. The mother's individuation from her father was no more similar to her adolescent's individuation than it was in a group of unrelated mother-adolescent dyads. Bartle and Anderson concluded that the adolescent individuation from both parents appeared to be more related to the mother's individuation from her mother than from her father, and not at all related to the father's individuation from either parent.
In summary, the primary construct for separation-individuation theory is the concept of identity. According to separation and individuation theory, identity or individuation in infancy is achieved by the infant's development from a relatively undifferentiated sense of self and other (the mother) to a more differentiated and autonomous representation of the self. Secondly, central to separation and individuation theory is an emphasis in the processes of separation. The cornerstone of separation and individuation theory centers on the developmental processes of an infant in obtaining an autonomous self who is separate and distinct from the mother. The separation-individuation theory maintains that as the child becomes more separate as a psychological entity, he or she is able to tolerate more interpersonal separation. As a result, the consolidation of a differentiated self will lead to better and more successful interactions and explorations of the environment. For example, an infant who has negotiated a successful separation from the mother will be more likely explore the environment more confidently and successfully. Implied in the theory is that in times of distress, levels of separation and individuation may serve as important determinants in terms of how successful an individual copes with distress. More recent research has suggested that both connected and individuation is instrumental for adaptive and healthy development. Although it is unclear at this point in time in terms of the specific processes and interaction between attachment and individuation, separation-individuation theory, nonetheless, serves as a useful tool in understanding how an individual functions and copes in the world.

While Mahler viewed these processes as occurring at critical and predictable stages in infancy, she also acknowledged that these are powerful and significant
processes that occur throughout the life cycle. Subsequently, researchers have extended the construct of separation-individuation to the period of transition from adolescence to young adulthood based on the assumption that similar developmental tasks that are of primary importance in infancy re-surface during late adolescence. For example, the process of achieving both physical and emotional separateness from parents during late adolescence parallels the dynamics of the "first individuation" described by Mahler. Theorists have linked the process of leaving home in adolescence to the exploration of the environment in infancy. Researchers in the area of separation and individuation initially hypothesized that adolescents who achieved a greater amount of individuation (implying less attachment) from parents would show more healthy adjustment and coping to college and to career exploration. Recently, however, theorists have suggested that rather than viewing the individuation process of adolescents as a "shedding of family dependencies," the processes during adolescence involve a combination of individuation and connectedness (attachment) to parents, and both processes co-existing together promote healthy adjustment in intrapersonal as well as interpersonal relations and underscore the complexity of this fundamental developmental process.

Empirical research has examined the relationship between separation-individuation processes to interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustment. Specifically, separation-individuation researchers have investigated the relationship between attachment and/or separation-individuation and three main areas: (1) identity development and adjustment (2) college adjustment and (3) career exploration and vocational identity. Overall, results from the separation-individuation literature support the relationship between separation-individuation and identity development, college
adjustment, and career exploration. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the separation and individuation process may be differentially experienced by men and women, underscoring the importance of gender in the study of separation and individuation. Finally, research has also suggested that the family context in which the adolescent individual is embedded plays a significant role in these developmental processes and that individual behavior may be better understood when viewed within the dynamic context of one's family relationships.

While a large body of literature exists concerning theoretical extensions of separation-individuation processes from infancy to adolescence as well as empirical tests of the theories, little conceptualization and empirical research has been conducted on the separation and individuation processes in adulthood. This may be a consequence of the fact that traditional theories have considered a stage model approach to the issue of separation and individuation which views separation and individuation as a process which should be completed in young adulthood. Recent theorists (La Sorsa & Fodor, 1990; Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, 1989; Combrinck-Graham, 1985), however, have offered new conceptualizations which support the notion that developmental issues such as separation and individuation within parents co-exist with similar developmental issues occurring within the adolescent child. Thus, separation and individuation may be a mutual process for adults and their adolescents when their adolescent children leave home and may have positive consequences for some adults and negative consequences for others.
Separation and Individuation from the Life-Span Perspective

Within the last two decades, theorists have begun to go beyond an age-specific approach to separation and individuation, to conceptualize the separation and individuation construct across the life span, and to speculate on the potential usefulness in viewing separation and individuation from a life-span perspective (Panel, 1973; Greene & Boxer, 1986; Baltes & Silverberg, 1993). According to Baltes (1987), life-span developmental psychology is the study of "constancy and change in behavior throughout the life course, from conception to death" (p. 611). Its goal is to understand interindividual differences and similarities of development as well as the degree and factors involving individual plasticity or change. A life-span perspective challenges traditional developmental theories which have conceptualized developmental change as primarily occurring in early, normative, sequential, and universal experiences in all individuals.

Original research on the separation and individuation processes within human development has typically focused on the individual child or adolescent. However, as Greene and Boxer (1986) point out, the transition to adulthood may be viewed as reciprocal transitions which although initiated by young adults during adolescence, affects parents and other family members as well. Thus, a critical dimension in the separation and individuation processes in late adolescent is the alteration in family relationships as a whole which have been produced by the transition.
Greene and Boxer (1986) maintain that most of the assumptions guiding both theoretical and research efforts by researchers of separation and individuation processes have been similar to those which have dominated traditional developmental theories in which separation and individuation is viewed primarily as a childhood or adolescent phenomenon. Hagestad (1981) has commented that "after voluminous research on early childhood and adolescence, we seem to drop the relationship and not pick it up again until the parent are old and the children are middle-aged" (p. 33). In contrast, a life-span perspective views human development, including the development of attachment relationships, as an ongoing, life-long process in which no one stage is most critical in producing developmental change.

According to Heatherington and Baltes (1988), "events and changes occurring after childhood and throughout the adult years have equally powerful effects on the direction and rate of human development" (p. 3). Thus, according to a life-span perspective, separation and individuation issues may be central throughout the life span of an individual, not just during infancy. From the life-span perspective, human development consists of changing levels of relationship between children and adults as children individuate self from other and as they delicately try to balance the need to be separate with the need to belong. Panel (1973) asserts that "the period of maturity and the process of aging are never free from separations and loss, which makes demands on the individual's capacity to adapt to these experiences...." (p. 638). From a life-span perspective, there is an emphasis on mutual, dialectical change within the context of a matrix of relationships which includes family, friends, spouses, community and culture.
Baltes and Silverberg (1993) propose that the constructs of dependency and independence be viewed in a dynamic relationship that plays itself out differently across the different phases of life, across different cultures, across different people, and across different domains within the same person. They suggest that the constructs of autonomy and dependency are complex, multidimensional, and interdependent on one another. Furthermore, the nature of dependency and autonomy transform over the life span and the balance between the two may shift. This balance between dependency and autonomy changes constantly with personal development, environmental contexts, across time, and change in cultural and societal values, expectations, and demands.

The separation and individuation processes described by Mahler (1963) also presents a conceptualization of infant-mother separation/individuation which assumes a universal, critical period of the individuation process. For example, the developmental task of separation and individuation is thought to take place within the critical period of development from about the fourth or fifth month to the thirtieth or thirty-sixth month. Consequently, much of the initial research has been restricted to this “critical period” of development. While there may be biological and maturational evidence that supports the existence of a “critical period” of separation and individuation, this does not imply that the task of “achieving” individuation is complete or preclude the possibility that development and maintenance of separation and individuation continue past this “critical period.” A related assumption is made by the traditional developmental approach to individuation concerning the notion of the progression of familial development in that the majority of the research on separation and individuation presents a universal and sequential picture of development of family unit as a whole. It is assumed that the child
develops within one nuclear family unit, becomes physically, emotionally, and financially independent from that unit, and forms a new family unit.

The original conceptualization of separation and individuation primarily has been unidirectional in that original research on individuation viewed this process solely from the infant's developmental perspective, without consideration of the interactional nature of the infant-mother relationship. Although the infant is limited in its biological ability to act on the environment, the significance of the dynamic processes involving interactions between parent and child which may influence separation and individuation increases as the social environment as well as biological capabilities of the child expand with increasing age of the child. In addition, coinciding with the developmental changes within the child, there exists potential concurrent separation issues for the mother which have been virtually ignored in the literature. Similarly, attachment, separation, and individuation issues for parents who are launching their child into adulthood have been overlooked by researchers who have focused primarily on the experiences of separation and individuation in the adolescent. Thus, the mother's individual context and own separation and individuation history and issues not only may have an impact on the separation and individuation process of her infant or adolescent but may be an important developmental issue for the mother in of itself.

From a life-span viewpoint, the separation and individuation construct as presented by Mahler (1963) conceptualizes the separation and individuation process within a narrow context. For instance, most of the research has focused on the infant-mother dyad, neglecting the existence of potential interactions between infant and father and even the more complex ecosystem of the infant-mother-father interactions. Levitt
(1991) suggests that mutual parent-child influence may vary in importance at various phases of the life cycle of both parents and children but is likely to remain in effect across the life span.

Little attention has been given by traditional researchers in human development to the importance of historical and socio-cultural influences on separation and individuation processes. From a life-span perspective, however, the differences in the experiences of various cohorts that result from their location in historical time are crucial in accounting for the variety of pathways by which individuals move through their lives. A life course approach focuses on the interaction of individual behavior with the behavior of the family unit as they change over time and in their relation to external historical conditions in order to depict more dynamically an individual in context. With regard to separation and individuation, many socio-cultural changes have occurred since the time of Mahler’s initial work appeared to alter the environmental context in which families raise their infant children. This environmental change, in turn, may have significant implications for the understanding and applicability of previous findings in today’s world. For example, the rise in the numbers of working mothers has resulted in the fact that many infants spend the day not with the mother but in some sort of daycare arrangement. In addition, the increase in the rate of divorce has changed the complexion of the “traditional” family so that now many families are run by a single parent, typically the mother. New types of attachment relationships have emerged as a result in the increase of divorce in the form of stepfamilies which requires new attachments and renegotiations of old attachments for not only the infant or child but for all the family members as well. Furthermore, divorce in of itself may bring about the necessity for individuation/separation. Because of
economic necessity, many adolescents are not able to leave home but are remaining or even returning after college to the parents' home, resulting in the need for the redefinition and renegotiation of attachment relationships between parents and child. The fact that individuals are able to live longer suggests that intergenerational relationships involving issues of attachment, autonomy and independence between aging parents and their children also reflect a dynamic process of change throughout the life span. According to a life-span perspective, these represent cohort effects or normative history-graded events that coincide with normative age graded events and should be measured as well. In conclusion, recent literature suggests that there are many potential benefits in the application of a life-span approach to the construct of separation and individuation by considering the ongoing, ever-evolving parent-child relationship as a process that occurs throughout the life span.

Separation and Individuation Processes and Intergenerational Relations

In keeping with the life span perspective of separation and individuation processes, an increasing body of research has investigated intergenerational relations and the maintenance of parent-child bonds over the life course. Hagestad (1981) states that each individual progresses through time and interacts with other family and generation members differently. These differences are based on individual lifetime, family lifetime, and cohort or historical time. With regard to the specific transition of an adolescent to adulthood, Greene and Boxer (1986) suggest that a child's transition to adulthood in some way differentially affects, for parents and their young adult children, both the perception and quality of the intergenerational relationship. From the intergenerational
perspective, then, the task of young adulthood is not the achievement of familial autonomy, but rather familial interdependence, a state of differentiation rather than separation, in which the maintenance of parental bonds and independent functioning are dual goals. Greene and Boxer (1986) propose that the task of young adulthood is reciprocally defined for parents and children as involving "a renegotiation of the interdependencies that bond and bind them" (p. 138). Furthermore, renegotiations and coping with transitions within the family system will vary in consequence of the child's sex, intergenerational position, and life cycle position of the parents themselves. The advantage of including this perspective in the conceptualization of the separation and individuation processes throughout the life span is the focus of the interactive, reciprocal nature of family relationships, transitions, and interactions across time.

Most of the intergenerational relations research has focused on similarities and differences across the generations, the changing social context of intergenerational bonds, and the nature of intergenerational ties (Troll & Bengtson, 1982). In a review of the intergenerational transmission literature, Troll and Bengtson (1982) reported several findings that are related to the topic of separation/individuation from a life span/life event perspective. First, Troll and Bengtson (1982) reported that there is substantial but selective intergenerational continuity within the family. Parent-similarity is most noticeable in religious and political areas, least in sex roles, life style, and work orientation. However, more recent research has provided some support to the intergenerational transmission of depressed mood and coping styles. For example, research by Whitbeck et al. (1992), who, using structural equation modeling to examine the intergenerational continuity of depressed mood and rejecting parenting, found a
cyclical transmission process by which parents' personality traits affect parent-child interaction, which, in turn, increases the propensity for developmental problems among offspring. In addition, the results indicated a pattern of intergenerational transmission of depressed mood through parental rejection of offspring. Another study by Hoffman and Levy-Shiff (1994) found a strong similarity between adolescents' coping profiles and those of their mothers. However, little evidence was found for the hypothesis that the developmental similarities in locus contribute to the cross-generational transmission of coping styles; instead, adolescent coping efforts are influenced by the coping profile modeled by their mothers. For example, maternal use of practical coping was found to be associated with a more internal locus among adolescents, and that this, in turn, was associated with more practical coping efforts by adolescents. Overall, the pattern of findings supports the view that maternal coping efforts indeed do form an important base for the form and character of adolescent coping. However, the mediating effect found for adolescent locus indicates that the mechanisms go beyond simple modeling and direct transfer of specific behavior modes. Instead, the mechanism of transmission may include the nature of the relationship between the mothers' use of coping and the development of the adolescent's own personality. These findings contribute to a growing body of literature which points to the complexity of intergenerational interactions and suggests that parent behavior is related to the development of personality traits in the next generation and that these traits, in turn, influence subsequent interaction with the next generation. In addition, such findings support the notion of the intergenerational transmission of personality traits, affect, attitudes, and values and underscore the need for further research into the intergenerational processes.
One of the most significant findings reported by Troll and Bengtson (1982) was that parent-child solidarity appears to represent consistently an important interpersonal bond in contemporary American culture. In addition, social and historical forces (cohort or period effects) serve as moderator variables in family-lineage transmission. For instance, transmission is enhanced in areas where social forces encourage particular values or behavior and is reduced where social forces discourage them. Secondly, gender is not an important variable in transmission. However, gender differences are apparent in research on cross-sectional family relationships such that parents feel differently about daughters and sons and daughters and sons relate differently to mothers and fathers. In general females have stronger kinship ties, and more affection is reported for female family members than for males. Third, qualitative aspects of family relationships, such as closeness, do not seem to affect lineage transmission. Also, parent-child "attachments" are perceived as exceptionally strong interpersonal bonds throughout the life course. However, high levels of intergenerational cohesion do not necessarily reflect high levels of similarity in general orientations or specific opinions. Intergenerational relations and transmission research suggests the benefits of investigating intergenerational interactions during life transitions and underscores the potential benefit in examining the transgenerational patterns of separation and individuation in parents and late adolescents who are leaving home. In summary, Troll and Bengtson (1982) concluded that relations between the generations are central issues in the theory concerning individual development, family processes, and societal trends and patterns.

Hagestad (1987) states that the progress in the study of parent-child relations from a life span perspective has been slow, in part because research examining early versus
later stages of life is largely nonconvergent. Early childhood researchers have tended to focus on the quality of the parent-child relationship as a predictor of child outcomes, whereas later-life researchers have been more concerned with the availability of social support from child to elderly parent, rather than the affective quality of the parent-child bond in relation to the provision of support. While these two thrusts in the research literature are different, they are not in opposition to one another; instead, according to Hagestad (1987), the next stage of life-span social development is to integrate these two foci from both a theoretical and empirical perspective.

One such research effort, which attempts to integrate early childhood research and intergenerational transmission research, is proposed by Antonucci and Akiyama (1991). These authors have extended initial intergenerational research and theory and proposed that intergenerational relationship be viewed within the context of what they term "convoys of social support" over the life course in which each person moves throughout life surrounded by a set of people to whom the individual is attached by the giving or receiving of social support. The social convoy is conceptualized as a hierarchical structure, with the individual's most significant relations at the core and developmental, in that the convoy may change over time. The convoy model stresses the importance of viewing the social network as a dynamic structure that changes with the development of the individual and situational alterations in the environment. This model calls for a more dynamically, process-oriented, and interactive view of interpersonal relationships. Results from an analysis of a national study of social support among older adults by Antonucci and Akiyama (1991) indicates a number of similarities in network structure and support functions among principal respondents and their children. In addition,
findings suggested a significant effect of family intactness on both structure, support functions, and to a more limited degree well being.

Levitt et al. (1992) investigated the exchange of intergenerational support, relationship quality, and well being in a bicultural (Anglo/European-American and Latin American) sample of young-adult women, their mothers, and their maternal grandmothers. With regard to intergenerational support, results suggest that the balance of exchange depends on the life stage of the provider and the recipient. Women are most likely to be overbenefited early or late in life, and underbenefited during the middle years. Specifically, women in the middle generation gave significantly more support they received, and these perceptions did not differ across cultural groups. Effects of support exchange on relationship quality were inconsistent across generations. Support predicted relationship quality for younger mother-daughter dyads, and relationships with granddaughters were marginally less positive for underbenefited grandmothers. Overall, intergenerational relationship quality was associated with well being for each generation.

Although perceptions were generally in agreement across generations and cultures, there were differences with regard to relationship quality. Relations with daughters were viewed more positively by older than by middle-generation women, and there was a significant discrepancy in perception between older-generation mothers and daughters regarding the quality of their relationship. Levitt et al. (1992) suggests that this is consistent with the notion of developmental stake within the intergenerational transmission literature which suggests that older women may have a greater stake in viewing their relations with daughters more positively for a variety of reasons, including increased awareness of morbidity or mortality or the possibility of eventual dependency
on the daughter. In contrast, younger mother-daughter dyads viewed their relationship similarly, and support exchanges were more salient for both relationship quality and affect in these dyads, suggesting that the mother-daughter relations may be closer and more interdependent for the younger dyads. However, Spanish-speaking respondents in the older and middle generations viewed their relations with the younger generation women less positively compared to English-speaking respondents and may reflect a difference due to acculturation tension between generations.

Separation and Individuation and a Family Life Cycle View

Carter and McGoldrick (1980, 1989) have offered a six-stage model of the family life cycle characteristics of intact, middle-class American families. Their model considers the interlocking tasks, problems, and relationships of the three-generational family system as it moves through time. Each stage represents a developmental advance within the family life cycle that introduces a transition with which the family must cope. Change is facilitated by "second-order changes" which refer to the consequences of external and internal events that alter the family status, roles, and structure. The six stages in this family life cycle model are: (1) between families: the unattached young adult (2) the joining of families through marriage: the newly married couple (3) the family with young children (4) the family with adolescents (5) the launching children and moving on and (6) the family in later life. This model proposes that the developmental task of the adolescent individual is not an isolated process, but that the processes of separation and individuation occur within a family context and subsequently influences the behavior of other family members. For instance, in the life stage of the
family with adolescents, Carter and McGoldrick suggest that this particular stage requires increasing flexibility of family boundaries and a renegotiation of parent-child relationships to allow for more independence for the adolescent. As a result, parents may shift their attention from the adolescent to refocus on mid-life marital and career issues and on concerns for their aging parents. The authors suggest that the following stage that consists of the launching of children is now the longest phase of the life cycle because families in modern society have fewer children and a longer life expectancy. Carter and McGoldrick hypothesize that it is in this stage that families need to adopt the greatest flexibility because this phase not only requires a total renegotiation of the marriage, but also involves dealing with "the greatest number of exits (dying parents and departing children) and entries (in-laws and grandchildren) of all family life cycle phases" (p. 14). Issues involving attachments and separation processes are thus conceptualized as being in a peak state for all family members during this transitional time in the life cycle.

Combrinck-Graham (1985), in contrast, has argued against a distinct stage approach to the family life cycle. She argues that the model of the family life cycle proposed by Carter and McGoldrick (1980) is problematic because of its adaptation of a family systems model from an individual model of development. The result is that observations and focuses in each stage of the model do not reflect a family stage at all, but the stage of an individual in relationship to his or her family in his or her own life cycle. To alleviate this problem Combrinck-Graham (1985) has proposed a “family life spiral” model that attempts to capture the reciprocal complexity and interaction between generational events for all family members. The family life spiral accounts for the cycles of individuals in the family in relationship to the cycles of individuals in other
generations. Combrinck-Graham hypothesizes that family processes alternate between phases of closeness ("centripetal" periods) and more distant, disengaged phases ("centrifugal periods"). This oscillation appears to provide opportunities within the family context for family members at different generational levels and with different developmental contexts and tasks to work and rework issues of closeness and intimacy and differentiation and individuation. According to this model, the period of late adolescence marks a centrifugal period in the family's life cycle where both younger and older members of the family are working on personal identity issues. By working separately on individual developmental tasks, the family collectively works toward redefining relationships with the hopes of moving to a more centripetal family period. These two family life cycle theories are important in that they recognize the need for families to adapt to changes in closeness and distance within the family which occur at different points throughout the life cycle. These two family life cycle theories also suggest that the conceptualization and investigation of late adolescent identity should be expanded to include an attempt to understand the concurrent developmental issues which are occurring within parents during this transitional time within the total family process.

The Life Events Perspective

While preliminary efforts to validate the life-span perspective centered on age-related change at various points in the life cycle, a more recent emphasis has been given to the study of life events as a component of the life-span orientation. According to Reese and Smyer (1983) life events or life transitions, in the broadest sense, may be defined as "possible happenings during the life course." Although Reese and Smyer (1983) state that most of the life event research has focused on major transitions or "life
crises" which are disruptive and stressful, life events can refer to positive transitions as well as negative ones. There are several advantages of using a life-events perspective to study behavior-change processes. First, because the impact of a particular life transition may be felt through a variety of different changes, the study of individuals experiencing specific life events provides a unique structure in which to observe a variety of changes within individuals including changes in routines, roles, relationships, views of self, identity, world views, and perhaps even physical and mental health. Life events, then, provides a dynamic context within which to observe individuals during change. Secondly, the life-span approach to life events assumes that the course of development is not only dependent on age-correlated factors of socialization. Thus, the usual developmental marker variables (infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age) becomes only one of many potential ontogenetic markers in developmental research. Life experiences and sociocultural-historical events become potentially valuable variables as well. Because of the expanded range of variables to explore adult development, the life-events perspective creates the potential for new developmental processes influencing the nature of change during adulthood that would be overlooked if only an age-specific approach was taken.

Researchers have conceptualized life events in several ways (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979; Fassinger & Schlossberg, 1992; Danish et al, 1980; Reese & Smyer, 1983). The Dohrenwends (1974) and Holmes and Rahe (1967), for example, view life events as catalysts to physical and emotional illness. Others suggest that life events can serve the purposes of personal growth, but choose to focus on single events and individual assessments of their impact (e.g. Rossi, 1980, on parenthood). Still others view life
events as antecedents to behavioral change (Hultsch & Plemons, 1979). Across these different perspectives, however, there is agreement concerning the pivotal role played by life events in individual development.

Danish et al. (1980) have conceptualized life events as markers and as processes. When events are viewed as markers, they become "milestones or transition points, giving shape and direction to the various aspects of a person's life" (p. 342). However, Danish et al. suggest that events should not be viewed solely as markers because the importance of the individual's experience of the event as well as the context of the event is ignored. They maintain that events are also processes that have a history of their own and occur in the life space of an individual, impacting a variety of areas within an individual's life (e.g. work, family life, and significant people to the individual).

According to Danish et al. (1980), whether an event is considered as a marker or as a process, all events are made up of structural characteristics and types of events. Examples of some structural characteristics of life events are event timing, duration, sequencing, cohort specificity, contextual purity, and probability of occurrence. The timing of a life event refers to its congruence with either personal or societal expectations of when it should occur. Neugarten (1976) emphasizes that every society has a system of social expectations regarding age appropriate behavior which constitutes a socially regulated cycle composed of socially delineated events, each with its recognized rights, duties, and obligations. Neugarten points out that life cycle events are much more likely to be stressful if they occur off time than in the expected course of life. The duration of a life event refers to the length of time it is experienced, including the anticipation of the event, the event itself, and the post-event influences. Event sequencing refers to whether
or not life events appear in personally or societally expected order. As with event time, it is assumed that events which are experienced in societally sanctioned order will be less traumatic than those which occur out of sequence. Cohort specificity refers to the fact that a given event may have different meanings and effects for different generations. The consideration of cohort effects is important in life events because of its implications for the reaction and adjustment to the life event as a result of the proportion of the population experiencing a given life change at a specific historical time. Contextual purity refers to the extent to which an event interferes with the resolution of other, concurrent life events. The consideration of this property of life events is important in that it points out the how a life transition for one individual may impact other domains within his or her own life as well as the lives of others. The last structural characteristic of life events outlined by Danish et al. (1980) is the probability of life-event occurrence. This refers to the likelihood that certain events will be experienced by large proportions of the population over time. High probability events are those often referred to as normative life crises and are defined as those life events that are usually expected and predictable. Examples of such events are marriage, birth of children, launching of children, and retirement. Low probability events or non normative events are those events which are unpredictable and affect either a great number of people at a single point in time, or small numbers of a total population over time. Examples of non-normative types of events are floods, involuntary job loss, and sudden onset of a life-threatening illness. Danish et al. hypothesized that individual life events and cultural life events constitute the two types of life events. Individual life events are events or transitions that demarcate a person's specific developmental history and tend to be age-related, whereas cultural life events are those
societal and historical events that shape the cultural context in which the individual lives. Examples of cultural life events are the Great Depression, the feminist movement, or matters of local politics. The conceptualizing of life events in terms of the complex patterns of event types and event characteristics provides a framework for understanding an individual's adjustment to a life event or transition.

Reese and Smyer (1983) have conceptualized the characteristics of events in a similar manner to Danish et al. (1980) viewing events in terms of their effects, the person's perceptions of events, and event properties or characteristics of the event themselves independent of the effects and perceptions. Unlike Danish et al. (1980), however, Reese and Smyer have expanded the possible types of events and have related these types of events to the context of an event, creating a two-dimensional taxonomy by type and context of event. The four types of events consist of biological events, personal-psychological events, physical-environmental events, and social-cultural events. They operationalize the context of events to include five broad areas of the "life space" such as family, self, social relations, work, and miscellaneous which contain a total of 14 specific event contexts. Reese and Smyer offer a comprehensive means in which to view a life transition.

The use of a life-event perspective allows for a broader context within which to investigate and understand individual differences and reactions to periods of major change in their lives. A life-events perspective underscores the importance for an individual's adaptation of recognizing that a change or transition is taking place and of reformulating a view of oneself in relation to the transformed world. Individual differences in personality and coping skills may influence whether an individual
experiences a life transition as a positive challenge or a reason for despair. A life events perspective emphasizes that not only the events themselves but perception of those events in conjunction with other variables such as the age of the individual and the timing of the event becomes crucial in providing a more dynamic and comprehensive understanding of the process of coping with life change.

Life Event: The Empty Nest

The period in adults' lives which is concerned with the launching of children into adulthood is a good example of what Danish et al. (1980) and Baltes (1987) describe as a normative transition. Also referred to as the empty nest or postparental period, the launching of children has traditionally referred to the phase in the family life cycle that occurs when the last child departs from the home. The empty nest period has become the center of attention of popular articles as well as empirical investigations because societal changes which have increased the potential for this phenomenon to affect a greater number of individuals for a longer period of time. Glick (1977) estimated that in 1900, the empty nest lasted an average of two years and often occurred during the parents' old age. Since that time, however, social trends such as smaller family size, closer spacing of children, and increased longevity for adults have resulted in a longer empty nest period. Glick (1977) calculated that couples today experience the launching of their last child during middle age and can expect to remain in the empty nest period for at least thirteen years and often much longer.

Although both men and women experience this transition, most of the literature has studied the impact of the launching of children into adulthood on mothers, since it entails the loss or change in the maternal role which has traditionally been a central focus
of many women's lives and identities. Since the late 1950's, the notion that the loss of the parental role during the empty nest transition resulted in greater stress in women has been prevalent in the literature. Investigators who have studied the impact of the empty nest on women have generally attempted to examine whether this event has a positive or negative effect by examining physical as well as psychological well-being assessed by overall life satisfaction, marital happiness, and depression. In early studies of the postparental period, the "empty nest" was often reported as precipitating deleterious changes in the mother's physical or psychological well-being resulting in the frequent reference made in the media and professional literature to the empty-nest syndrome—a period of depression, identity crises, adjustment, confusion, role loss, and a lowered sense of well-being which occurs when the last child leaves the parental home (Bart, 1971; Lurie, 1974; Spence & Lonner, 1971). The results from the investigations by Bart (1971) and Lurie (1974) may be limited in terms of their generalizability, however, because of the fact that these two studies were based on clinical populations and may not be representative of the way in which women generally respond to the departure of their children.

In contrast, more recent studies have offered a more positive picture regarding the impact of the empty nest on mothers' well being (Axelson, 1960; Glenn 1975; Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1972; Harkins, 1978; Black & Hill, 1984). For instance, Axelson (1960) suggested that the postparental period appeared to be as satisfying as when having one or more children living at home, and from a study of U.S. national surveys Glenn (1975) found that postparental women reported greater happiness, enjoyment of life, and marital happiness than women of similar age who have a child at home. White and Edwards
(1990) analyzed panel data from a national random sample to investigate the effects of children leaving home on marital happiness and overall life satisfaction. They found that the empty nest is associated with significant improvements in marital happiness for all parents, regardless of parent and children's characteristics. According to White and Edwards (1990) overall life satisfaction, however, improves only under two conditions: when there is frequent contact with the "launched" children and during the period immediately following the departure of the children. These findings underscore the notion that the postparental period involves an ongoing process of redefinition of the attachment relationships between parents and children.

Very little is known about how men react to the departure of children from the home. The lack of research on the effect of the empty nest transition on fathers may reflect traditional social roles which has reserved the parenting and caretaking of children primarily for women and has designated the role of provider to the male. Two recent studies that have focused on the reactions of fathers to the empty nest period have provided some evidence that the transition to the postparental period may be difficult for some men as well. In a study by Lewis et al. (1979), husbands and wives in the same marital dyads were interviewed regarding their experience of the launching of their last child. Although most fathers in this study were neutral (35 percent) or felt some degree of happiness (42 percent) about their child's departure from home, nearly a quarter of the men (22 percent) reported feeling either very unhappy or somewhat unhappy. Fathers who expressed unhappiness in the empty nest transition were most likely to be those men who had fewer children, were older, had the highest nurturing orientation, felt most neglected by their wives, received the least amount of understanding, empathy, and
companionship from their wives, and were the most lonely. A more recent study by Lewis and Duncan (1991) supports the notion that men as well as women may have difficulties when their children leave home. In a sample of 325 fathers, while the majority of fathers did not have bad feelings over the leaving home of a child, 41% did report some negative reactions, even though these children were not the last child to leave the home. Lewis and Duncan suggest that the fathers' negativity would be even greater if all of these children were the last children to leave the home. In addition, they found that the father's perceptions of their child's leaving home was significantly related to the fathers' feelings about the leaving, the frequency of psychosomatic complaints, and subjective well-being, but not to their satisfaction with family life.

In summary, this research suggests that there is little support that the transition to the postparental period applies solely to women. Instead, recent research suggests that the well being of fathers can also be affected by this life transition. Furthermore, recent social trends suggests that men are investing more of themselves and their time in the raising and nurturing of their children and that there is more equality in the sharing of parental duties and responsibilities in families than ever before. These societal changes in parenting trends suggest that there is a need for future research to include men's reactions and adjustment to this life transition.

While the majority of the most recent studies have found little support for the widespread existence of the empty-nest "syndrome" which has been popularized in the media, reported in clinical casework, and argued theoretically, research on parental well-being during the postparental period has been inconsistent. The inconsistency found in previous research on the postparental period may be due to several methodological and
conceptual limitations that have restricted the interpretations of findings. First, Harkins (1978) argued that most of the empty nest research has failed to test adequately for the effects of the empty nest transition. According to Harkins (1978), for example, most research has compared the well-being of women prior to the leaving of their last child with that of women whose youngest child has departed some time in the past. Such a comparison assumes that whatever the effect of child leaving, it is sustained or endures for an arbitrary period of time. Harkins states that delayed assessment of the post-empty nest stage may have inadequately or incompletely captured the effects of the launching of children into adulthood and suggests that effects from the empty nest transition may be best explored during the year or two immediately following the event. Indeed, recent research by White and Edwards (1990) has suggested that for measures of parental well-being as assessed by marital and overall life satisfaction, the positive effects of the empty nest appear to be strongest immediately after the children leave. Further research is needed to more fully understand the overall process of adjustment to the end of the childrearing years.

Secondly, confusion has arisen due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition of what constitutes an empty nest. Much of previous research has marked the postparental period as the graduation form high school of the youngest child. In an analysis of case studies of 27 women, however, Spence and Lonner (1971) reported that women differ considerably in what to them constitutes successfully launching a child and depending on this definition, it may or may not have yet occurred with the graduation from high school of the youngest child. The criterion for leaving appears to be determined by that point at which the mother decides her child has become successfully
independent, a point that ranges according to the subjective perceptions of parents from high school graduation to married with a family. In an attempt to study subjective definitions of the empty nest, questionnaires from 315 women were obtained to determine which of several proposed meanings most closely approximated their own personal definitions of "what leaving home is." Harkins (1978) found that only 1.3 percent of her sample chose "graduation from high school" when they were asked to indicate which of a set of events came closest to their idea of what leaving home is, while the largest percentage of the sample (41.3%) chose going away to school and the second highest choice by the sample was moving to a separate residence (39.4%). Harkins (1978) also compared the differences between psychological and physical well-being of empty-nest and non-empty nest women using both the objective definition of the empty nest variable (graduation from high school of the youngest child) as well as the mother's own subjective definition of leaving. Controlling for age and menopausal status, Harkins (1978) found no difference in psychological well-being between empty nest and non-empty nest women objectively-defined but significantly more positive well-being among empty nest women when using a subjective definition. On measures of physical well-being, no significant differences were obtained between subjectively-defined empty nest and non-empty nest women, but objectively-defined empty nest women report significantly more physical symptoms. While the Harkins (1978) study is important in its questioning of the operationalization of empty nest, one can argue that Harkins' (1978) term "leaving home" may not be synonymous with psychological and financial independence. These studies underscore the need for researchers to rely on individual parental definitions of the empty nest in order to accurately examine the postparental
period. In addition, the variations in perceptions of the definition of the postparental period serve to caution researchers against operationally defining the empty nest solely in terms of discrete events. Barber (1989) states that these variations in operational definitions point out the deficiencies in the current literature concerning this life transition and suggests that future research should be conducted in which launching events as well as the duration of the event itself are considered as dependent variables.

Another study by Harris, Ellicott, and Holmes (1986) also supports the notion that results obtained during this life transition may be affected by the definition and time of measurement that researchers conduct an investigation. In this study, 64 middle-class women from four cohorts ages 45, 50, 55, and 60 participated in retrospective interviews concerning psychosocial changes in their adult lives. Judges who read the interview protocols provided independent ratings of major psychosocial transitions. The results indicated that major psychosocial transitions were more likely to be associated with phases of the family cycle than with chronological age. The authors suggest that these findings underscore the importance of considering both social roles and chronological age when studying the development of women. In addition, within the family cycle, transitions were more likely to occur during the preschool (28% of the women), launching (42% of the women), and postparental (33% of the women) phases than during the no children, school age, or adolescent phases. These findings must be viewed with caution, however, because the difference in findings may be due to the use of somewhat older women in this study and the transitions and changes experienced during the school-age and adolescent phases may have appeared less salient than those which occurred in other life phases. Transitions associated with the preschool and launching phases
(commencing when the oldest child left home) were characterized by dissatisfaction, personal disruption, marital unhappiness, and decreased personal development, whereas transitions associated with the postparental phase (commencing when the last child left home) were characterized by personal mellowing and improved marital relations. Thus, adjustment and well-being was found to be different depending on whether one focused on the beginning stages of the transition (the departure of the first child from the home) or whether one focused on that point in the transition where all children have been launched from the home. The findings of this study also suggested that most women in the launching phase did not perceive the departure of children from home as negative in and of itself. However, many other difficult psychosocial changes such as marital dissatisfaction, decreased personal development, and ending of stability were reported by women who experienced a transition and suggest the importance of evaluating the interaction of moderating variables with the launching of adolescent children. The results concerning women in the postparental phase of the life cycle indicate that this transition was distinctly positive in nature and was more likely to occur among older women who had completed their family early and who had a mother who was employed outside the home.

Furthermore, the initial research in this area has conceptualized the launching process as one in which once the children have departed, the nest will remain empty. But for an increasing number of parents, these expectations regarding the timing and permanence of launching are not being met due to recent societal changes. For example, between 1968 and 1983, the percentage of families with one child eighteen to twenty-four years of age at home increased from 6.36 percent to 7.40 percent, representing an
increase of 23 percent. During the same period, the percentage of families with a child age twenty-five or older increased from 2.57 percent to 3.84 percent, an increase of 58.3 percent (Taeber, 1991). Some of the explanations for the return of the “fledgling adult” may be found in social changes which have reversed recent historical trends such as rising divorce rates, the increasing age at first marriage, the low entry salaries for the majority of young adults, unemployment and underemployment, the continuing high cost of housing, and the protracted time in educational endeavors have been proposed as possible explanations for the return of the “fledgling adult.”

Based on results from questionnaires, Clemens and Axelson (1985) found that the return of adult children to the home had a significant impact within the family. They reported that 80 percent of the parents of a child twenty-two years or older had not planned to have the child home at that time in their lives. The data also suggested that the older the child, the less likely parents were happy with the living arrangement. One explanation for this finding may be that the older the child is, the less normative their behavior appears to what parents perceive as developmentally appropriate. Instead of achieving a smooth transition to autonomous adulthood, parents may view a child’s return home as a failure to establish a separate identity. Most parents viewed the resulting living arrangement as temporary and were generally unwilling to have the adult child remain in the nest indefinitely. In addition, a decrease in marital satisfaction in parents was reported upon the return of the child. The return of the adult child to the home may prevent parents from experiencing quality time anticipated for this phase of life. A study by Aquilano (1991) found that among parents with children age 19 to 21, 55% had a child of that age living at home. Coresidence probabilities decreased steeply
with children's age: 30% of parents with 22-24-year-olds, 19% with 25- to 29-year olds, and 10% with children age 30 and older, had children in those age ranges living at home. Aquilano found that the coresidence of unlaunched children was most likely to occur when living at home does not involve living with a stepparent, when relationship quality between parents and children is high, and when parents hold positive attitudes toward the continued support of adult children and have offered housing to relatives or nonrelatives. Parental well being in the coresident living arrangement was depressed by children's unemployment and continuing financial dependency. Parents whose adult children moved back home after marital breakups reported more negative effects of coresidence than did parents of never married children. Supporting grandchildren as well as adult children added additional pressure on parents. Finally, Aquilano found that middle-class parents found coresidence more burdensome than did parents of lower socioeconomic status. Aquilano suggest that these findings may stem from middle-class parents' higher expectations for self-development and life opportunities for their children at this stage in life. This body of research suggests that the phase in the family life cycle that involves the launching of adolescents into adulthood may not be such a permanent process as once previously held and may involve more complexity in role negotiations than had been previously thought.

Research since the 1970's has begun to look at the mediating variables that may influence successful adaptation and adjustment to the postparental period. The advantage of considering the mediating variables is that by doing so, the empty nest period may be conceptualized as a dynamic process involving renegotiations of previous roles and relationships that are influenced by these mediating variables. From this viewpoint, it is
not only important to assess if one adjusts and copes successfully during this transition in terms of well-being, but it also becomes crucial to determine the factors which may influence a successful transition to this time of the life cycle. First, Black and Hill's (1984) analysis from questionnaires and interviews found that while women involved in the launching of the last child seemed generally well-adjusted and satisfied with themselves and their lives, there were perceptible differences in levels of adjustment and coping ability to this transitional phase during the life cycle. Black and Hill (1984) found that a key determinant for women's adjustment to the postparental period to be the degree of involvement in the maternal role. Raup and Myers (1989) have hypothesized that women who have developed alternative roles to coincide with the declining mothering role may experience less distress. In a study of psychological well being in 238 women ages 35 to 55 in 1979 and 1980, Baruch (1984) found that the lack of multiple roles maybe be detrimental for women in mid-life. For example, in their study the women lowest in mastery were married, nonemployed, and childless, a finding which is consistent with the theory held by Long and Porter (1984) that if a woman's sole role is that of housewife, it may represent a "condition of underload" that can impair well being. Similarly, Baruch (1984) found that the women lowest in pleasure were the never-married women, who also occupied only one major role of paid worker. In contrast, she found the employed married women who had children were the highest in well being, although very few of these women had very young children. Baruch concludes that investing in several roles may be beneficial in that they may provide "several sources of stimulation, gratification, and social validation."
Wheaton (1990) has also suggested the role context within which a major life and role transition event occurs and in particular, the consideration of pre-existing chronic stress in the social role may be an important determinant as to whether or not a transition is potentially stressful. He hypothesized that life transitions may not be viewed as problematic and may even be perceived as beneficial when preceded by chronic role stress. With regard to the empty nest period, an analysis of the effect of a child moving out of the house in relation to previous problems with the parental role indicates that parents who enjoyed their children suffer a moderate increase in symptoms when a child moves out. In contrast, parents who had experienced problems with the parental role prior to the launching of the adolescent, did not evidence distress. According to Wheaton, the results suggest that factors in the role history prior to the life transition have a major impact on its stressfulness. Wheaton's research emphasizes the importance in understanding and accounting for the social environment prior to the occurrence of the transition.

Another variable which has been suggested to be an important factor in a woman's adjustment to the empty nest is related to the timing of the leaving of the last child. According to Neugarten (1976), the psychology of the life cycle is not a psychology of crisis behavior so much as it is a psychology of timing. She asserts that every society has a system of social expectations regarding age-appropriate behavior. For instance, there is a time when an individual is expected to go to work, to marry, to raise children, and to retire. She emphasizes that in charting the life the trajectories of the life cycle, researchers must consider the interaction of historical time, biological time in the context of social time. She suggests that for middle-aged men and women, chronological age is
no longer the positive marker that it was early in life. Instead, Neugarten (1976) maintains that middle-aged adults "look to their positions within different life contexts-body, career, family-rather than to chronological age for their primary cues in clocking themselves" (p. 94). With regard to the empty nest period, Neugarten (1976) has noted that the general historical trend has been toward a quickening of events through most of the life cycle, followed by a much longer post-childrearing period than ever before. The quickened pace means that not only do different generations grow up in different historical eras, but they go through the life cycle at different ages and are influenced by differing social expectations as time moves along. She asserts that the major stresses of life are those "caused by events which upset the sequence and rhythm of the life cycle" such as when the birth of a child is too early or too late or when the empty nest occurs off-time to socially sanctioned time. Harkins (1978) empirically studied the effects of the empty nest transition for women who may be described as "off-time" relative to the age or life span norms for the launching of their last child. She found that the women who are "off-schedule" with respect to the socially expected timing of the transition appear to be the only group adversely affected in terms of psychological well being.

Raup and Myers (1989) have suggested that another socially "off-time" phenomenon that may impact the experience of the postparental period occurs when childbearing is delayed until later in life. Harris, Ellicott and Holmes (1986) found that problems psychosocial transitions for women which occurred during the preschool phase were most frequently negative in nature, being characterized by personal withdrawal, dissatisfaction, restlessness, and marital problems. The problems occurred in the context of raising young children by women who were older when they had their last child.
Therefore, these women were still raising a preschool child while their peers had progressed to later phases of the family life cycle, indicating that these women were "off-time" in relations to the rest of the sample with regard to childrearing. Further support was provided by Rossi (1980) who asked a sample of middle-age women to rate the difficulty of rearing children at various ages. Rossi (1980) found that having children at an older age was also related to higher childrearing difficulty than first births early in life. Her data suggested adjustment and coping difficulties was true not only with infants and preschoolers but with older adolescents as well. Rossi suggests that while birth postponement may be helpful in younger women's efforts to complete professional training and to become established in a career, there may be some unanticipated difficulties in the child-rearing role at later points in the life span.

Another factor that may influence how an individual copes with the postparental period is marital status and marital quality. Age-specific divorce rates indicate that divorce is more common among those in their teens and twenties than among those at mid-life or older. In terms of divorce, then, the data clearly indicate that divorce is much less likely to occur at mid-life than earlier in life. Research relating marital satisfaction and the postparental period has suggested that the quality of marriage increases when the children start leaving home (Axelson, 1960; Deutscher, 1964). For example, over half of the parents in Deutscher's (1964) study evaluated their postparental life as preferable to their parental life; most of the others said that their married life remained about the same; and only 6 percent considered their postparental relationship worse than it was before the children left. An implied extension of this correlation between marital satisfaction and the launching of adolescent children is that higher marital satisfaction may aid in a more
successful and positive transition to the postparental period. This is consistent with a substantial body of literature which indicates that marital satisfaction follows a U-shaped pattern over the family career, suggesting a decline in satisfaction from the early marriage through the childbearing and childrearing years (Rollins & Feldman, 1970). In terms of mid-life, in general, and the postparental period in particular, however, these studies may not provide an accurate picture of families in today's society since they do not account for couples who divorced before their children left home or before the age of thirty.

Furthermore, the view that marital satisfaction and quality increases when the children leave home assumes that once the children leave, they do not return. Recent social trends, however, indicate that there are increasing numbers of young adults who are returning to the nest. Clemons and Axelsson (1985) reported that almost half of the parents in their studies complained that the presence of an adult child in the home had a negative effect on their marriage. The lack of permanence in launching young adolescents in today's society suggests that coping with this period of the family life cycle requires an on-going ability to renegotiate attachments within familial relationships.

It is therefore unclear as to whether marital status or marital satisfaction may play a role in either positive or negative adjustment. The literature to date, however, does not present a comprehensive view of the empty nest period and its interaction with marital status and quality of marital relationship between the adult parents. It does indicate that the transition to the postparental period is complicated by societal changes in family constitution and variations in marital quality and satisfaction in parents of these late adolescents.
Consideration of birth cohort constitutes a third factor that mediates adaptation to the postparental period. In a theoretical article comparing and contrasting the social experiences of white, black and Mexican-American women and utilizing a cohort analysis approach, Borland (1982) has hypothesized that cohorts and the changing roles of women, especially in terms of the work role, would create differential experiences of a woman's experience and adjustment to the postparental period. She argues that the degree to which women experience the empty nest syndrome depends on the unique set of social circumstances in which they live, including family values and social norms concerning women's "proper" roles. For instance, Borland suggested that the generation of women who were born between 1920 and 1940, who went through the active phase of parenting between 1940 and 1960, and who experienced the empty nest transition between 1960 and 1980 were more likely than other cohorts to experience difficulties with the departure of their last child because these women in particular, were socialized through early life teachings and mother-role modeling that "to be feminine and happy was to be married and to become mothers who dedicated their lives selflessly to their family's needs." Borland's (1982) work underscores the fact that unique historical and social circumstances may influence parental reactions to and evaluations of the transition to the postparental period.

A study by Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan, and Coleman (1989) has attempted to empirically test the relationship of empty nest status, cohort membership and employment status to well-being within two cohorts of mid-life women that differed in their emphasis in maternal and work roles. Specifically, Cohort I consisted of women who as young adults were encouraged to enter the labor force during World War II, while
Cohort II reached adulthood during the historical period of strong societal emphasis on women's maternal role and a decrease in well-paying employment opportunities for women. The results of this study showed that cohort and employment each have important independent associations with women's well-being at mid-life, whereas empty nest status has no main effect on well-being but interacts with cohort and employment in its association with well-being. For example, there was an overall effect of cohort membership on women's well being at mid-life. Women from Cohort I had significantly higher well-being than women from Cohort II on psychological measures of anxiety and immobilization (measures of difficulty in getting up in the morning, feelings of dizziness, experience of nightmares, loss of weight when worried, trembling hands, sweating hands, inability to get going) but not in reported physical health symptoms. In regard to employment status, employed mid-life women had lower anxiety and immobilization and better health than full-time homemakers for both cohorts.

The results of this study provided little evidence that the empty nest per se has much effect on women's well-being at mid-life; instead, the study underscores the fact that the empty nest is experienced differentially by cohorts which in turn may mediate adjustment to this life transition. The authors suggest that the differences between the two cohorts in the experience of the empty nest may be due to societal emphasis in maternal role involvement during young adulthood. The authors predict for the upcoming cohort of mid-life women whose young adulthood coincided with the feminist movement of the 1960s and the 1970s will be as positive an experience as it was for mid-life women of Cohort I, if not more so.
Although employment did not appear to be a significant factor affecting adjustment to the postparental period in the Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan, and Coleman (1989) study, Baruch (1984) found that for mid-life women (ages 35-55) in general, paid employment seems to have positive consequences for women's self-concept and lower levels of psychiatric symptomatology, regardless of marital status, but employment per se does not contribute significantly to happiness and satisfaction in the middle years. Furthermore, Baruch found that the components of employment most likely to affect a woman's well being are how challenging her job is and whether it is dull and does not offer any advancement. Raup and Myers (1989) have hypothesized that qualitative aspects of the work situation such as those mentioned in the Baruch (1984) study may determine whether work is a positive or negative factor for adjustment in the postparental transition period. According to Raup and Myers (1989) further research needs to investigate more specific, qualitative aspects of work such as level of occupation, the opportunities for advancement, degree of power, degree of commitment to work or the work role, and tokenism to understand more fully the relationship between employment status and well-being during the empty nest period.

Raup and Myers (1989) have also suggested other mediating variables that need to be considered in understanding parental adjustment during the empty nest transition. Assessing parents’ traditional attitudes towards women’s roles in family and society and considering other major life issues which may be occurring simultaneously with the launching of children may play an important role in adjustment during this life transition. For example, many women may exchange the role of caretaking of their children with the
role of caretaking of an aging parent. Whether this represents a positive or negative gain for the women has not been empirically investigated.

Inconsistencies in the results of previous research on the empty nest as well as recent societal changes that have impacted the family constitution underscore the fact that very little is known about the period in life known as the "empty nest." Further research is needed to understand more fully reactions and adaptability to the end of the childrearing years. Separation and individuation theory has the potential for providing a deeper understanding of the life transition known as the empty nest. The applicability of separation/individuation theory to the empty nest transition is appropriate in that the postparental period represents the symbolic breaking and redefining of the bonds between adolescent and parent. This period in the life cycle therefore may be conceptualized as a recapitulation of previous attachment experiences and experiences of loss. The experience of loss of the primary parenting role that occurs during this transition may be ameliorated by other care giving roles or may be aggravated by experiencing multiple losses at the same time. Research to date suggests that adaptation to the launching of the last child into adulthood is a complex phenomenon that involves many variables such as employment, marital, and cohort status. The investigation of transgenerational processes of separation and individuation and their interaction with other moderating variables such as gender, marital status and satisfaction, employment, and cohort may prove beneficial in providing a more complex yet more accurate picture of the phenomenon known as the empty nest.
Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to employ a life-events perspective to examine the potential of separation and individuation processes in adulthood to predict the ability of an individual to cope with a normative life transition. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the degree of success that adults have demonstrated in dealing with issues of autonomy and connectedness with their respective families of origin as well as their level of triangulation in their current family will have a definitive impact on their success in handling these issues within the normative life transition of launching their adolescent children. Moreover, it was hypothesized that gender configuration of the parent-child dyad will differentially effect the separation and individuation experience of the parent. The specific hypotheses to be tested in this study were the following:

1. Level of individuation from family of origin would positively influence adjustment, marital and life satisfaction, coping strategies, positive affect, and level of overall distress.

2. Level of individuation from spouse would positively influence adjustment to the empty nest, marital and life satisfaction, positive affect, and level of overall distress.

3. Level of triangulation between adolescent, father, and mother would inversely influence adjustment to the empty nest, marital and life satisfaction, coping strategies, positive affect, and level of overall distress.

4. Level of individuation from family of origin and spouse as well as level of triangulation would interact with gender in predicting adjustment to the empty nest.
CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were asked to participate in a study investigating adult life transitions and the empty nest transition in particular. Empty nest was defined as the period of time which commences when the youngest child departs from the home and no longer lives in the home. For the purposes of this study, the departure of the youngest child from the home must have occurred during the past 18 months or less for the volunteer to be eligible to participate. Participants were recruited through newspaper advertisements in the Denton, Arlington, Fort Worth, and Dallas area and from introductory psychology classes at the University of North Texas. The total number of subjects who fit the criteria of the study was two hundred and twenty seven subjects, with 159 females and 68 males. Most participants were Caucasian (87%), but African American (7%), Hispanic (4%), and Asian (2%) participants also comprised the sample. The average age for participants experiencing the empty nest transition was 48 (mean = 48.36, standard deviation = 4.55), and the average level of educational attainment was three years of college (mean = 15.17, standard deviation = 2.57). Participants reported their approximate gross family income was between $40,000 and $50,000. 76% of the sample reported being employed in full-time work for an average of 10 years. Most of the individuals participating in the empty nest study were currently married (75%), while 20% of the sample reported being
divorced (20%), separated (2%) or widowed (2%). 85% of the sample reported going away to college as the reason for their child leaving home. Other reasons for the adolescent child leaving home included the child wanting to be on their own (5%), marriage of the child (6%), and miscellaneous reasons, such as joining the military, conflict with parents, and divorce of parents (4%). The average number of children for participants in the study was two children. The average length of time since the departure of the youngest child from the home was 7 months.

Materials

Demographic information to obtained included the following: sex, age, race, employment or unemployment status and length, occupation, level of education completed, current family income, family income a year ago, whether or not father or mother are still alive, marital status and length, number and ages of children, and date of departure of youngest child.

Levels of individuation and personal autonomy from the parent's family of origin and spouse as well as levels of triangulation in the family in transition served as the independent variables. The dependent variable consisted of a variety of outcome measures of coping and adjustment. Additional analyses employed age, level of education, and extent of other caregiving responsibilities as covariates.

Independent Variables

Levels of individuation and personal autonomy were measured by the Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984). The PAFS questionnaire consists of eight scales which measure concepts such as differentiation/fusion, intimacy/isolation, and personal authority/intimidation within a
three-generational context. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Test-retest reliability estimates ranged from .55 to .95 with a mean test-retest reliability of .74. Research has also indicated that the PAFS-Q has good internal consistency (Bray, Williamson, & Malone, 1984). For the purposes of this study, three of the eight scales were employed: (1) Spousal fusion/individuation which measures the degree to which a person operates in a fused or individuated manner in relationship with his or her significant other (2) Intergenerational fusion/individuation which measures the degree to which a person operates in a fused or individuated manner with parents, and (3) Nuclear family triangulation which measures triangulation between spouses and their children.

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, levels of individuation, autonomy, and triangulation was operationalized in two ways. First, levels of individuation, autonomy, and triangulation was operationalized using the mean scores provided by Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984). Second, levels of individuation, autonomy, and triangulation was operationalized using median scores of each variable obtained from the sample.

Sex of the parent and sex of the child served as the second and third independent variables. These two variables were chosen because of the differential effects that gender may have on the experience of the empty nest.

Dependent Variables

Assessment of psychological functioning and adjustment was measured with the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL; Derogatis, Lipman, Rickles, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974). The HSCL is composed of 58 items, which reflect the kinds of psychological symptoms most frequently reported by individuals seeking outpatient counseling and
therapy. The HSCL yields scores on five separate scales—Somatization, Obsessive-Compulsive, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Anxiety, and Depression—as well as a total symptom score. The five symptom scales have been supported by results of factor analysis. Derogatis et al. found that internal consistency reliability estimates (coefficient alphas) for the five scales ranged from .84 to .87 and that test-retest reliability coefficients over a one-week interval ranged from .75 to .84. Respondents were asked to answer items by rating the extent to which each symptom has bothered them in the past 30 days on a 4-point scale ranging from not at all (1) to very frequently, much of the time (4).

The Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969) was used to obtain an additional measure of the ratio of positive to negative affect. The scale consists of thirteen items of both positive and negative affect. George (1981) established that the scale measures more transitory aspects of emotion. Internal consistency was reported to be high (alpha = .89; George & Gwyther, 1986).

Questions from the Self-Rated Health Questionnaire (SRHQ) adapted by Rider (1994) from the Older Americans Resources and Services Procedure (OARS) (Fillenbaum, 1988), the Coping Inventory (Horowitz & Wilner, 1980), and the Family Crisis-Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olsen, 1981), were derived to assess the participant's current self-evaluation of physical and psychological health. For purposes of data analysis in the study, questions were obtained from three subsections, labeled the Physical Health Questionnaire (PHQ; part I, items 1-8), the Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ; part II, items 1-28), and the Coping Questionnaire (CQ; part II, item 29, choices 1-26), to examine participants' perceptions
of physical health, perceptions of emotional health, perceptions of marital and family problems, and the availability of someone in whom to confide and from whom to receive help. Reliability statistics yielded coefficient alphas of .80 for the PHQ, .91 for the MHQ, and .75 for the CQ.

An additional measure of coping behaviors was obtained by a revised version of The Ways of Coping Checklist (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986) which consists of items that describe a broad range of behavioral and cognitive strategies that an individual might use in a specific stressful episode. The items on this instrument consist of content from the domain of defensive coping, such as avoidance, isolation, intellectualization, suppression, information seeking, problem solving, palliation, inhibition of action, direct action, and magical thinking. Items on the original version of this questionnaire were classified into two categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused. The problem-focused items describe cognitive problem solving efforts and behavioral strategies for altering or managing the source of the problem. The emotion-focused items describe cognitive and behavioral efforts directed at reducing or managing emotional distress. Internal consistency for this measure was evaluated by several methods. Inter-rater reliability was high (91%) for the 68 items, with 27 items classified as problem-focused (P), and 41 classified as emotion-focused (E). Additionally, The internal consistency of the P and E scales was also examined using Cronbach's alpha, where the mean alpha coefficient for the two administrations of the P scale was .80 and for the E scale, .81.

For the purposes of this study, the items were classified into eight forms of problem- and emotion-focused coping scales derived by Folkman et al, (1986): confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting
responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving, and positive reappraisal. The Ways of Coping Checklist was originally constructed to be used with a specific stressful event in mind, and with a true/false format. In order to fit the purposes of the present study, the instrument was modified. First, the stressful event presented to participants concerned the departure of the youngest child from the family of origin. Second, the response format was modified to a four-point scale, ranging from "does not apply and/or not used" (0) to "used a great deal" (3).

Life Satisfaction was measured by the Life Satisfaction Index developed by Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1961) and revised by Wood, Wylie, and Sheafer (1969). The Life Satisfaction Index measures global affective components such as mood and positive self-concept. Validity and reliability coefficients for this Index have been reported at .57 and .79 respectively.

Marital satisfaction, the degree of satisfaction with the marital relationship, was measured using a 10-item scale for marital satisfaction from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). The Dyadic Satisfaction Subscale (DSS) consists of eight 5-point Likert items, with responses ranging from "all the time" to "never." Of the remaining two items, one is a 7-point Likert item which asks participants to rate their overall degree of satisfaction in the relationship from "perfect" to "extremely unhappy." The remaining item, a 6-point Likert item, asks respondents to indicate their degree of commitment to making their relationship successful. Spanier (1976) reports validity and reliability coefficients for the Dyadic Adjustment Scale of .87 and .96, respectively. In addition, the author reports a reliability coefficient of .94 for the DSS. Scores on the DSS range from
8 to 51 with higher scores indicating higher levels of Dyadic satisfaction and commitment.

Social support was measured by the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB), in which respondents are asked to report the frequency with which they are recipients of supportive actions (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981). Instructions for the 40-item inventory ask participants to rate the frequency with which each of the 40 items included in the inventory occurred during the preceding month using the following 5-point scale: (1) = not at all, (2) = once or twice, (3) = about once a week, 4 = several times a week, and 5 = about every day. Research has suggested that the ISSB has adequate test-retest and internal consistency reliability and is significantly correlated with network size and perceived support of the family (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981).

Sex role attitudes was measured by the Scanzoni Sex Role Scale (1980) which consists of 30 items pertinent to the wife, husband, father and mother roles. This scale is composed of seven subscales: (1) Traditional Wife Role, (2) Wife Self-actualization (defined as a role in which the wife interests are equal to those of husband and children), (3) Problematic Husband Alterations (a role in which the husband's interests remain basically superior to those of the wife, but who is open to temporarily placing his interests second for the sake of the wife in a special situation), (4) Institutionalized Equality (defined as a role in which the husband's interests are not superior to nor more significant than the interest of his working wife), (5) Traditional Husband Role, (6) Traditional Mother Role, and (7) Father Role. Subjects were asked to rate the degree of agreement with each statement on a four-point Likert scale ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (4).
Role strain refers to the degree of difficulty an individual experiences when attempting to exhibit behaviors appropriate to a person's social position in measuring up to the obligations and demands contained in the role expectations for all the roles associated with the position (Rollins & Feldman, 1970). As Burr (1970) has argued, incompatibility between roles, lack of clarity about expected behaviors within roles, and role overload are thought to increase role strain. The evaluation of the dimension of role strain in this study included two factors: marital strain and parental strain. Role strain was assessed using the Role Strain Scale from the Structure of Coping Scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) which is designed to provide information about potential life strains in parental and marital roles, as well as emotional stress felt by individuals. The Role Strain Scale (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) represents problems that frequently occur among individuals in their roles as marriage partner and parent. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) identified the strains from themes that surfaced repeatedly during unstructured interviews. Standardized questions about these strains were gradually developed, tested, and included in the final instrument.

A final item was included to provide a generic indicator of other caretaking responsibilities of the participant, including the extent of responsibilities and the extent of the caretaking problem (Jones, 1994).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the Dallas-Fort Worth area in the manner discussed previously. Potential participants who responded by phone to the advertisements were contacted by the investigator, given a brief verbal description of the project, and answered any questions the participant had. Participants who were interested
and met the criteria for the study were sent a questionnaire packet. Participants who were recruited by direct personal contact through university classes were handed their questionnaire packet in person.

Each questionnaire packet contained an informed consent form, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and instructions for completing the questionnaire, the questionnaire itself, and a self-addressed stamped envelope in which the participants could return their questionnaire. The informed consent form explained that: (1) the participation in the study was voluntary, (2) subjects could drop out of the study at any time, (3) confidentiality of responses would be maintained, (4) anonymity would be upheld, and (5) the study would investigate coping and adjustment with life events, in particular, the empty nest.

Statistical Analyses

The present investigation consisted of the following independent variables: levels of intergenerational individuation, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation, sex of the parent, and sex of the adolescent child leaving home. Dependent measures assessed psychological and physical functioning (scores on the Hopkins Symptom Checklist, Affect Balance Scale, and the Self-Rated Health Questionnaire), coping behaviors (scores on The Ways of Coping Checklist), satisfaction (scores on the Life Satisfaction Index and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale), social support (scores on the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors), sex role attitudes (scores on the Scanzoni Sex Role Scale), role strain (scores on the Role Strain Scale), and the composite measure of caretaking responsibilities.
Three initial analyses were conducted for this study based on the original conception of personal autonomy and individuation by Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984) utilizing their means for each separation/individuation variable: (1) a 2 (levels of intergenerational individuation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of the parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA); (2) a 2 (levels of spousal individuation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of the parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA); and (3) a 2 (levels of nuclear family triangulation) x 2 (sex of the adolescent child) x 2 (sex of the parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). In addition, the identical independent measures were also used to perform Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVAs) with age, education, and extent of caretaking responsibilities as covariates for each case.

Supplementary analyses were conducted in which each separation/individuation independent variable (intergenerational individuation, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation) were analyzed according to a median split, resulting in three additional analyses. As a result of this typology, statistical analyses consisted of a (1) 2 (levels of intergenerational individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of the adolescent child) x 2 (sex of the parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA); (2) a 2 (levels of spousal individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of the adolescent child) x 2 (sex of the parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA); and (3) a 2 (levels of nuclear family triangulation-median split) x 2 (sex of the adolescent child) x 2 (sex of the parent). An additional exploratory analyses was conducted in order to investigate the interaction of gender of parent, marital status, and the three individuation dimensions, resulting in three additional Multivariate Analysis of Variances (MANOVAS). Finally, as in the case of
the first set of analyses using the Bray's typology, Multivariate Analysis of Covariances (MANCOVAS), using age, education, and extent of caretaking responsibilities as covariates were performed with each separation/individuation independent variable.

In order to evaluate to what extent individual differences in individuation and personal autonomy uniquely predict scores on measures of adjustment to the empty nest, hierarchical regressions were performed with age, care, education, sex of adolescent child, sex of parent, spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, intergeneration individuation, Sex x Spousal Individuation, Sex x Nuclear Family Triangulation, and Sex x Intergeneration Individuation entered hierarchically. The specific variables to be predicted included the following dependent variables: dyadic satisfaction, marital strain, parental strain, Hopkins psychological and physical distress, positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction, financial strain, financial stress, traditional wife role, traditional husband role, traditional mother role, and traditional father role.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Results from the investigation will be discussed in four main sections: statistical analyses and results based on the original work of Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984); median-split analyses; exploratory analyses; results from the Multivariate Analyses of Covariance (MANCOVAs); and analyses of hierarchical regressions.

Statistical Analyses and Results Based on the Original Work of Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984)

Means from a normal population provided by Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984) were used to obtain a high/low dichotomy of the three individuation dimensions investigated. For intergeneration individuation, any score less than or equal to 29 defined a low level of intergeneration individuation, while any score greater than or equal to 30 defined a high level of intergeneration individuation. For spousal individuation, any score less than or equal to 45 defined a low level of spousal individuation, while a score greater than and equal to 46 defined a high level of spousal individuation. Finally, scores which were less than or equal to 37 defined high levels of nuclear family triangulation, while scores which were greater than or equal to 38 defined less nuclear family triangulation. After obtaining high and low levels for each individuation dimensions, three analyses were conducted: a (1) 2 (levels of intergeneration individuation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance, (MANOVA);
(2) a 2 (levels of spousal individuation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance, (MANOVA); and (3) a 2 (levels of nuclear family triangulation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance, (MANOVA).

Results for Intergenerational Individuation Using Bray's Typology:

Multivariate Findings

Using Bray's calculated means from a normal population for the dimension of intergeneration individuation, a 2 (levels of intergenerational individuation) x 2 (sex of the adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed. The minimum cell size was 8, and cell size ranged from 8 to 63, with an average of 26 subjects per cell. Results from the 2 x 2 x 2 MANOVA did not yield a significant three-way interaction, nor did it produce any statistically significant two-way interactions. However, significant main effects of intergeneration individuation, $F(25, 179) = 1.79, p < .02$, and of sex of parent were found, $F(25, 179) = 1.84, p < .01$. Table 1 summarizes the results of this procedure.

Main Effects for Intergeneration Individuation using Bray's Typology:

Univariate Findings

With regard to the main effect for intergeneration individuation, univariate analyses yielded twelve significant differences between low intergeneration individuation individuals (empty nest parents who operate in a more fused manner with their parents) and high intergeneration individuation individuals (empty nest parents who are more individuated from their parents). Results indicated that empty nest parents who were less individuated from their parents (low intergeneration individuation) reported greater
overall distress, \( F(1, 203) = 9.19, p < .003 \), and higher overall negative mood, \( F(1, 203) = 8.31, p < .004 \). In contrast, empty nest parents who were more differentiated from their own parents experienced significantly higher overall positive affect, \( F(1, 203) = 12.20, p < .001 \), and more life satisfaction, \( F(1, 203) = 8.02, p < .01 \). With regard to parental and sex roles, participants who were less differentiated from their own parents reported higher levels of parental strain, \( F(1, 203) = 9.63, p < .002 \), and problematic husband alterations where individuals who primarily hold to a traditional view of the husband role are open to a less traditional role in a particular situation, \( F(1, 203) = 7.15, p < .01 \).

Finally, univariate analyses also suggested that low and high intergeneration individuation individuals differed in their styles of coping with the empty nest, including accepting responsibility for the situation, \( F(1, 203) = 5.08, p < .03 \), confrontation, \( F(1, 203) = 3.78, p < .05 \), distancing, \( F(1, 203) = 6.26, p < .01 \), escape-avoidance, \( F(1, 203) = 6.24, p < .01 \), and planful problem solving \( F(1, 203) = 4.52, p < .04 \). Specifically, empty nest parents who were less differentiated from their own family of origin utilized significantly more coping strategies involving confrontation, distancing, escape-avoidance, and planful problem-solving as compared to parents who were more highly differentiated from their family of origin.

Main Effects for Sex of Parent using Bray's Typology:

Univariate Findings

Univariate analyses using Bray's typology produced significant main effects for sex of parent which were specific to institutional equality (defined as a role in which the husband's interests are not superior to nor more significant than the interests of his working wife), \( F(1, 203) = 4.70, p < .03 \), and traditional views toward the husband role,
F (1, 203) = 7.21, p < .01, and father roles, F (1, 203) = 7.83, p < .01. Specifically, males reported significantly higher levels of institutional equality and more traditional values concerning the husband and father roles. In addition, females who were experiencing the empty nest also employed significantly more often specific coping strategies as compared to males, including seeking support, F (1, 203) = 5.11, p < .03, planful problem solving, F (1, 203) = 4.73, p < .03, and positive reappraisal, F (1, 203) = 15.56, p < .000.

Results for Spousal Individuation using Bray’s Typology:

Multivariate Findings

Using the means from Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984) to create high and low levels of spousal individuation, a 2 (levels of spousal individuation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed. For this analysis, the minimum cell size was 4, and cell size ranged from 4 to 68, with an average of 27 subjects per cell. Similar to the results for intergeneration individuation, results from this analysis did not yield a significant three-way interaction, nor were any two-way interactions significant. However, significant main effects of spousal individuation, F (25, 182) = 2.05, p < .004 and of sex of parent, F (25, 282) = 1.99, p < .01. Table 2 summarizes the results.

Main Effects for Spousal Individuation using Bray’s Typology:

Univariate Findings

With regard to the main effect for spousal individuation, empty nest participants who were less individuated from their spouse reported less marital satisfaction, F (1, 206) = 6.00, p < .004, more marital strain, F (1, 206) = 9.06, p < .003, parental strain, F (1, 206) = 7.35, p < .01, financial strain, F (1, 206) = 8.57, p < .004, and financial stress, F
Effects of spousal individuation were also specific to traditional wife role, $F (1, 206) = 18.25, p < .000$, wife self-actualization, $F (1, 206) = 10.52, p < .001$, problematic husband alterations, $F (1, 206) = 4.25, p < .04$, and traditional views toward the mother role, $F (1, 206) = 8.75, p < .003$, and father role, $F (1, 206) = 6.07, p < .02$. Univariate analyses revealed that empty nest participants who were less differentiated from their partner held more traditional views toward the roles of wife, mother, and father. In addition, individuals who were less individuated from their spouse reported significantly more wife self-actualization (where husband's interests are equal to the wife's interests), and more open to husbands who temporarily take on a more nontraditional role as a result of a specific situation.

Differences between high and low levels of spousal individuation emerged in coping strategies, specifically, in utilizing distancing, $F (1, 206) = 8.31, p < .004$, self-control, $F (1, 206) = 8.36, p < .004$, and escape-avoidance, $F (1, 206) = 4.12, p < .04$, and accepting responsibility for their situation, $F (1, 206) = 4.77, p < .03$. Participants who were low in spousal individuation reported the employment of coping strategies involving distancing, self-control, escape-avoidance, and accepting responsibility for the situation significantly more than individuals who were highly differentiated from their spouse.

Finally, univariate analyses revealed that empty nest parents who operated in a more fused manner with their spouse experienced higher overall levels of distress, $F (1, 206) = 7.82, p < .01$, and negative mood, $F (1, 206) = 7.28, p < .01$ as compared to individuals who were more differentiated from their spouses. In contrast, individuals who interacted with their spouse in a more individuated manner reported significantly
higher positive affect, $F(1, 206) = 4.84$, $p < .03$, and life satisfaction, $F(1, 206) = 7.81$, $p < .01$ than individuals who were less individuated from their partners.

Main Effects for Sex of Parent using Bray's Typology:

Univariate Findings

With regard to the main effect of sex of parent, results were identical to those discussed previously in the analysis of intergeneration individuation, except for two particular differences. First, in the present analysis, univariate analyses yielded an additional main effect which was specific to the self-controlling coping strategy, $F(1, 206) = 4.70$, $p < .03$, such that females employed a self-controlling coping strategy to deal with the empty nest significantly more than males. Secondly, the effect of sex of parent specific to the tendency to hold a traditional view of the husband role, $F(1, 206) = 7.65$, $p < .01$, which was significant in the analysis for intergeneration individuation, disappeared with respect to spousal individuation.

Results for Nuclear Family Triangulation using Bray's Typology:

Multivariate and Univariate Findings

A 2 (levels of nuclear family triangulation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted; however, because of insufficient cell size and an inability to fill all cells, results for a three-way interaction as well as a two-way interaction were unable to be calculated. Although a significant main effect of nuclear family triangulation was not found, a significant main effect of sex of parent was found, $F(25, 186) = 2.71$, $p < .000$. With regard to the main effect of sex of parent, univariate analyses were identical to the results from the analysis of intergeneration individuation which was described previously. However, three
additional results emerged, specific to overall level of distress, $F(1, 210) = 4.88, p < .03$, negative affect, $F(1, 210) = 6.72, p < .01$, and the escape-avoidance coping strategy, $F(1, 210) = 5.12, p < .03$. Specifically, from our empty nest sample, females reported experiencing significantly more overall distress, more negative affect, and the utilization of an escape-avoidance coping strategy as compared to males.

Median-split Analyses

Because of the inability to fill all cells for the proposed analysis using the means provided by Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984), three additional analyses were performed which analyzed the three dimensions of intergeneration individuation, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation according to a median split calculated from the sample. For intergeneration individuation, any score less than or equal to 24 defined a low level of intergeneration individuation, while any score greater than or equal to 25 defined a high level of intergeneration individuation. For spousal individuation, any score less than or equal to 37 defined a low level of spousal individuation, while a score greater than or equal to 38 defined a high level of spousal individuation. Finally, scores which were less than or equal to 26 defined high levels of nuclear family triangulation, while scores which were greater than or equal to 27 defined less nuclear family triangulation.

Median-split Results for Intergeneration Individuation:

Multivariate Findings

Utilizing the median splits to create a low/high dichotomy of intergeneration individuation, a 2 (levels of intergeneration individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was
performed. For this analysis, the minimum cell size was 13, and cell size ranged from 13 to 51, with an average of 26 subjects per cell. Results from this analysis did not yield a significant three-way interaction, nor were there any statistically significant two-way interactions. However, significant main effects of intergeneration individuation, \( F(25, \, 179) = 2.62, \, p < .000 \) and sex of parent were found, \( F(25, \, 179) = 2.79, \, p < .000 \). Tables 3 and 6 summarize the results.

Main Effects for Intergeneration Individuation:

Univariate Findings

With regard to the main effects of intergeneration individuation, univariate analyses yielded eighteen significant differences between low intergeneration individuation and high intergeneration individuation individuals. Results indicated that empty nest parents who were less differentiated from their own parents experienced less overall positive mood, \( F(1, \, 203) = 9.80, \, p < .002 \), less life satisfaction, \( F(1, \, 203) = 15.55, \, p < .000 \), and more overall negative affect, \( F(1, \, 203) = 16.02, \, p < .000 \). Furthermore, univariate analyses also suggested that empty nest parents who differed in their level of individuation from their parents also differed in the utilization of the following coping strategies: confrontive coping, \( F(1, \, 203) = 8.41, \, p < .004 \); distancing, \( F(1, \, 203) = 8.27, \, p < .004 \); self-controlling strategy, \( F(1, \, 203) = 7.59, \, p < .01 \); seeking support, \( F(1, \, 203) = 4.02, \, p < .05 \); accepting responsibility for the situation, \( F(1, \, 203) = 15.80, \, p < .000 \); escape-avoidance strategy, \( F(1, \, 203) = 12.21, \, p < .001 \); and planful problem-solving, \( F(1, \, 203) = 5.36, \, p < .02 \). Results indicated that empty nest parents who were more fused in their interactions with their own parents employed significantly more coping strategies which entailed more confronting, distancing, self-controlling,
seeking support, accepting responsibility for the situation, escape-avoidance, and planful problem-solving as compared to the adults who perceived themselves as more differentiated from their own parents.

Finally, parents who were less individuated from their own parents held significantly more traditional views concerning the role of wives, $F(1, 203) = 5.95, p < .02$ and of mothers, $F(1, 203) = 8.90, p < .003$. Parents who were less individuated from their own parents also reported significantly higher wife self-actualization, $F(1, 203) = 4.83, p < .03$, higher problematic alterations, $F(1, 203) = 23.37, p < .000$, and institutional equality, $F(1, 203) = 7.34, p < .01$. In addition, differences between differentiated and undifferentiated adults were found for parental strain, $F(1, 203) = 7.99, p < .01$ and financial stress, $F(1, 203) = 4.86, p < .03$ such that parents who were less differentiated from their own parents reported experiencing significantly more parental strain and financial stress than parents who were more individuated from their parents.

Main Effects for Sex of Parent: Multivariate and Univariate Findings

Results of the 2 (levels of intergeneration individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) also yielded a significant main effect for sex, $F(25, 179) = 2.79, p < .000$. Univariate analyses produced significant main effects for sex which were specific to institutionalized equality, $F(1, 203) = 11.46, p < .001$, traditional views regarding the husband role, $F(1, 203) = 10.44, p < .001$, and traditional views regarding the father role, $F(1, 203) = 11.10, p < .001$, such that males reported significantly more institutional equality, and traditional
views regarding the husband and father roles. Effects of sex also were specific to levels of physical and psychological distress, \( F(1, 203) = 3.70, p < .05 \), positive mood, \( F(1, 203) = 5.11, p < .03 \), and negative mood, \( F(1, 203) = 5.72, p < .02 \). Data revealed that males reported a lowered level of overall distress, and less positive as well as negative mood when compared to females. Univariate analyses also suggested that males and females differed in their coping strategies, specifically in seeking support, \( F(1, 203) = 9.21, p < .003 \), in planful problem-solving, \( F(1, 203) = 4.87, p < .03 \), and in positive reappraisal, \( F(1, 203) = 20.10, p < .000 \). Results indicated that females were more likely to seek support and to use a problem-solving and positive reappraisal coping strategy as compared to males.

Additional Median-split Results for Intergeneration Individuation:

Multivariate and Univariate Findings

Although the 2 (levels of intergeneration individuation) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) and 2 (sex of parent) did not yield any statistically significant interactions per se, the interaction of sex of parent and intergeneration individuation approached significance, \( F(25, 179) = 1.51, p < .067 \) and was particular to problematic husband alteration, \( F(1, 203) = 4.70, p < .03 \); financial strain, \( F(1, 203) = 3.75, p < .05 \); and a self-controlling coping strategy, \( F(1, 203) = 3.81, p < .05 \). For empty nest fathers, those who were less individuated from their family of origin reported being more open to a less traditional husband role in specific situations than fathers who were more individuated from their own parents. In contrast, there was no difference between females who were more or less individuated from their family of origin with respect to problematic husband alterations. Furthermore, empty nest mothers who were less individuated from their
family of origin tended to report more financial strain as compared to mothers who were more differentiated from their own parents. For fathers, however, there was no difference with respect to financial strain between those individuals who were more or less individuated from their family of origin.

Finally, the interaction between sex of parent and intergeneration individuation approached significance specific to the employment of a self-controlling coping strategy such that fathers who reported being less individuated from their own parents tended to use a more self-controlling coping strategy in dealing with the empty nest than those fathers who were more individuated from their family of origin. In contrast, empty nest mothers who were either high or low in individuation from their family of origin did not differ in their use of a self-controlling coping strategy.

Median-split Results for Spousal Individuation:

Multivariate Findings

After computing the median splits to create high and low levels of spousal individuation, a 2 (levels of spousal individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of the adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed. For this analysis, the minimum cell size was 13, and cell size ranged from 13 to 56, with an average of 27 subjects per cell. Similar to the median-split results for intergeneration individuation, results from this analysis did not yield a significant three-way interaction, nor were any two-way interactions significant. However, significant main effects of spousal individuation, \( F(25, 182) = 3.30, p < .000 \) and of sex of parent were found, \( F(25, 282) = 2.48, p < .000 \). Tables 4 and 6 summarize the results.
Main Effects for Spousal Individuation:

Univariate Findings

With regard to the main effect for spousal individuation, empty nest parents who were less individuated from their spouse reported less marital satisfaction, $F(1, 206) = 4.39, p < .04$, and higher marital strain, $F(1, 206) = 4.24, p < .04$ than individuals who were more individuated from their spouse. Furthermore, individuals who were less differentiated from their partner were significantly different with regard to views concerning parental and sex roles. Results suggested that persons who were less differentiated from their spouse tended to value traditional wife, $F(1, 206) = 18.62, p < .000$, mother, $F(1, 206) = 10.64, p < .001$, and father roles, $F(1, 206) = 8.32, p < .004$, believe husbands can take on a less traditional role in special situations, $F(1, 206) = 4.18, p < .04$, and institutional equality, $F(1, 206) = 4.09, p < .04$ than those empty nest parents who operated in a more fused manner in their relationship with their mate or significant other. Univariate analyses also produced significant main effects for spousal individuation which were specific to parental strain, $F(1, 206) = 7.64, p < .01$, financial strain, $F(1, 206) = 10.23, p < .002$, and financial stress, $F(1, 206) = 13.23, p < .000$. Results indicated that individuals who were less individuated from their partner experienced significantly more parental strain, financial strain, and financial stress.

Univariate analyses also suggested that empty nest parents who differed on their level of individuation from their spouse also differed in their coping strategies in dealing with the empty nest transition, specifically in utilizing confrontive, $F(1, 206) = 9.59, p < .002$, distancing, $F(1, 206) = 10.17, p < .002$, self-controlling, $F(1, 206) = 8.48, p < .004$,
and escape-avoidance styles of coping, $F(1, 206) = 15.29$, $p < .000$. The data indicated that empty nest parents who operated in a more fused manner with their spouse or significant other employed significantly more coping strategies which entailed more confronting, distancing, self-controlling, and avoiding than those empty nest parents who were more individuated from their spouses. Finally, results of the univariate analyses revealed that persons who differed in their level of spousal individuation also differed in their overall level of distress, $F(1, 206) = 30.50$, $p < .000$, positive affect, $F(1, 206) = 6.62$, $p < .01$, negative affect, $F(1, 206) = 23.08$, $p < .000$, and overall life satisfaction, $F(1, 206) = 18.17$, $p < .000$, with participants who were more differentiated from their spouse having significantly less overall distress, less negative mood, and greater positive mood and more life satisfaction than less individuated persons.

**Main Effects for Sex of Parent:**

**Univariate Findings**

The analyses of the main effects for sex with regard to spousal individuation were similar to the results of the main effects for sex in the analyses of intergeneration individuation. Univariate effects for sex in the analyses of spousal individuation were the same as those previously found in the analysis of intergeneration individuation, with only two differences. In the present analysis of spousal individuation, positive mood disappeared as a significant result, while the coping strategy of escape-avoidance emerged as a significant finding, $F(1, 206) = 3.79$, $p < .05$ such that females used escape-avoidance as a coping strategy significantly more than males.
Median-split Results for Nuclear Family Triangulation:

Multivariate Findings

After computing the median splits to create high and low levels of nuclear family triangulation, 2 (levels of nuclear family individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed. For this analysis, the minimum cell size was 14, and cell size ranged from 14 to 57, with an average of 27 subjects per cell. Similar to the intergeneration individuation and spousal individuation results, the median-split results for nuclear family triangulation did not yield a significant three-way interaction, nor any statistically significant two-way interactions. However, significant main effects of nuclear family triangulation, $F(25, 183) = 3.39, p < .000$ and sex of parent were found, $F(25, 183) = 2.77, p < .000$. The results from these analyses are found in Tables 5 and 6.

Main Effects for Nuclear Family Triangulation:

Univariate Findings

Univariate analyses for the main effect of nuclear family triangulation yielded twenty-two significant differences between families which were highly triangulated between parents and children and those who were low in triangulation between parents and children. The empty nest parents who were classified as being triangulated with their children reported significantly less marital satisfaction, $F(1, 207) = 7.07, p < .01$, and significantly more marital strain, $F(1, 207) = 5.34, p < .02$, parental strain, $F(1, 207) = 34.77, p < .000$, financial strain, $F(1, 207) = 10.02, p < .002$, and financial stress, $F(1, 207) = 11.14, p < .001$, than those parents who operated in a less triangulated manner with their children. In addition, parents who were more triangulated with their children
also reported higher perceived social support than empty nest parents who were less 
triangulated with their children, $F (1, 207) = 5.10, p < .03$. With regard to parental and 
sex roles, empty nest parents who were more triangulated with their children tended to 
value traditional roles for wives, $F (1, 207) = 4.54, p < .03$, and expressed more 
institutional equality, $F (1, 207) = 7.36, p < .01$, and were open to husbands who 
temporarily would take on a less traditional husband role, $F (1, 207) = 7.86, p < .01$.

Differences between low and high triangulation within the family also emerged 
with regard to differences in coping strategies. Results indicated that highly triangulated 
families utilized significantly more coping strategies which entailed seeking support, $F 
(1, 207) = 20.28, p < .000$, confrontation, $F (1, 207) = 18.71, p < .000$, distancing, $F (1, 
207) = 11.62, p < .001$, self-control, $F (1, 207) = 15.59, p < .000$, accepting responsibility 
for their situation, $F (1, 207) = 11.22, p < .001$, planful problem-solving, $F (1, 207) = 
19.13, p < .000$, and positive reappraisal, $F (1, 207) = 12.41, p < .001$, when compared 
with parents who were classified as having low levels of triangulation within the nuclear 
family unit. Finally, empty nest participants who were more triangulated with their 
children experienced significantly more overall distress, $F (1, 207) = 22.48, p < .000$, and 
negative mood, $F (1, 207) = 18.81, p < .000$. In contrast, empty nest parents who were 
less triangulated with their children reported significantly higher positive mood, $F (1, 
207) = 4.28, p < .04$, and overall life satisfaction, $F (1, 207) = 9.85, p < .002$.

Main Effects for Sex of Parent:

Univariate Findings

The analyses of the main effects for sex with regard to nuclear family 
triangulation were again identical to the results of the main effects for sex in the analyses
of intergeneration individuation with two exceptions. Specifically, in the analysis for nuclear family triangulation, positive affect disappeared as a significant result, while the coping strategy of escape-avoidance, $F (1, 207) = 5.46, p < .02$, emerged as significant such that females used escape-avoidance as a coping strategy during the empty nest as compared to males.

Additional Median-split Results for Nuclear Family Triangulation:

**Multivariate and Univariate Findings**

As reported above, the $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design did not produce any statistically significant interactions; however, the interaction of nuclear family triangulation and sex of adolescent child approached significance, $F (25, 183) = 1.54, p < .058$, and was specific to the coping strategy involving planful problem solving, $F (1, 207) = 6.56, p < .01$. Empty nest parents of adolescent males who reported more triangulation between them and their children tended to use a planful problem-solving strategy to deal with the empty nest transition more than those empty nest parents of adolescent males who were classified as less triangulated within their nuclear family unit. For empty nest parents of females, there was no significant difference between families who scored high or low on scores of nuclear family triangulation and their use of planful problem-solving.

**Exploratory Analysis: Multivariate and Univariate Findings**

An additional exploratory analysis was conducted to investigate the interaction of marital status, gender of parent and levels of individuation. Marital status was defined as being married or not (divorced, widowed, separated, or single). Three identical analyses
were performed, resulting in a 2 (sex of parent) x 2 (marital status) x 2 (levels of individuation) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for each individuation dimension (intergeneration individuation, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation). Results indicated no reliable interaction between marital status, gender of parent, and level of individuation for the three dimensions. However, reliable marital status main effects were found which were specific to financial strain, overall negative mood and traditional mother role such that individuals who were not married experienced higher financial strain and greater overall negative mood as well as a less traditional view of the mother role as compared to married individuals. In addition, univariate analyses suggested that because more absolute levels of distress, non-married parents used a variety of coping mechanisms, including confrontation, seeking support, accepting responsibility for the situation, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal significantly more than married persons.

Results from the Multivariate Analyses of Covariance (MANCOVA):

Multivariate and Univariate Findings

Three supplementary analyses included (1) a 2 (levels of intergeneration individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Covariance, (MANCOVA), with age, education, and extent of caregiving responsibilities as covariates, (2) a 2 (levels of spousal individuation-median split) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Covariance, (MANCOVA), with age, education, and extent of caregiving responsibilities as covariates, and (3) a 2 (levels of nuclear family triangulation-median split) x 2 (sex of adolescent child) x 2 (sex of parent) Multivariate Analysis of Covariance, (MANCOVA),
with age, education, and extent of caregiving responsibilities as covariates. Similar to the previously reported analyses, results from these three analyses did not yield any significant three-way or two-way interactions. Moreover, for each of the three analyses, the main effects for intergeneration individuation, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation were attenuated in the following specific ways. First, for the main effect of intergeneration individuation, in contrast to the results for the Multivariate Analysis of Variance, the specific effects of financial stress, the tendency to hold traditional views toward the wife role, and coping strategies which involved seeking support and planful problem-solving disappeared when age, education, and extent of caretaking responsibilities were controlled. Second, with regard to spousal individuation, the main effects specific to problematic husband alteration and institutional equality, effects which were present in the Multivariate Analysis of Variance, disappeared when controlling for age, education, and extent of caretaking responsibilities in the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance. Finally, in the analysis of nuclear family triangulation using the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance, traditional view of the wife role, institutional equality, and positive affect disappeared as a function of controlling for age, education, and extent of caretaking responsibilities.

Results from the Hierarchical Regression Analyses

In order to evaluate to what extent individual differences in individuation and personal autonomy uniquely predict scores on measures of adjustment to the empty nest, marital satisfaction, marital strain, parental strain, overall level of distress, positive mood, negative mood, life satisfaction, financial strain, financial stress, traditional wife role, traditional husband role, traditional mother role, traditional father role were predicted by
entering age, extent of caregiving responsibilities, education, sex of parent, sex of adolescent child, spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, Sex x Spousal Individuation, Sex x Nuclear Family Triangulation, and Sex x Intergeneration Individuation, and intergeneration individuation in separate hierarchical multiple regressions. Table 7 summarizes the results from this analysis for each variable.

For dyadic satisfaction, hierarchical regression analyses suggested that for the set of predictors as a whole, the regression model was statistically significant from zero. Spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and the interaction of sex of parent and spousal individuation accounted for the most unique variance in dyadic satisfaction scores. With respect to the relationship between spousal individuation and marital satisfaction, post-hoc tests suggested that for males, there is no relationship (Beta = .14, p > .05). In contrast, for females, greater levels of spousal individuation predicted higher levels of marital satisfaction (Beta = .34, p < .01).

For marital strain, the regression model was also found to be significant, with spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and the interaction between sex and spousal individuation. Post-hoc tests revealed that levels of spousal individuation did not predict marital strain for males (Beta = -.12, p > .05). However, greater levels of spousal individuation did predict levels of marital strain (Beta = -.39, p < .01).

With regard to parental strain, the results from the hierarchical regression analyses indicated that the regression equations were statistically significant. Sex of adolescent child, spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, intergeneration individuation, and the interaction of sex and spousal individuation accounted for the most unique variance in parental strain scores, with extent of caretaking responsibilities approaching
significance (see Table 7). With regard to the interaction of sex of parent and spousal individuation, post-hoc tests indicated that for males, greater levels of spousal individuation predicted lower levels of parental strain (Beta = -0.48, p < .01, but not for females (Beta = -0.15, p > .05).

For overall level of distress, the regression model was found to be significant. Extent of caretaking responsibilities, education, sex of the adolescent child, spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and intergeneration individuation all contributed significantly to predicting greater levels of distress scores.

For positive mood, hierarchical regression analyses suggested that the regression model was statistically significant. Spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and the interaction of sex and intergeneration individuation accounted for the most unique variance in positive affect scores, with age and sex of parent approaching significance. Post-hoc tests conducted for the interaction of intergeneration individuation and sex suggested that for males, greater levels of intergeneration individuation predicted higher positive mood (Beta = .31, p < .01), while no significant relationship between levels of sex of parent and spousal individuation was found for females (Beta = .08, p > .05).

As shown in Table 7, hierarchical regression analyses revealed that the regression model was statistically significant for negative mood. Age, sex of adolescent child, spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and intergeneration individuation accounted for the most unique variance in negative affect scores, with sex of parent approaching significance.
For life satisfaction, the results again suggested that for the set of predictors as a whole, the regression model was statistically significant. Spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and intergeneration individuation accounted for the most unique variance in life satisfaction scores, with sex of adolescent child approaching significance.

Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that the regression model was statistically significant with regard to financial strain. Spousal individuation and nuclear family triangulation accounted for the most unique variance in financial strain scores, with extent of caretaking responsibilities approaching significance.

As shown in Table 7, results suggested that for financial stress, the regression model was significant for the set of predictors as a whole. Extent of caretaking responsibilities, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation accounted for the most unique variance in financial stress scores.

For traditional views concerning the wife role, the regression model was statistically significant. Age, extent of caretaking responsibilities, education, sex of adolescent child, spousal individuation, and the interaction of sex and nuclear family triangulation accounted for most unique variance in traditional scores, with the interaction of sex and spousal individuation approaching significance. Post-hoc tests suggested that for males, greater levels of triangulation predicted lower levels of traditional views toward the wife role (Beta = -.37, p < .01). In contrast, no relationship between levels of nuclear family triangulation and traditional views concerning the role of wife were found for females (Beta = .02, p > .05).

With regard to the traditional husband role, hierarchical regression analyses suggested that the regression model was statistically significant with age, extent of
caretaking responsibilities, and sex of parent accounting for the most unique variance in traditional husband scores.

For traditional views with regard to the mother role, the regression model was significant for the set of predictors as a whole. As shown in Table 7, age, sex of adolescent child, spousal individuation, and intergeneration individuation accounted for the most unique variance in traditional mother scores.

Finally, with regard to traditional father role, the hierarchical regression analyses revealed that the regression model was statistically significant for the set of predictors as a whole. Age, extent of caretaking responsibilities, sex of parent, and spousal individuation accounted for the most unique variance in traditional father scores.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Review of Results

While there has been a large amount of research on the late adolescent child and the effect of individuation on adjustment to leaving home, (Blos, 1979; Blustein et al, 1991; Hoffman, 1984; Lapsley et al, 1990; Lopez et al, 1989), little attention has been focused on the parents during this life transition. The purpose of this investigation was to examine the potential of individuation to influence the ability of adult individuals to cope with the empty nest, the period of the family life cycle involving the launching of children into adulthood and the renegotiation and loss of attachment relationships. The working hypothesis was that the degree of success that adults have demonstrated in dealing with issues of autonomy and differentiation with their families of origin as well as their level of individuation with their significant other and their children will impact their coping and adjustment with the normative life transition of the empty nest.

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, three separate types of analyses were employed: (a) three analyses based on the typology and derived means from Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984), (b) three median-split analyses for each individuation dimension (spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and intergeneration individuation), and (c) hierarchical regression analyses. Because of insufficient numbers to fill all cells using Bray’s (1984) typology which most likely resulted from differences
between samples, only a discussion of the median-split results for spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and intergeneration individuation will be detailed. In addition, a discussion of the results of the hierarchical regression analyses will be presented.

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis to be tested stated that the level of individuation from one’s family of origin would positively influence adjustment, marital and life satisfaction, coping strategies, positive affect and inversely influence the level of overall distress. A significant multivariate main effect for intergeneration individuation (defined as the degree to which an adult individual operates in an individuated manner with their own parents) was found, specific to life satisfaction, coping strategies, positive affect and overall distress, thus confirming the majority of effects proposed by hypothesis one. Specifically, univariate analyses suggested that empty nest parents who were less differentiated from their own parents experienced less overall positive mood, less life satisfaction, and more parental strain, financial stress, and greater overall negative affect and distress relative to those parents who operated in a more individuated manner with their parents.

The finding that individuals who are less differentiated from their family of origin experience more overall distress and difficulty coping lends support to Mahler’s (1963) theory that a more differentiated sense of self helps an individual relate to others in a more adaptive manner. In addition, this investigation provides preliminary empirical evidence to the idea originally proposed by Mahler and which has been extended by more recent life span theorists such as Heatherington and Baltes (1988) that separation and
individuation are significant developmental processes which occur throughout the life cycle. The results of this study suggest that for individuals who are less differentiated from their own parents, the experience of the particular life event of the empty nest may be more difficult and stressful and may have more negative consequences as compared to empty nest parents who operate in an individuated manner with their family of origin.

The results of this study also support Bowen's (1978) family systems theory which states that an individual's level of differentiation is reflected in a person's characteristic response to stress. Our data suggests that parents who are less differentiated from their own parents report less adaptive responses to stress during the launching of their children into adulthood. Furthermore, the findings from this investigation also lends some tentative support to Bowen's "multigenerational transmission process," in which a pattern of relating in either a fused or individuated way is transmitted across generations. In our sample, those persons who were classified as less individuated from their family of origin reported more life stress and strain during the empty nest, a time of separation and renegotiation of attachment relationships with their children.

The findings from this study also support the empirical literature on adolescent separation and individuation processes which has found that levels of separation and individuation impact an adolescent's level of adjustment to leaving home. Our study suggests for the first time that, similar to adolescents, levels of separation and individuation also have consequences for adjustment in middle-aged parents whose children are leaving home, thus empirically confirming a life-span perspective on separation and individuation processes by proposing that separation and individuation
issues may be central throughout the life span of an individual, not just during infancy or adolescence. For example, similar to the results of Fleming and Anderson (1986) who found that adolescents who perceived themselves as being more fused or triangulated within their families were more likely to experience poorer college adjustment, lower self-esteem, and a greater number of health-related problems than more emotionally independent peers, our sample of empty nest parents who perceived themselves as more fused with their parents also reported more physical and psychological distress, more negative affect, and less life satisfaction than those parents who described a more differentiated sense of self. In conclusion, our data suggests that individuals who are autonomous, differentiated selves may be more equipped to meet developmental and life challenges not only in adolescence but in adulthood as well.

The results for the main effect of intergeneration individuation also indicated that empty nest parents who were more fused in their interactions with their own parents employed significantly more coping strategies which entailed more confronting, distancing, self-controlling, seeking support, accepting responsibility for the situation, and escape-avoidance, and planful problem-solving as compared to the adults who perceived themselves as more differentiated from their own parents. Based on these results, it appears that participants who were less individuated from their family of origin felt a greater need to use coping strategies during the empty nest transition as compared to those individuals who functioned more autonomously from their own parents. It is interesting that parents who were less individuated from their own parents reported using more coping strategies such as confronting, distancing, seeking support, and escape-avoidance to deal with the empty nest as compared to more autonomous individuals.
These coping strategies are what Folkman et al. (1986) termed emotion-focused coping strategies which describe efforts at reducing or managing emotional distress. It is understandable that a less differentiated person would employ a more emotion-focused coping strategy given the high predilection towards emotionally based reactions and the tendency to be consistently embroiled in emotionality. The results suggest that while the less differentiated parent did attempt to help his or her distress with coping strategies, such emotion-focused strategies, including confrontation, distancing, escape-avoidance are coping strategies which may support the emotional fusion of the family and may, in fact, encourage the maintenance of, and even exacerbate the dysfunctional interactions within the nuclear family.

Finally, while specific effects between low and high individuated individuals did not yield a significant main effect for marital satisfaction per se as hypothesized, empty nest parents who perceived themselves as being less individuated from their parents held significantly more traditional views toward the role of wives and of mothers, and reported higher institutional equality, wife self-actualization, and husband problematic alterations. Our data provides conflicting results since our findings suggest that empty nest parents who are less differentiated from their own parents hold both traditional as well as less traditional views concerning the role of parent and spouse. These conflicting results may reflect more the less dichotomous sex roles in today’s society and the flexibility and blending of sex roles given that most families in today’s society must have two incomes due to economic necessity. It may be that although less individuated persons may hold more traditional views of sex roles, they must function in their families with more flexibility in their roles because of the necessity of having two incomes. Another
potential explanation for these conflicting results with regard to sex roles may be that because the empty nest is a time of renegotiation of attachments between the interactions between parents and children as well as between husband and wife, the views of sex roles are in flux and are changing as a response to this particular life transition. In any event, our results underscore the complexity of sex roles within families, and in particular, in adults during the middle years.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis which stated that the level of individuation from spouse would positively influence adjustment to the empty nest, marital and life satisfaction, positive affect, and inversely affect the level of overall distress was confirmed by a significant multivariate main effect for spousal individuation. Specifically, results indicated that empty nest parents who related in an individuated manner with their partner reported significantly greater marital and life satisfaction, positive affect, and less overall distress than those empty nest parents who were more emotionally fused with their significant other. The main effects for spousal individuation were identical to the main effects of intergeneration individuation with respect to traditional wife role, problematic husband alteration, institutional equality, traditional mother role, parental strain, financial stress, overall level of distress, coping strategies involving confrontation, distancing self-control, and escape avoidance, positive and negative mood, and life satisfaction. Because these effects have been discussed previously for intergeneration individuation, they will not be detailed again; however, there were some differences in the results for spousal individuation which warrant discussion.
Univariate analyses produced significant effects such that parents who were less individuated with their partner reported significantly more marital strain, financial strain, and a tendency to hold a traditional view of fatherhood. The inclusion of financial strain as a significant factor which distinguishes spouses who were more or less differentiated in their relationship with partners makes sense because financial problems are one the main areas of disagreement in intimate relationships. Another important variation between the findings of intergeneration individuation and spousal individuation was that differences between levels of spousal individuation were not significant for wife self-actualization and the following coping strategies: seeking support, responsibility, and planful problem solving. This difference suggests that individuals who are more fused with their spouse may not feel the need to use coping strategies such as seeking support, accepting responsibility, and problem solving. One possible explanation is that spouses who operate in a highly fused manner who would employ these strategies might risk upsetting the emotional fusion in their interactions with their partner.

Our findings of a significant main effect for spousal individuation support several findings in the literature which has examined the role of the family in the separation processes and adjustment for adolescents. The literature on adolescents leaving home suggests that marital conflict negatively influences adjustment to leaving home for adolescents. Similarly, our findings suggest that low levels of spousal differentiation also negatively impacts adjustment for parents whose children have left home. Specifically, our findings of high maladjustment and distress as indicated by high levels of distress, parental and financial strain, and more negative mood in people with less differentiation from spouses during the empty nest transition parallels Kenny’s findings that family
anxiety surrounding separation, in conjunction with parental marital conflict is associated with psychological symptoms for first year college women. Our findings also support the correlation found between dysfunctional family structure and problems in adjustment for adolescents leaving home in the Lopez, Campbell, and Watkins (1988) study. The results from our study as well as the Lopez, Campbell, and Watkins (1988) study underscores the influence of high levels of marital conflict and dysfunctional family interactions (such as low spousal individuation) on adjustment and successful adaptation to the empty nest transition for both adolescence and adults.

Hypothesis Three

Results from the study confirmed hypothesis three which stated that the level of triangulation between the empty nest parent and their children would inversely influence adjustment to the empty nest, marital and life satisfaction, coping strategies, positive affect, and positively influence the level of overall distress. A significant main effect for nuclear family triangulation (defined as the level of triangulation between spouses and their children) indicated that empty nest parents who were classified as being highly triangulated with their children reported significantly less marital and life satisfaction, less overall positive affect, and significantly more distress during the empty nest transition. Additional findings suggested that empty nest parents who were classified as being triangulated with their children also reported significantly more marital strain, parental strain, financial strain, and financial stress. Parents who were more triangulated with their children also reported higher perceived social support than empty nest parents who were less triangulated with their children.
With regards to parental and sex roles, results for nuclear family triangulation paralleled the results found for intergeneration individuation and spousal individuation. Specifically, empty nest parents who were more triangulated with their children tended to value traditional roles for wives, and expressed more institutional equality and problematic husband alterations. Finally, differences between low and high triangulation within the family with regard to differences in coping strategies were similar to the differences found for intergeneration individuation and spousal individuation. Results indicated that highly triangulated families utilized significantly more coping strategies which entailed seeking support, confrontation, distancing, self-control, accepting responsibility for the situation, planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal as compared to parents who were classified as having low levels of triangulation within the nuclear family unit.

Our findings suggest that families in which there is a high degree of triangulation between members experiences significantly more distress, negative affect, and difficulties in adjustment to the empty nest. Our data which presents the point of view of the parent parallels previous findings by Fleming and Anderson (1986) which found that adolescents who perceived themselves as being more fused or triangulated within their nuclear family were more likely to experience poorer college adjustment, lower self-esteem, a greater number of health-related problems and lower grades than more emotionally independent peers. In our sample, empty nest parents who perceived their nuclear family unit to be highly triangulated reported significantly more overall physical and psychological distress, higher negative affect, and less overall satisfaction. Our findings concerning dysfunctional family interactions and their negative impact on family
life transitions such as the empty nest also supports Hoffman and Weiss' (1987) findings of a direct relation between the degree of interpersonal conflict in the family and intrapersonal distress among family members and the emotional adjustment of the adolescent college student. Similar to the findings on adolescents who have recently left home reported by Lopez, Campbell, and Watkins (1988), our data suggests that families which operate in a well-differentiated structure adjust and adapt more successfully to the empty nest than those families which with more triangulation between its members. Our research supports the importance of the family context in which an individual is embedded in understanding the developmental processes of separation and individuation during the transition to the empty nest. Thus, the separation and individuation process may be a mutual process for adults and their adolescent children when their adolescent children leave home. Furthermore, our results suggest that for parents of adolescent children leaving home, the level of individuation from one’s own parents, the level of individuation from spouse, and the level of nuclear family triangulation have a significant impact on coping and adjustment to the empty nest.

Hypothesis Four

Hypothesis Four, which stated that level of individuation from one’s family of origin and spouse as well as level of triangulation within the nuclear family would interact with gender in predicting adjustment to the empty nest, was not statistically confirmed. However, the interaction of nuclear family triangulation and sex of adolescent child approached significance, particular to planful problem solving. Results suggested that empty nest parents of adolescent males tended to used a planful-problem solving strategy to deal with the empty nest transition more than those empty nest parents
of adolescent males who were less triangulated within the nuclear family unit. For empty nest parents of females, there was no difference between families and their use of planful problem solving who scored high or low on scores of triangulation. It may be that parents of adolescent males who are more triangulated in their interactions with their adolescent son view the interaction negatively and use problem solving strategies in an attempt to create more healthy interactions. The absence of this type of coping strategy in parents with adolescent females may be a result of parents' perceptions of the difference between males and females in their individuation processes as proposed by Gilligan (1982), where continued connectedness with the parents may be viewed as more "normal" for females, and hence, not discouraged by parents.

The absence of a significant result for the interaction of sex of parent and sex of adolescent child and the individuation dimensions suggests that for this sample the specific dyadic configurations (father-daughter, father-son, mother-daughter, mother-son) did not interact with levels of individuation from the family or origin, spouse, and children to predict adjustment and coping with the empty nest. Our results do not support the results in the literature on adolescents leaving home which suggest that parent-child dyadic interactions composed of specific gender configurations may influence the adjustment to leaving home (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987). From the perspective of the middle-aged empty nest parent, it may be that quality of the relationship and the type of parental-child interaction (such as the level of individuation of the family members or the presence or absence of triangulation in the interactions between family members) is more important than the specific gender configurations in whether or not the experience of the empty nest is positive or negative.
In addition to the interaction which approached significance, significant main effects of sex of parent were found for all three individuation variables. The results for the main effect of sex of parent were identical for the spousal individuation and nuclear family triangulation variables. Specifically, males reported having significantly higher institutional equality, and more values which tended towards a more traditional view of the husband and father roles as compared to females. In contrast, females reported higher levels of overall distress and significantly more negative affect than males. Finally, females reported using the following coping strategies significantly more often than males specifically to deal with the empty nest transition: seeking support, escape avoidance, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal. With regard to the main effect of sex of parent for intergeneration individuation, results were identical to those found for spousal individuation and nuclear family triangulation except that the use of an escape-avoidance coping strategy was not significant for either males or females; however, in addition to overall level of distress, and negative mood, females reported experiencing significantly higher positive mood than males as well.

Based on the results from our investigation, it does appear that females experience more overall distress, negative mood, and utilize significantly more coping strategies to deal with the empty nest as compared to empty nest fathers. Our findings support the research on adolescents leaving home which has indicated the separation and individuation process may be differentially experienced by men and women. For example, our results support Hoffman and Weiss' (1987) finding that women comparing men and women who are adjusting to college, women experienced higher levels of distress than men. Similarly, in our sample of empty nest parents, mothers reported
significantly more distress and negative mood when compared to fathers. Our results support Gilligan's theory that because women define themselves in a context of relationship, women may be more sensitive to relational issues and may experience more distress at a time when there is a loss or renegotiation of that attachment. Another possible explanation may be that women are more sensitive to relational issues, and subsequently may report more information and concern over relationships than do males. An additional factor which also may explain women's higher level of distress during the empty nest when compared to men is that for many women, the empty nest period may coincide with menopause which may increase physical and emotional symptoms during this time and make this life event more salient for women than for men. Future research is needed to investigate the relation of the empty nest, menopause, and women's emotional well being during this life transition. With regard to coping with the empty nest, when compared with men, women use significantly more coping strategies involving seeking support, planful problem-solving and positive reappraisal in dealing with the empty nest. These coping strategies are all adaptive and proactive coping strategies, suggesting that while women may be more negatively affected by the empty nest, they tend to utilize constructive, adaptive means to take care of themselves. It is particularly interesting that seeking support is one of the significant coping strategies used by women as compared to men. It may be that because of the loss or renegotiation of their attachment to their children and the change in their role and duty as mother, women will seek to fill relational needs by seeking support.
Discussion of the Hierarchical Regression Results

Results of the present study provide strong evidence that individuation dimensions uniquely predict individual differences in scores on measures of adjustment to the empty nest, sex roles, marital satisfaction, marital and parental strain, affect balance, financial strain and stress when controlling for age, extent of caregiving responsibilities, education, sex of parent, sex of adolescent child, spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, Sex x Spousal Individuation, Sex x Nuclear Family Triangulation, and Sex x Intergeneration Individuation, and intergeneration individuation. Spousal individuation was the strongest predictor of all and accounted for the most unique variance in scores on dyadic satisfaction, parental strain, overall distress, positive and negative moods, life satisfaction, financial stress and strain, and traditional views concerning the wife, mother and father roles. Nuclear Family Triangulation was the individuation dimension which was the next best predictor, accounting for the most unique variance in scores on dyadic satisfaction, parental strain, overall distress, positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, and financial strain and stress. Next, intergeneration individuation accounted for the most unique variance parental strain, overall distress, negative affect, life satisfaction, and traditional mother role. Furthermore, the interactions of sex of parent and individuation also yielded significant findings as well. First, the interaction of sex of parent and spousal individuation accounted for the most unique variance on scores on dyadic satisfaction and parental strain. Second, the interaction of sex of parent and nuclear family triangulation accounted for the most unique variance for traditional wife role. Finally, the interaction of sex of parent and
intergeneration individuation accounted for the most unique variance in traditional wife role scores.

Although no interactions were found in the Multivariate Analysis of Variance, results from the regression analyses suggest that there are gender differences which interact with levels of individuation in terms of positively predicting adjustment to the empty nest. For example, post-hoc tests indicated that women who function more autonomously from their husbands experience greater levels of marital satisfaction and less marital strain during the empty nest. These findings help explain previous conflicting results concerning the relationship between the empty nest and marital satisfaction by clarifying the factors such as levels of individuation which may predict greater marital satisfaction during the empty nest. In addition, the results of the current study underscores that the relationship between the empty nest and marital satisfaction is perhaps a more complex phenomenon than previously described, and is differentially experienced by men and women.

The post-hoc findings that greater levels of differentiation from family of origin predicted higher positive mood for males but not for females again supports Gilligan's (1982) theory that women may define themselves more in terms of relationships as compared to men and thus may not view separation from one's own parents as necessary or beneficial. In conclusion, the individuation dimensions of spousal individuation, nuclear family triangulation, and intergeneration individuation are robust determinants of adjustment. It appears that an individual's adjustment, affect, role strain, and sex role values during the empty nest is strongly influenced by the direct effects of their level of individuation from their own family of origin, spouse, and children.
Summary

The literature which has focused on the experience of parents during the launching of their children into adulthood has been limited in the amount of serious, empirical work which has been undertaken on the subject. Much of the knowledge about the empty nest has been theoretical, anecdotal, demographic, and the subject of popular literature. As stated previously, investigators who have studied the impact of the empty nest have primarily focused on mothers and have generally attempted to examine whether or not this event has a positive or negative effect. Results from these studies have been conflicting with some researchers suggesting that the empty nest precipitated deleterious changes in the mother’s well being, while others suggesting the empty nest has a positive impact for women with respect to marital happiness, and overall life satisfaction. These conflicting results for the empty nest may have resulted because of their overly simplistic view of a very complicated, complex, and dynamic transition.

The findings in the present study have uncovered a more complete, yet more complicated picture of the empty nest by investigating several factors which may influence whether or not an individual experiences this normative life transition as negative or positive. First, the results from the present study suggest that levels of individuation from a parent’s family of origin, spouse, and children differentially effect one’s adjustment, coping, and experience of the empty nest. Empty nest parents who are less differentiated from their own parents, from their spouse, and from their children report a more negative experience of the empty nest with more overall stress and role strain, more negative mood, and less life satisfaction than empty nest parents who operate in an autonomous, individuated way with their parents, spouses, and children. Our study
underscores the importance of the family context in understanding this developmental transition and supports Carter and McGoldrick's conceptualization of a family life cycle which proposes that the process of separation and individuation is not the isolated, developmental task for the adolescent leaving home, but is a process occurring within a family context, influencing the behavior of other family members. Furthermore, our results suggest that present as well as past experiences of separation and individuation processes impact how one copes with the adjustment to the empty nest. The findings from our sample lend support to the significance of early, successful individuation experiences for later experiences involving separation and loss.

Our findings on the relationship of sex roles and the empty nest were less definitive, given our conflicting results that empty nest parents who were less autonomous experience both traditional views as well as less traditional views about the roles of wife, husband, mother, and father. These conflicting results make it difficult to unanimously confirm previous theories that empty nest women who are more traditional and by implication, more invested in the maternal role, have a more difficult time during the empty nest period. However, our findings indicate that views concerning sex roles may be in flux, both in terms of this particular moment in the life cycle of the family which the empty nest represents and in terms of a general, cultural trend towards the loosening of the roles which have traditionally been conceptualized for males and females. The conflicting results for gender and parental roles, therefore, may be specific to this cohort and historical time in which employment opportunities for women have increased, an economic trend which demands two incomes within a family, an a social trend in which fathers are more active and involved in the caretaking of children. In spite
of conflicting results concerning the influence of sex roles on adjustment to the empty nest, the results from this current investigation support more definitively and consistently the finding that less individuated empty nest parents experience significantly higher parental and marital strain as compared to empty nest parents who are more differentiated from their own parents, spouses and children.

The lack of a significant finding of an interaction of sex of parent, sex of adolescent child, and the individuation dimensions suggests that different parent-child dyadic configurations (mother-son, mother daughter, father-son, father-daughter dyads) did not effect the experience of the empty nest. Instead, data suggest that autonomous functioning and a history of adaptive, autonomous functioning with one's family of origin, marital partner, and children is more important in predicting one's adjustment to the empty nest. The significant main effects of sex of parent, nonetheless, did support the notion that women and men experience the empty nest transition differently as well, with women experiencing more distress and more negative mood. The results of this current investigation may indicate that women, who, according to Gilligan (1982), define themselves in a context of relationship, may experience more distress at a time when significant relationships are in flux. Nonetheless, additional results found that women employed significantly more proactive and adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking support, positive reappraisal, and planful-problem solving as compared to men. Because the empty nest transition is anticipatory and inevitable, it may be that although women grieve the loss of the child-rearing phase of their lives, they can meet the demands of the new definitions of themselves and their relationships in a relatively positive and adaptive way. This may better explain the conflicting results previously found in investigations of
the psychological well being of women experiencing the empty nest and again underscores the complexity of women's experiences during this particular life transition. Our findings suggest that perhaps the overall phenomenon of the empty nest has changed since the initial thrust of research on this life transition in the 1950's. Unlike earlier research, our sample consisted primarily of two working parents, not the family of the 1950's in which the mother's sole task was the raising of the children, while her husband was the breadwinner. Similar to early research, however, is the presence of distress and readjustment to this transition. While it may no longer be appropriate to call this distress, "empty nest syndrome", since it was originally used to define homemakers who became depressed when their children left home because their purpose in life, the raising of children, had ceased, our study does suggest that for many, this life event may be a difficult transition. It may be that the parents who were sampled in this study represent a cohort of parents who live in a more mobile society in which close proximity to family and support networks are more tenuous. As a result, such a life transition, involving the redefinition of family roles and relationships may be more significant and have a more powerful impact on their lives.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the present study have several clinical implications for the practice of psychology. First, the fact that individuals who are less individuated from their family of origin, spouse and children experience more overall distress during the empty nest suggests that there may be a specific need for services for adult parents who are experiencing the renegotiation of familial attachments during mid-life. Furthermore, results from this study suggest that it may be possible for mental health practitioners to
identify not only adolescents, but also parents, and whole families who are at risk in successfully coping with a transition involving separation and individuation. Psychologists who work with middle-aged adults need to be aware of and assess the impact of life transitions, such as the empty nest for each individual and his or her particular situation. In addition, institutions, such as high schools and college counseling centers, may find it beneficial to offer workshops or groups for parents who may be more likely to experience the negative effects of the transition. Because the empty nest can be anticipated, the potential for preventive interventions where the goal is to obtain autonomous and differentiated functioning of its family members is great.

As mentioned previously, results of this study also indicated that those empty nest parents who were more likely at risk did attempt coping strategies; however, many of the coping strategies employed, such as confrontation, distancing, escape avoidance are coping strategies which support the emotional fusion of the family and may, in fact, encourage the maintenance of, and even exacerbate the dysfunctional fusion or triangulation within the nuclear family unit. Based on the results of this study, it may be beneficial, within a preventive mental health framework, to help at-risk parents and families to develop more effective styles and strategies for coping which are less rooted in emotionality. Interventions which teach more adaptive coping strategies in general may impact how an empty nest parent copes with the specific demands of the empty nest transition.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this study was the unequal and in some cases, small cell sizes and the lower number of males who participated in the study. It is possible that
with larger numbers of males and more equal numbers of individuals comprising each of
the cells, even more significant and powerful results may be found. Another limitation is
that the sample in this study consisted of males and females, ranging in age from 33 to 63
who belong to the cohort born between the years of 1935 to 1965. Consequently, the
results of the current investigation may not generalize to parents who were born after
1965.

Furthermore, the results of this investigation were limited to the empty nest, a life
transition or event which is considered to be a normative one that can be anticipated and
predicted. It is unclear as to whether or not the findings of this study would generalize to
ore unanticipated or non-normative life events.

Another limitation of this study concerns the unique predictors and independent
variables that were chosen and the means by which they were measured. It is arguable,
for example, that the measures used to define the three individuation dimensions are too
limited and simplistic of a very complex and dynamic phenomenon. However, the
significant results from this study suggest the benefits of continuing to explore this
complicated, yet highly significant and vital construct of development.

The results of this study may also be limited by the way in which empty nest was
defined. For the purposes of this study, empty nest was defined as the period of time
which commences when the youngest child departs from the home and there are no
longer any children living in the home. As previously discussed in the review of the
literature, however, due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition, there is confusion
as to what constitutes an empty nest. Our findings may be limited in that this study
focused on the point in the empty nest transition where all children have been launched
from home. Adjustment and well-being may be experienced differently by parents who are at the beginning stages of the transition when only the first child has departed from the home.

In addition, this study did not investigate who initiated the leaving of the child. Whether or not the leaving of the child was forced by the parent, was initiated by a child and accepted reluctantly by the parents, or a mutual decision or expectation on the part of both parents and child could differentially impact the experience of the empty nest.

Another limitation of the current study is the selective nature of the sample. The sample consisted primarily of married, Caucasian upper middle class parents whose children left home specifically to attend college. It may be for the families in our sample that attending college is a necessary, expected, normative event. It is unclear, however, if the leaving of a child from a low-income family, for example, would be viewed as a positive or negative event. Furthermore, the notion of separation and individuation is grounded in a European/ Euro-American theoretical tradition. The theoretical premise in this study may not be supported by different ethnic cultures which may not value separation and individuation as a normative developmental process.

The findings of the current investigation may also be limited because of the utilization of median-splits to define high and low levels of the three individuation dimensions. According to Bray, Williamson, and Malone (1984), possible range of scores for intergeneration individuation, spousal individuation, and nuclear family triangulation were 8-40, 20-100, and 10-50, respectively. Ranges of scores from our sample were 5-34 for intergeneration individuation, 15-62 for spousal individuation, and 12-38 for nuclear family triangulation. Our results may be limited by a potential
restriction of the range of scores. Thus, what may be considered a high or low level of individuation in our sample may not be representative of high/low levels of individuation from another sample.

With regard to the regression analyses, the findings of this study may be limited in light of the potential capitalization on chance and/or the inflation of Type I errors.

A final limitation of this study concerns the self-report nature of the data. All the data were collected by means of a self-report questionnaire; therefore, the subjective responses of the participants were considered to be reliable and valid indicators of psychological functioning. Although all the instruments employed in the questionnaire were reliable instruments, subjects may have responded in a way that injected a bias (either positive or negative) into the results, thereby influencing the validity of the current study.

Future Research

Results from the present investigation suggest several areas of future research. First, future research which allows larger and equal numbers of participants, and in particular, larger number of males to be classified into the cells would further knowledge about the effect of separation and individuation processes and gender on the experience of the empty nest. Second, additional regression analyses which investigates the interaction of the individuation dimensions and sex of child and sex of parent would provide additional information in predicting adjustment to the empty nest. Because of the strong support which was found for the influence of an individual's level of individuation from family of origin, spouse, and children on adjustment to the empty nest, it may be useful to extend the applicability of our findings by investigating other life transitions.
which involve a renegotiation or loss of an attachment relationship, such as divorce or 
widowhood. Such research would provide valuable information and support to the life-
span perspective of a developmental construct such as separation and individuation. 
Future research which collects data on levels of individuation dimensions and adjustment 
not only from parents but from the adolescent leaving home as well potentially could 
provide empirical confirmation of Bowen's multigenerational transmission process in 
families. The results of this study underscore the value of further investigation to explore 
in more depth the differential role that levels of individuation from family of origin, 
spouse, and children play in mediating reactions to life events during adulthood which are 
defined in terms of a renegotiation or loss of a significant attachment relationship.
Table 1

**Observed Means for Main Effects of Intergeneration Individuation using Bray’s Typology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Low Intergeneration</th>
<th></th>
<th>High Intergeneration</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Hopkins (Distress)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
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<td>Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14.90</td>
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Table 2

**Observed Means for Main Effect of Spousal Individuation using Bray's Typology**

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<th>High Spousal Indiv.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wife Self-actualization</td>
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<td>Traditional Father Role</td>
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Table 3

Observed Means for Main Effects of Intergeneration Individuation

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<th>High Intergeneration</th>
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Table 4

**Observed Means for Main Effects of Spousal Individuation**

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<th>Dependent Variables</th>
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<th>High Spousal Indiv.</th>
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<td></td>
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Table 5

Observed Means for Main Effect of Nuclear Family Triangulation

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Table 6

Observed Means for Main Effect of Sex of Parent

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Table 7

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

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<td>4.09, p &lt; .01</td>
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</table>

| Marital Strain     | age                   | -.01 | .00    | .00 |
|                    | caregiving            | -.04 | .00    | .00 |
|                    | education             | -.06 | .00    | .00 |
|                    | childsex              | -.02 | .00    | .00 |
|                    | sex                   | .02  | .00    | .00 |
|                    | spousal indiv.        | -.32**| .08    | .08 |
|                    | nuclear fam triang.   | -.22**| .12    | .04 |
|                    | intergen. indiv.      | .00  | .11    | .00 |
|                    | 11                    | -1.08**| .14    | .03 |
|                    | 12                    | -.03 | .13    | .00 |
|                    | 13                    | -.12 | .13    | .00 |
| R²                 | .18                   |      |        |     |
| Adj. R²            | .13                   |      |        |     |
| R                  | .42                   |      |        |     |
| Overall F (11, 201)| 3.88, p < .01         |      |        |     |

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
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R² = .26  
Adj.R² = .22  
R = .51
Overall F (11, 201) = 6.35, p < .01

| Distress          | age            | -.04 | .00    | .00 |
|                   | caregiving     | .24**| .05    | .05 |
|                   | education      | -.13*| .06    | .01 |
|                   | childsex       | -.26**| .13  | .07 |
|                   | sex            | .09  | .13    | .00 |
|                   | spousal indiv. | -.28**| .20  | .07 |
|                   | nuclear fam triang. | -.25**| .25  | .05 |
|                   | intergen. Indiv.| -.20**| .28  | .03 |
|                   | 11             | -.09 | .28    | .00 |
|                   | 12             | .20  | .28    | .00 |
|                   | 13             | -.39 | .27    | .00 |

R² = .31  
Adj.R² = .28  
R = .56
Overall F (11, 201) = 8.39, p < .01

(table continues)
<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Beta</th>
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<th>ΔR²</th>
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<td>.01</td>
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R² = .11
Adj.R² = .06
R = .33
Overall F (11, 201) = 2.30, p < .01

| Negative Affect   | age             | -.15* | .02   | .02  |
|                   | caregiving      | .11   | .03   | .01  |
|                   | education       | .05   | .02   | .00  |
|                   | childbirth      | -.18**| .05   | .03  |
|                   | sex             | .13a  | .06   | .01  |
|                   | spousal indiv.  | -.29**| .14   | .08  |
|                   | nuclear fam triang. | -.22** | .18 | .04 |
|                   | intergen. indiv. | -.21**| .21 | .03 |
|                   | 11              | -.18  | .21   | .00  |
|                   | 12              | .00   | .20   | .00  |
|                   | 13              | -.54  | .21   | .01  |

R² = .25
Adj.R² = .21
R = .50
Overall F (11, 201) = 6.02, p < .01

(table continues)
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$R^2 = .18$
Adj.$R^2 = .14$
$R = .43$
Overall $F(11,201) = 4.12, p < .01$

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Adj.$R^2 = .10$
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Overall $F(11,201) = 3.12, p < .01$

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$R^2 = .11$
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$R = .33$
Overall $F (11, 201) = 2.20, p < .02$

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<th>nuclear fam triang.</th>
<th>intergen. individ.</th>
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<th>I2</th>
<th>I3</th>
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$R^2 = .27$
Adj.$R^2 = .23$
$R = .52$
Overall $F (11, 201) = 6.78, p < .01$

(table continues)
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Predictors</th>
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R² = .15  
Adj.R² = .11  
R = .39  
Overall F (11, 201) = 3.28, p < .01

| Traditional Mother      | age                   | .19**  | .03     | .03  |
| Role                    | caregiving            | .09    | .03     | .00  |
|                         | education             | .01    | .03     | .00  |
|                         | childsex              | -.16*  | .05     | .02  |
|                         | sex                   | -.03   | .05     | .00  |
|                         | spousal indiv.        | -.28** | .12     | .06  |
|                         | nuclear fam triang.   | .03    | .11     | .00  |
|                         | intergen. Indiv.      | -.17*  | .13     | .02  |
|                         | 11                    | .42    | .13     | .00  |
|                         | 12                    | .27    | .13     | .00  |
|                         | 13                    | .02    | .12     | .00  |

R² = .17  
Adj.R² = .12  
R = .41  
Overall F (11, 201) = 3.69, p < .01

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R² = .20
Adj.R² = .15
R = .45
Overall F (11, 201) = 4.52, p < .01

Note. 11 = Sex x Spousal Individuation
       12 = Sex x Nuclear Family Triangulation
       13 = Sex x Intergeneration Individuation

**p < .01
* p < .05
Δ p < .10
REFERENCES


*Family Coordinator*, 369-375.


