

Spring 2017

# Making Meaning Of Motherhood: A Phenomenological Investigation Of Mothers Raised By Grandparents

Rebecca L. Sheffield

*College of William and Mary - School of Education*, [rlsheffield@email.wm.edu](mailto:rlsheffield@email.wm.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://publish.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Sheffield, Rebecca L., "Making Meaning Of Motherhood: A Phenomenological Investigation Of Mothers Raised By Grandparents" (2017). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1499449985.  
<http://doi.org/10.21220/W4T363>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M Publish. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M Publish. For more information, please contact [wmpublish@wm.edu](mailto:wmpublish@wm.edu).

**MAKING MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF MOTHERS  
RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS**

---

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education  
The College of William & Mary in Virginia

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Rebecca L. Sheffield

March 2017

**MAKING MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF MOTHERS  
RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS**

by

Rebecca L. Sheffield

---

Approved March 2017 by

Victoria A. Foster, Ed.D.

Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Charles R. McAdams, Ed.D.

Thomas J. Ward, Ph.D.

## Dedication

This research is dedicated to my grandparents, Dorothy and Millard Reynolds, who gave up the quiet and relative ease of their retirement years to take on the raising of another child. They helped me to know and understand the love and dedication of family, and strengthened the development of my own ideas of what it means to be a mother.

## Table of Contents

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	viii
List of Tables	ix
Abstract	x
Chapter One: Introduction	2
Statement of the Problem	4
Justification for the Study	5
Theoretical Rationale	6
Purpose of the Study and Research Question	9
Research Approach	10
Researcher Perspectives	11
Limitations	13
Summary	14
Chapter Two: Literature Review	16
Changes in Family Structure	16
Children Raised by Grandparents	21
Effects of Parental Disruption	26
Role of Motherhood	27
Motherhood in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	28
Women's Ways of Knowing	30
Ego Development	35
Summary	39

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology	41
Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Paradigm	41
Design	42
Research Questions	44
Sample Selection and Site	45
Participants	45
Setting	46
The Role of the Researcher	47
Bracketing	48
Ethical Considerations	49
Data Collection	50
Instrumentation	52
Washington University Sentence Completion Test	52
Data Analysis Procedures	53
Summary	56
Chapter Four: Results and Within-Case Analysis	57
Research Site	58
Analytical Method	58
Participants	59
Descriptions of Participants	60
Participant 1 “Allie”	60
Participant 2 “Andrea”	68
Participant 3 “Carmen”	74

Participant 4 “Constance”	80
Participant 5 “Elizabeth”	85
Participant 6 “Joy”	89
Participant 7 “Sarah”	93
Cross Case Analysis	97
Emergent Themes	101
Theme 1: Unselfish Motherhood	101
Theme 2: Hindered Belonging	102
Theme 3: Generational Incongruence	103
Theme 4: <i>A la Carte</i> Motherhood Models	104
Theme 5: Perceived Level of Support	104
Theme 6: Reflective Gratitude	105
Ego Development Analysis	106
Women’s Ways of Knowing	107
Summary	107
Chapter Five: Discussion	109
Purpose of the Study: Review and Summary	109
Links to Literature	113
Implications	122
Future Research	122
Counselor Education and Supervision	124
Family Therapy Practice	126
Limitations and Delimitations	128

Personal Statement	131
References	133
Appendices	144
Appendix A: Letter to Participants	144
Appendix B: Informed Consent	145
Appendix C: Demographic Questions	146
Appendix D: Interview Protocol	147
Appendix E: WUSCT-81 – Abbreviated Form	148
Vita	151



## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of a few influential people, without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. My deepest respect and gratitude goes to my committee for their encouragement and support. My chair, Victoria Foster, saw potential in me and provided numerous opportunities to foster leadership skills and my own personal growth throughout this program. Rip McAdams provided an excellent example of an educator and a counselor to which to aspire. Tom Ward helped me see the many possibilities and increased my excitement about research.

I would like to thank my family from the depths of my heart. Their patience and support throughout this process was invaluable. Since our eyes met in eighth grade science class, my husband Paul, has been my most important advocate, cheering me on to new heights. My daughters, Hannah and Emily, taught me more than anyone in my life about what it means to be a mother. They inspire me daily to learn more and be better than I was yesterday.

Words are not enough to thank the women who participated in this study. Each of them invited me into their world for a little while and shared some deep and beautiful moments. I'm excited to see how their contributions benefit mothers and families in the future. I'm forever grateful for their time and willingness to share their experiences.

My gratitude and best wishes go to grandparents everywhere who are willing to step in when life gets hard to take care of their grandchildren. Being a parent after raising their own children is often a challenging, yet joyful task. Their support and love benefit children into adulthood in ways we have yet to fully understand.

## **List of Tables**

Table 3.1 Sequential Coding Process	50
Table 4.1 Attribute Table of Study Participants	60
Table 4.2 Research Sub-Questions and Samples of In Vivo Codes	98
Table 4.3 Emergent Themes	101
Table 5.1 Research Question with Emergent Themes	111

**MAKING MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION OF MOTHERS RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the construction of motherhood of women raised by grandparents. The epistemological framework of *Women's Ways of Knowing* provided the theoretical perspective and the concept of ego development added descriptive depth. Seven mothers who identified as having been raised primarily by one or more grandparents were recruited for the study. Data collection consisted of one semi-structured interview and the shortened version of the Washington Sentence Completion Test to assess ego development. Questions this study sought to answer were: What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent? Sub-questions were: What themes within the meaning-making of women raised by grandparents may contribute to perceptions of motherhood? What are the influences of gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood by women raised by grandparents? What is the relationship between the participant's level of ego development and her perceptions of motherhood? The following themes emerged through this inductive study: unselfish motherhood; hindered belonging; generational incongruence; *a la carte* motherhood models; level of perceived support; and reflective gratitude. Implications for future research, Counselor Education and Supervision, and Family Counseling are discussed, as are limitations of the study.

REBECCA L. SHEFFIELD

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY IN VIRGINIA

**MAKING MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF MOTHERS  
RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS**

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The United States (U.S.) Census Bureau (2014) reported that 10 percent of children in the U.S. have lived in the home of a grandparent, up from eight percent just 10 years before. No parent is present in many of these households, leaving more than half of those grandparents with primary caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren under the age of 18. Circumstances that require a grandparent to take on the role of caregiver are often severe, ranging from child abuse or neglect, abandonment, parental substance abuse, homelessness, parental death, or parental deployment (Smith & Palmieri, 2007; Edwards & Ray, 2010). Such situational stressors often take a toll on all family members.

Grandparents with custody of their grandchildren often experience serious challenges including anxiety, depression, isolation, declining physical and emotional well-being, financial difficulties, and role confusion (Heywood, 1999). Grandchildren frequently suffer emotional and behavioral problems and may also experience academic and social difficulties due to the circumstances that led to displacement. Contextual factors, such as racial discrimination and poverty, further compound problems associated with such a transition (Edwards & Ray, 2010). However, little is known regarding the impact and influence of this alternate family structure upon children. Although minimal studies have explored family relationships within grandparent-headed families, some have examined well-being within various family structures. For example, King, Boyd,

and Thorsen (2015) explored perceptions of family relationships of adolescents from stepfamilies. The authors found that the level of children's feelings of family belonging was directly linked to their well-being. A later study by King and Boyd (2016) examined factors associated with perceptions of family relationships among adolescents from two parent households. The researchers found that adolescents' perceptions of belonging within a family were associated with well-being indicators, which vary according to family structure. An additional finding was that the adolescents' sense of family belonging was more connected to the quality of family relationships. Findings from these studies led the authors in both cases to recommend that future research explore perceptions of family in other types of family structures.

Little is known regarding what occurs generationally as female children grow up in custodial grandparent-led households and then later become parents themselves. What messages from their childhood regarding parenting and family functioning are carried forward that construct ideas of motherhood? A surge in the number of children placed in the care of grandparents occurred in the 1980's; researchers speculate that the crack epidemic, the AIDS epidemic, as well as a national financial crisis contributed to the rise (Roe & Minkler, 1998). Based on the associated stressful situations that require a child to live with grandparents, grandparent-headed families are likely to experience circumstances that could lead them to seek family counseling and other community services (Edwards & Ray, 2010). Currently, very little research examines the experiences of adult females who grew up in a diverse family structure, their perceptions of family relationships, or what influences are present within their families as they become parents.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Despite evidence that families and family structures are more complicated, current institutions remain organized to provide services to a nuclear family form (Walsh, 2012). The most recent U.S. Census revealed the changing landscape of the American family (2010), showing a broader array of family roles and relationships. The prevalence of single-parent families is growing and now makes up over 25% of all American households. Individuals are waiting longer to marry and start a family, and are choosing to have fewer children (Walsh, 2012). Views of gender identity and sexual orientation are evolving, with same-sex couple parenting becoming more prevalent (Walsh, 2012). In addition, the presentation of interracial couples and families in mainstream media is more frequent.

McGoldrick, Garcia Preto, and Carter (2016) suggested a reevaluation of the traditional concept of family and an expansion of the definition. As families with increasingly complex problems present for counseling services, counselors require direction in the treatment and intervention of families' unique and specific therapeutic goals. Edwards and Ray (2010) noted that despite the many challenges and needs that result from being placed in the care of grandparents, children can and do exhibit strengths, noting that children "frequently experience a nurturing familial environment with relatives whose biological connection to them is second only to their parents" (p. 183). As such, Edwards and Ray (2010) recommended that counseling services are needed that attend to cultural contexts and are aligned with the family members' specific needs.

Although a search of the literature revealed a small number of articles that discussed problems arising from children being placed in a grandparent's home, minimal research is available that hones in on specific needs within the context of family therapy. More information is necessary to determine the particular needs inherent within the grandparent-headed family structure. Further, more research is needed that examines generational impacts as the children mature and become parents themselves. Research reveals that individuals raised in the care of their grandparents can have both positive and negative mental health outcomes, yet less is known about factors that contribute to those outcomes (Dolbin-McNab & Keiley, 2009). Specifically, little extant research focuses on strengths and challenges within grandparent-headed homes that also may carry over into adulthood as grandchildren become parents themselves.

### **Justification for the Study**

As family structures grow exponentially more diverse, families are often faced with interruptions in custodial parenting. Associated challenges of an interruption in parenting include emotional and behavioral problems in children that are likely to carry over into adulthood and influence development and perceptions of family (Tyrka, Wier, Price, Ross, & Carpenter, 2008). Stereotypical perspectives persist and are reflected in societal and community expectations. Resources provided by organizational structures have not adapted along with changes, and as such, are based heavily on the outdated idea of the nuclear family as normal or typical (Farrell, VandeVusse, & Ocobock, 2012). Although all family members are likely to experience challenges due to family disruption when grandparents assume parenting responsibilities for their grandchildren, remaining in the home of grandparents may be the most positive setting to care for children (Edwards



& Ray, 2008). To provide effective interventions, family counselors require a more comprehensive view of the unique and specific needs of families with diverse perspectives of family, including families in which an adult was raised by a grandparent. Hardships associated with being placed in the care of grandparents lead to emotional and behavioral challenges that often carry forward into adulthood. However, close relationships between children and their grandparents can contribute unique advantages that result from shared family identity (Soliz, 2007).

As the configuration of families in the U.S. continues to grow in diversity, specialized study is needed to understand the complex needs of differing family forms. To advance the scholarly discourse imperative, this study focused on a crucial dimension of the complexity of a growing and unique family form: mothers who were raised by custodial grandparents. By examining perceptions of the role of motherhood within this specific atypical family form, researchers may gain a better understanding of particular needs that can inform family counselors in guiding treatment when working with this specialized population. The concept of *Women's Ways of Knowing* provides a tool for conceptualizing the construction of motherhood among adult women who were raised by grandparents.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

The current study will use epistemological frameworks to conceptualize role development to gain a better understanding of the experience of women raised by grandparents who are now mothers. Epistemological theories provide a framework to describe how individuals make meaning of their experiences. *Women's Ways of Knowing*, a feminist epistemological framework put forth by Belenky, Clinchy,

Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), is a valuable tool for conceptualizing mothers who were raised by grandparents. Belenky et al. (1986) argued that women's knowledge of self in relation to others and authority could be explained within a series of categories of knowing. These categories which exist on a continuum, include: silenced, received, subjective, procedural, and constructed knowledge. On one end of the continuum are women who experience powerlessness as a result of being silenced knowers, lacking self-awareness. At the other end are constructed knowers, women who experience self-awareness as well as the understanding of others' experience. Women on this end of the spectrum can be described as feeling empowered regarding constructing meaning of their experience and influencing their own lives and the lives of others within their communities (Belenky, et al., 1986). A mother on the constructed knowledge end of the spectrum who was raised by grandparents would be more able to assist her own children with empowerment and the development of self and other awareness. *Women's Ways of Knowing* has been utilized as a conceptual model in the understanding of high-risk mothers and their ability to influence family relationships and their children positively (Belenky et al., 1996).

Loevinger's theory of ego development is a relevant model for further informing the developmental perspective of taking on a maternal role regarding the capacity of individuals' meaning-making. It also incorporates relational style, impulse control, cognitive function, and themes of moral development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Further, the assessment of ego development, the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) was originally normed on women (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

Promotion of ego development among adults is facilitated by disequilibrating life experiences (Manners, Durkin, & Nesdale, 2004). Research indicates increased stage development when the learning environment is designed to support psychological growth. Ego development is an applicable framework for understanding motherhood in women who were raised by grandparents as it offers insight into the meaning that adults construct regarding familial roles (Loevinger, 1976). Women raised by grandparents typically have experienced a disequilibrating life experience, but also may have received the support necessary for the facilitation of growth through relationships with grandparents.

Practitioner-informed research found that adults who were not raised by their biological parents experienced specific strengths and challenges, and provided strategies that can be utilized to work with those families' unique needs (Jurkiewicz, 2014; Dolbin-MacNab, Rodgers, & Traylor, 2009). For example, Dolbin-MacNab et al. (2009) found that children raised in kinship care often experienced loving family relationships and increased stability, but also experienced family conflict and problems associated with the age gap between themselves and their caregivers. The authors recommended that management of intergenerational ambivalence be a central task for children raised in the care of grandparents or great-grandparents. Jurkiewicz's (2014) study examined motherhood in women raised in foster care. She recommended that interventions should assist with providing young mothers with empowering experiences and encouragement to speak up for themselves, as a means to positively impact their parenting practices.

Additionally, Sprinthall, Peace, and Kennington (2001) emphasized the importance of meaning-making and reflective practice throughout the process of

counseling to assist the client to progress in cognitive development. This perspective is consistent with the meaning-making component of an ego development perspective. Thus, the incorporation of a developmental model would meet the needs of a family in which at least one parent (in this study, the mother) had experienced challenges and support associated with having been raised by a grandparent.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the influence of having been raised by grandparents on women's perceptions of motherhood. The goal was to determine key themes relative to the experience of the role of motherhood that emerged through the process of interviewing. The researcher hoped to discover common elements in the meaning that participants make of having been raised by a grandparent and potential connections to the experience of a maternal role within a family. Discovering the essence of the experience can assist counselors, educators, and caregivers in the interventions associated with the phenomenon.

Creswell (2013) recommended that the researcher synthesize the total study into a single, broad, central question. The central question should be general so as not to limit the scope of the investigation. The overarching, central question is then followed by several open-ended sub-questions that seek to narrow the focus of the investigation, but which also leave some flexibility for the researcher.

In that vein, the study was guided by the following research questions:

Central Question: What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent?

Sub-questions:

1. What themes within the meaning-making of women raised by grandparents may contribute to perceptions of motherhood?
2. What are the influences of gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood by women raised by grandparents?
3. What is the relationship between the participant's level of ego development and her perceptions of motherhood?

### **Research Approach**

After obtaining approval from an Institutional Review Board, the researcher identified seven participants through the use of an online forum and snowball sampling. The advertisement requested participation by women who identified as having been raised primarily by at least one grandparent. Interested individuals were directed to complete a brief initial screening survey to determine if they were appropriate for inclusion. Inclusion criteria consisted of women age 25 or older who had experienced having one or more grandparents as their primary caregiver and who identify as mothers. According to Arnett (2006), adulthood begins around the mid-twenties when individuals are taking on more adult roles and independent living arrangements. Women age 25 or older were sought to ensure that participants were more likely to be experiencing adult roles and living arrangements and had some time to reflect since becoming independent from their caregivers.

Participants completed an informed consent that noted the responsibilities of both the researcher and the participants. The informed consent outlined confidentiality standards to which the researcher would adhere. To protect participants from further emotional distress, interviews were conducted by a Licensed Professional Counselor who

screened for current mental health problems to determine if conducting the interview would be harmful to the participant. Participants were provided with mental health referral information in case the interviews brought up any feelings that the participants may want to process further with a professional.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews as the primary technique. As suggested by Moustakas (1994), the researcher utilized questions related to the topic, which contained inherent individual meanings and social significance. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews, in person and using the technology platform, Skype, that focused on the topic of motherhood for women raised by grandparents. The interview questions followed a sequential list with follow up questions interspersed to elicit further themes. Interviews were conducted by one researcher and audio taped to ensure consistency. All audio recordings were manually transcribed. Participants were then provided with their transcripts and asked to provide feedback to member check accuracy of the data. A peer review was conducted by persons with doctoral degrees in Education.

### **Researcher Perspectives**

As a woman and mother who was raised primarily by grandparents, I personally experienced the challenges and joys of a non-traditional family form. I am aware of societal and familial messages that contributed to and challenged my own identity as a mother. I am also aware of strengths that I received from the experience. As a result, my perspective of what it means to be a family and what it means to be a mother differs a great deal from the dominant ideal imposed by society. In a world of diverse families and people, individuals have the capacity to make very different meaning out of a similar experience. My research interest lies in how others develop as mothers and experience

the unique stressors of this family form and what similarities and differences exist in their perspectives.

Although having been raised by grandparents is a personal experience of my own, my interest in studying the impacts on adults largely evolved from my experience as a counselor. As a systems-oriented counselor, I have had the privilege of working with children and families over the duration of seven years in multiple settings. During the progression of my counseling experience, I worked with children and adults who have experienced being raised by grandparents, many who have suffered from severe emotional distress due to a significant disruption in caregiving. In my own work, I have noticed generational impacts of those disruptions, but also the loving and supportive relationships that can and do often exist. My desire to examine women's experiences of motherhood emerged from my work as a counselor. The ontological underpinnings that guide my counseling practice are humanistic in nature, and are aimed toward an open, empathic understanding of clients' subjective experience. As a doctoral candidate, my research interests have consistently gravitated toward understanding roles within the family.

In my most recent appointment, I served for two years as the student director of a university-based family counseling center that provides support to families within a seven-county catchment area. As families presented for counseling, I gained an understanding of the diverse and complex therapeutic goals for which families sought assistance. Through my own clinical work as well as supervision with multiple family counseling students, I observed a common theme of role confusion emerging in most families in which grandparents acted as custodial parents.

My interest in conducting a qualitative study grew from a clear need to understand the meaning of essential experiences of generational influences on families that is yet unavailable in the current literature. A starting point is needed to develop a focused line of inquiry for additional study. My desire is bolstered by a passionate interest in the qualitative paradigm. The idea that valuable data can be extracted through a structured investigation of individuals' unique and collective experiences appeals to my humanistic sensibilities.

### **Limitations**

Although a deeper understanding was gained through phenomenological study regarding the experience of motherhood of women raised by grandparents, some limitations became apparent. Particular concern lies in selecting participants to interview. This qualitative study focused on the experience of a small number of participants; as such generalizability is naturally limited. The participants varied in background including dissimilarities in age, race/ethnicity, religion, gender; even though this small sampling was heterogeneous in nature, it might be nonetheless construed as a limitation. As differences in societal views exist among diverse populations, the meaning that individuals from differing groups make of their experiences may contrast. Access to a larger, diverse group of participants may yield richer, more detailed information from which to draw conclusions.

Additionally, time limitations were imposed on the present study. Although interviews were detailed and thorough, results were drawn from one interview at a specific point in time with each participant. This study focused on the perspectives of individuals in adulthood, specifically those age 25 and older. Participants varied greatly



in ages, which may have produced differing conclusions. A benefit of variation in ages would assist with controlling for any cohort effects that may be present. However, as people age and experience life-cycle changes, their reflection and perception of events may alter according to experience. Further research is recommended to study specific age groups over time to determine how meaning-making may shift and change throughout the life-cycle.

While current literature confirms that many children who have experienced familial disruption suffer emotional consequences, some who have dealt with significant changes in regard to caregiving have experienced exceptional accomplishments. Citing renowned historical figures as examples, a recent paper discussed the potential for individuals who have experienced familial disruption to accomplish outstanding achievements (Standing, Aikins, Madigan, & Nohl, 2015). Differences are evident in the meaning that individuals make of the experience, which may lead to very different life circumstances. Discovering the essence of the experience of motherhood for women raised by grandparents can offer assistance to counselors, educators and caregivers in the intervention of problems associated with the phenomenon. Further qualitative research is needed to determine those differences to direct education and counseling models to reduce emotional distress and support individual and family growth.

### **Summary**

Chapter one outlined a research study that seeks to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of motherhood of women who were raised in the care of their grandparents. The aim of the study is to provide further insight to assist family counselors in understanding how the important familial role of mother is constructed

among women who were raised by grandparents. The epistemological framework of *Women's Ways of Knowing* was presented as a useful model to conceptualize the manner in which participants made meaning of the experience. Ego development was presented as a tool to further explain participants' meaning-making experience.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

Chapter two provides an overview of current research related to changes in family structure, the role of mother within the family, an overview regarding individuals who have been raised by grandparents, and the inherent strengths and challenges of this family form to provide the groundwork for the study. Additionally, an overview of how women develop motherhood identity is provided, followed by a synopsis of the relevance of *Women's Ways of Knowing* theory as a framework for understanding women's perceptions of motherhood. Finally, chapter two will discuss the relevance of ego development as a means to develop a deeper understanding of women's maternal identity.

#### **Changes in Family Structure**

McGoldrick et al. (2016) suggest a reevaluation of the traditional concept of family and an expansion of the definition. Information provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) firmly dispelled the myth of the "normal" family that consists of two married heterosexual parents. Census data revealed that less than half of children in the U.S. live within a nuclear family, with remarried couples heading up the most prevalent family form. The clear majority of married mothers are in the workforce rather than staying home keeping house. Single parent households are rising rapidly, with the steepest rise occurring among white women. Moreover, the number of interracial couples with children rose by 28% from a decade before (Census Bureau, 2010).

Farrell et al. (2012) investigated four prominent sociology and family studies journals over the course of nearly two decades to determine how non-traditional families were studied and portrayed in published articles. The goal of the investigation was to determine the impact of family structure changes on core family processes during a time in U.S. history of immense changes in family configuration. The most dramatic changes to family structure noted seemed to stem from economic changes. The authors clarified that the decline of the family wage impacted the ability of a single wage earner to support a family. Farrell et al. (2012) listed subsequent familial economic changes which included the expansion of women in the workforce, a reformation in defining gender roles, and a shift in incentives to marry. Of the journals examined, a range of 27.5% to 46.9% of articles included non-traditional family forms during a time of rapid changes to family structure.

Farrell et al. (2012) concluded that research regarding families had significantly lagged behind the realities of American family structure. The authors chose to examine four journals. Though the research included prominent journals, it was not exhaustive. A more thorough investigation of relevant journals may provide deeper insight into the state of family research. Additionally, the article focused on a few family forms, but did not include some of the most common, such as families headed by kin other than biological parents. Between 2000 and 2010, a 51% increase in the number of children being raised by relatives was noted (U.S. Census, 2010). As families headed by kinship caregivers is one of the most rapidly changing family forms, more research is needed to understand these relationships.

In a review of the literature regarding family structure through the early 2000's, Kierkus and Baer (2003) examined the relationship between family constellation and behavior. The authors noted that a connection existed between familial disruption and the onset of delinquent behavior among adolescents. They sought to determine if socioeconomic status (SES) or gender of the child influenced criminogenic behavior. Their findings indicated the existence of contradictory results as to the question of gender. They noted that SES does appear to interact with family structure when it comes to substance abuse behaviors. However, after reviewing the overall picture, they noted that a substantial number of studies indicated that gender and SES do not significantly impact behavior. Among the specific variables reviewed, family structure was noted as the single most important influence on delinquent behaviors.

Several limitations of the Kierkus and Baer (2003) literature review are notable. The authors surmised that, although research on the topic of family structure was readily available during the period of review, many of the available studies were outdated. Kierkus and Bauer (2003) also acknowledged research up to the early 2000's that pointed to the societal stigma of growing up in a non-traditional family as a possible predictor for delinquent behavior. The numbers of families that meet the old idea of the "traditional" family are rapidly dwindling. As disrupted families are becoming more common, stigmatization is declining.

According to Maslow (1999), individuals have a basic need to feel connected to others. Loevinger's theory of ego development contends that individuals have a need to gain acceptance and belonging within groups (Westenberg, Blasi, & Cohn, 1998). The family environment is an important element in developing a sense of belongingness

(Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1989). Further, research suggested that the level to which children feel belonging within a family is directly linked to their well-being (King et al., 2015).

As previously stated, interruptions in parenting during childhood, can lead to emotional, behavioral, and academic problems, which have lifelong effects. Having been raised by a grandparent significantly influences romantic and family relationships. Kennedy and Keeney (1988) noted that those raised in kinship care are less likely to attain trusting romantic relationships. Those who experience interruptions in parenting and lack of appropriate parental modeling develop significantly lower parental identities, which may contribute to problematic family functioning (Mireault, Thomas, & Bearor, 2002; George & Solomon, 1999).

According to King and Boyd (2016), adolescents' perceptions of belonging within a family are associated with well-being indicators, which vary according to family structure. The authors drew data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (also known as Add Health). King and Boyd (2016) sought to test two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that the quality of the mother and child relationship in a two-biological parent headed family was a predictor of family belonging. The second hypothesis was that a quality marital relationship between biological mother and father would result in greater feelings of family belonging. Data was pulled in two waves. The sample in Wave One included 20,745 adolescents in grades 7 – 12 and 17,670 parents (one parent for each adolescent). After excluding adolescents who did not live in the home with biological parents, the final sample was reduced ( $n = 9,686$ ). Wave Two took place one year later and included 6,736 adolescents. The sample was reduced

due to the exclusion of adolescents who were in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade during Wave One and those who were no longer living in the home of their biological parents.

Using structural equation modeling, King and Boyd (2016) determined that both parents' relationships with the child were significantly correlated with family belonging, thus supporting the first hypothesis. The mother-child relationship was determined to be most strongly related to the experience of family belonging. Female adolescents reported a higher level of belonging than male respondents and older adolescents reported a lower level of belonging than did younger adolescents. Results revealed that their second hypothesis, that the parent's marital relationship would be a predictor, was partially supported. They determined that the relationship between mother and father was indirectly associated through the adolescent's relationship with both mother and father. Additionally, King and Boyd (2016) compared results to a previous study in which they examined relationships between adolescents in step-parent families. Results of the subsequent analysis revealed that, though slightly weaker in stepfamilies, the mother-child relationship was still a significant predictor of family belonging.

Limitations for the King and Boyd (2016) study include that the data was extracted from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) responses that took place in the 1990's. Multiple societal and cultural changes have taken place over the course of the last 20 years that may have changed perceptions of family belonging. Conducting the study with a more current sample would add strength to the findings and control for any potential cohort effects. The Add Health questionnaire included questions related to parent-child relationships, but did not include other important relationships that may contribute to the experience of family belonging,

such as siblings, grandparents, and other extended family members. Despite the limitations, the study provided data that gives more specific detail about needs within two important family structures, which may guide future research. The authors recommend that future study regarding family relationships be conducted with varying family structures. That the first hypothesis was supported and the authors' recommendation lends significant credence to this study's focus.

### **Children Raised by Grandparents**

McGoldrick et al. (2016) noted that children develop security and a sense of identity through their connections with caregivers. Primary caregivers are often mothers, but may also be fathers, babysitters, aunts, uncles, siblings, or grandparents. McGoldrick et al. (2016) expressed that traditional frameworks of child development include the limited lens of only the mother-child dyad despite evidence that across time and culture, children have been cared for by others for a variety of reasons. The authors cautioned that if focus is singularly targeted at mothers, then society develops and maintains impossible expectations for the role and ignores the strengths and value of the contexts in which children often grow up such as the grandparent dynamic that is at the heart of this study.

Several studies emphasize that custodial grandchildren are at greater risk of emotional and behavioral problems than children in general (Smith & Palmieri, 2007; Kelch-Oliver, 2011; Yorgason, Gavazzi, Kamp-Dush, Yarcheck, Chang, & Stockdale, 2014). Yorgason et al. noted the importance of considering differences in contextual factors such as race and gender when studying children raised by grandchildren. The authors examined mental health and disrupted family processes in court-involved African



American and Caucasian adolescents who were being raised by their grandparents.

Participants included 166 adolescents ages 13 to 17 who were being raised in the care of grandparents. Of the adolescents, 103 were male and 63 were female; 69% were Caucasian and 31% were African American.

Yorgason et al. (2014) created and used the Global Risk Assessment Device to measure possible risks to the developmental progress of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. The instrument consists of 11 domains of risk or need. These include: prior offenses, problems with parenting or family, problematic peer relationships, substance use, psychopathology, sexual activity, leisure activity, health risks, trauma, accountability, and issues related to education or work. Regression analysis was utilized to estimate the relationships between gender, race, and disrupted family processes and how the variables may be predictive of mental health symptoms.

The results of the study revealed that Caucasians were more likely than African Americans, and males were more likely than females, to report mental health symptoms. Females of both races reported more disrupted family processes. Mental health symptoms increased as the disrupted family processes increased, at a rate of 11% by each disrupted family process. Yorgason et al. (2014) concluded that disrupted family processes are harmful to the emotional health and well-being of adolescents living with grandparents. The authors noted that the experience of mental health symptoms in African American adolescents may be reduced because culturally, living with grandparents is a more common occurrence and the stigma of residing with a grandparent is not as pronounced as in other cultures. Although Yorgason et al. (2014) considered the important contextual factors of race and gender, future study should include more races

and ethnicities to determine similarities and differences to determine factors that may be present regardless of contextual factors. The authors note that future study should also include a variety of family structures to make more accurate comparisons.

Another limitation of the study is that based on minimal availability of court involved youth living with grandparents, participants were drawn from a variety of sites. The data was collected by various administrators, which may have led to inconsistent collection procedures. Despite these limitations, this study provides more in-depth information regarding the well-being of adolescents raised by grandparents. The study specifies differences across race and gender that may help develop a greater understanding of needs within this family form. Yorgason et al. (2014) recommend that future research should be longitudinal, examining well-being before, during, and after being in the care of grandparents.

Interruptions in parenting during childhood can lead to emotional, behavioral, and academic problems, which have lifelong effects. Edwards and Mumford (2005) noted that having been raised by a grandparent significantly influences psychological development. The displaced parent may be present to some extent, which creates role confusion for both grandparents and grandchildren (Soliz, Thorson, Rittenour, & Murry, 2009). Situational stressors can lead the grandparent headed family to seek assistance. However, lack of legal relationships creates a barrier to get needed services (Etten & Gautam, 2012). Identity gaps between grandparent and grandchild present a challenge to healthy relationships (Pusateri, Roache, & Kam, 2015).

Kier and Fung (2014) sought to determine factors of well-being for adults who were raised by grandparents. An analysis of health data revealed that adults who were

raised by grandparents experienced reduced life satisfaction at midlife than adults overall. The authors noted that the relationships with grandmothers helped to expand social networks, but the size of the network did not act as a protective factor in achieving life satisfaction. Results of the study indicated that being raised in the care of a grandmother may create circumstances that impact individuals throughout life. The authors noted that information is lacking as to why the individuals were unable to make better use out of increased networks. They speculate that perhaps as adults become parents, they lack skills required to pass on utilizing social networks to assist their children in achieving life satisfaction. Kier and Fung (2014) recommend further study to determine more information about how adults raised by grandparents connect with others. This study attends to that recommendation.

In family counseling, generational influences on families are significant and need to be considered in support and treatment of family presenting problems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Valdez, Chavez, and Woulfe (2013) found evidence to support that the experience of stressful family processes influences adaptability in coping with significant stressors as children become adults. As previously stated, grandparent-led households make up a substantial proportion of families in the U.S. and continue to increase. These families include members having oftentimes experienced a traumatic interruption in familial roles. Gaining the perspectives of adults, regardless of gender or biological relationship, is an important aspect in providing insight into the generational patterns passed down within this family form.

A search of available research that examines the experiences of individuals raised in grandparent headed households revealed an array of studies. A recent review of the

literature synthesized available research into categories (Choi, Sprang, & Eslinger, 2016). Choi et al. (2016) furthered an earlier review by Hayslip and Kaminski (2005) by focusing on all articles published since the review by Hayslip and Kaminski (2005). A comprehensive search of relevant databases was conducted using a wide array of search terms.

Choi et al. (2016) found 134 articles that met their inclusion criteria and covered a wide range of topics, then divided them into nine categories based on area of focus. The nine categories were: Well-being of grandparents; services for grandparents; policies and laws; relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren; parenting skills of grandparents; health and achievement of grandchildren; communication between grandparents and their grandchildren; training health professionals working with grandparents; and a final, miscellaneous category labeled “other.” The most prevalent focus of the research centered around the *experience of* grandparents (n = 66). The next largest category included 22 articles discussing *services available to* grandparents. A small number of studies explored the experience of adolescents. No studies were noted that examined the experiences of adults who were raised by grandparents. This study addresses that stark research gap.

A limitation of the Choi et al. (2016) study was the scant discussion of the category labeled “other.” A more thorough description of how the articles in this category were selected would provide a more accurate representation of available research. Overall, the article offered a helpful synthesis of current literature and provides recommendations for future research such as examining specific needs of families and

evaluating efficacy of interventions currently in use that are aimed at treating associated problems.

Insufficient data exists to develop interventions and services to address related problems in adulthood for those raised by grandparents. Many currently used approaches are outdated (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). Implications for future study often point to developing a deeper understanding of the specific needs of custodial grandparent households. Additionally, little is known about generational influences on families in which a parent has been raised by grandparents. More information will help prepare counselors for working with this growing population.

Despite the negative view in the literature of grandparent led families, characteristics of a healthy family can be met within grandparent-led households (Walsh, 1998). Having been raised by a grandparent results in lower internalizing and externalizing problems such as depression, low self-esteem, delinquency, and substance abuse than other family configurations (King, Mitchell, and Hawkins, 2010). Unfortunately, assistance may not be readily availability nor focus on important cultural contexts (Edwards & Ray, 2010). Additionally, little is known about the generational impacts on families and parenting. Leder, Grinstead, Jenson and Bond (2003) call for longitudinal research which would follow children raised by grandparents to determine long term factors related to well-being and cause and effect stressors.

### **Effects of Parental Disruption**

Research on the topic of parental disruption, particularly when that disruption occurs by choice of the parent, reveals the prevalence of emotional distress and behavioral problems that result from alienation from a parent. McAdams, Dewell, and

Holman (2011) connected an individual's experience of the voluntary departure of a parent from the family system with *chronic sorrow*, noting that children who have been rejected by a parent can experience perpetual grief throughout life. Orbach (2007) hypothesized that parental disruption through abandonment can lead to insecure attachment and deficits in the ability to manage stressors. He noted that abandonment is significantly detrimental to continued normal, healthy development and a precursor to depression, low self-esteem and suicidal behavior. Timmons, Selby, Lewinsohn, and Joiner (2011) agreed that parental displacement is a risk factor for emotional distress. The authors explored the experience of *failed belonging*, as a result of parental displacement. The results of the study showed evidence of a link between a low sense of belonging and suicide attempts in older, urban adolescents. An additional problem that results from parental disruption is the stress placed on family members that are left behind to care for the children with limited resources (Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2011). These stressors are a source of emotional distress for the caregiver as well as the child.

### **Role of Motherhood**

Salvador Minuchin (1974) referred to the family as "the matrix of identity," noting that children develop their sense of selfhood and belonging within their families (p. 47). It is in this early process of socialization that children develop a sense of separateness and connectedness in relation to others. Minuchin's Structural Family Therapy and other systems oriented theories of family counseling stress the importance of examining roles of individuals within the family. An exploration in this context would

include impacts of the greater systems of extended family and community and the accompanying expectations of those roles.

Medina and Magnuson (2009) recommended that counselors need to increase their awareness of societal expectations placed on mothers. Counselors working with mothers are part of society, and as such, need continued reflection on their own values and assumptions related to the meaning of motherhood. The authors noted recommendations for counselors in their work with mothers. Among these are to refrain from conceptualizing client concerns within the framework of stereotypes and avoid reliance on beliefs about gender differences. An additional recommendation was to avoid misusing the role of counselor by allowing one's own ideology to interfere with remaining objective in planning treatment and formulating diagnoses.

### **Motherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In the last twenty years, the topic of motherhood has arisen as an important focus of study across a wide range of disciplines (O'Reilly, 2010). Definitions of motherhood are varied in the literature. Medina and Magnuson, (2009) point out that some scholars describe motherhood in terms of gender, as synonymous with womanhood. Others stress that motherhood is a socially constructed idea of a nurturing caregiver that is interwoven with femininity. The authors note that in most cases, the central theme of motherhood is directly connected to caregiving of children and/or partners.

As women's roles have evolved over time within the sociocultural context, so too has the construction of motherhood. To illustrate, Hays (1996) examined the meaning of motherhood since the 1980's. She outlined the ideal of "intensive mothering" as self-sacrificing mothers who provide and nurture all children's physical and emotional needs.

According to Medina and Magnuson (2009), the construction of motherhood is impacted when mothers nurture children in ways different from the dominant ideal, and must be considered by counselors in treatment. The authors stress the importance of further study of motherhood to provide “realistic expectations” so that mothers can experience success and perceptions as “good mothers” more often (p. 94).

Mireault et al. (2002) examined the development of motherhood among women who lost their mothers due to death before themselves becoming a mother. The authors note that women reported significantly lower maternal identity than women who had access to their mothers at the time they became mothers. Zalewski, Cyranowski, Cheng, and Swartz (2013) reported that childhood trauma, such as events likely to lead a child to need care from a grandparent, contribute to challenges with effective parenting practices. The authors recommended that practitioners working with mothers and families consider the mother’s childhood history when planning treatment.

Medina and Magnuson (2009), in their description of the construction of motherhood, described motherhood as a role or a set of customary actions surrounding nurturing relationships. The idea of motherhood is socially constructed and exists only within the context of the family. The role, though not always performed by a woman, is heavily intertwined with femininity and acts to reinforce the gender identity of women. As such, studying the complex role of motherhood requires a theoretical framework that is aligned with social construction, attends to identity within the context of the family, and considers gender differences. Meeting the criteria is the epistemological framework, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, which provides a relevant means for knowing and exploring the role of motherhood (Belenky et al., 1986). Ego development also meets the criteria



for understanding complex family roles (Loevinger, 1976). The concept of ego development is presented as a means to provide added depth to the understanding of the experience of motherhood.

### ***Women's Ways of Knowing***

Belenky et al. (1986) developed an epistemological framework from which to conceptualize the cognitive development of women. The authors developed five stages of knowing based on the various ways that women perceive reality and make meaning of their life experiences. Belenky et al. (1986) determined that the ways that women view themselves and the ways in which they view the world are interconnected. The framework builds on the work of William Perry (1970), who studied the development of college students. Though Perry's work included female students, Belenky et al. (1986) asserted that elements specific to women's conceptual understanding are likely missing from the original scheme. The role of mothering and motherhood was central in developing the *Women's Ways of Knowing* framework as it is unique to the experience of women. The researchers noted an anticipation that learning about maternal thought and practice would provide distinct themes concerning women's perspectives. The concept of the framework assumes that two major institutions, family and school, which are dedicated to human development, both foster and suppress the development of women.

*Women's Ways of Knowing* was developed from a case study approach in which 135 women across a wide range of ages, educational attainment, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds participated in in-depth interviews. The interviews were designed to uncover the personal and unique experiences and conceptual meaning-making of the women. The interviews took place in the participants' chosen natural setting. Questions

were open-ended and structured to begin with broad perspectives and move toward more internal experiences. Participants were drawn from a variety of colleges, including academically rigorous and local community colleges (Belenky et al., 1986). The researchers also included institutions referred to as “invisible colleges” (p. 12). These included community programs and family agencies to which women had reported seeking assistance with parenting practices. The researchers’ intention in including women from community agencies was to ensure the inclusion of the experience of motherhood. The expectation was that listening to women discussing their experiences with a role that is traditional for many women, would ensure the discovery of enlightening information beneficial for human service workers in assisting women.

The narratives of the participants’ life experiences were analyzed to determine themes that explained the various ways that women come to understand and know their world. The results were interpreted using the metaphors of *voice* and *silence*, which refers to the level to which women feel heard and understood by others, and how they are able to know their own minds. The allegory of voice is ample within feminist research, as women tend to speak of their experiences using language associated with voice and silence, which is related to the level to which women feel connected or isolated from others (Gilligan, 1979; Belenky et al., 2009).

The resulting themes, which were arranged into five epistemological categories outlined below, build on Perry’s scheme which categorizes students’ ways of knowing into progressive developmental stages (Perry, 1970). The authors cautioned that the five categories were intended to be abstract and did not sufficiently encapsulate the unique and complex thoughts and life experiences of women. Due to the wide variation in

participants' backgrounds, ages, and life stages, developmental trajectories are not detectable. Belenky et al. recommend that future research explore differences in demographic characteristics to determine specific stage-oriented features.

#### The Five Stages of Knowing

1. Silence: Women perceive themselves as having no mind or voice of their own and feel under the control of external authority.
2. Received Knowledge: Women may receive or produce knowledge from an external omniscient authority, but cannot create knowledge independent of an external authority.
3. Subjective Knowledge: The concepts of knowledge and truth are believed to be personal, and are known subjectively or through intuition.
4. Procedural Knowledge: Women perceive knowledge as contextual and actively work to gain and communicate knowledge through objective measures.
5. Constructed Knowledge: Knowledge is perceived as contextual. Women in this stage believe themselves to be creators of knowledge and esteem both subjective and objective strategies of obtaining knowledge.

Worsham, Kretchmar-Hendricks, Swenson, and Goodvin (2009) utilized the *Women's Ways of Knowing* epistemological framework to examine mothers at risk of losing their children through foster care placement. The overall purpose was to gain a more accurate understanding of at-risk families for those in helping professions, such as counselors and social workers. A case study approach was utilized with two mothers who were enrolled in an intensive intervention program within a supervised environment.

The two participants had experienced the removal of their children from the home either due to an injury or suspicion of maltreatment. Rich narratives of the participants through in-depth, semi-structured interviews were analyzed to understand mothers within the context of their own life stories.

The two participants were enrolled in an intervention program designed to provide a supportive family environment. Semi-structured interviews took place at intake and at discharge. The authors developed a coding system specifically aligned with the stages of *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Results indicated that both mothers exhibited growth of at least one to two stages through several epistemological scales. Stage growth was indicated by heightened ability to reflect on their past experiences, evidence of active engagement in making meaning of their current environments, language that expressed a stronger sense of self, and the recognition of their children's capacity for independent thought. The women's children were returned to their care and were found to be still living with their mothers long after the study concluded. Worsham et al. (2009) noted that women who experienced challenges from their upbringing were more likely to become silenced. They also emphasized that when women have experienced trauma or an abusive environment, these women were more likely to pass their ways of meaning making down to their children through their parenting practices unless the appropriate level of support is present.

Jurkiewicz (2014) qualitatively examined the experience of mothers who had aged out of the foster care system, applying the lens of *Women's Ways of Knowing*. The participants included 12 young mothers between the ages of 18 and 27 and had been placed in foster care at various ages between birth and age 16. The women had lived in

foster care for an average of 11 years. The majority of the participants were African American (n = 10) with the remaining women identifying as Hispanic or mixed race. Each of the women were mothers of at least one child at the time of participation. Most participants reported having experienced neglect or maltreatment in foster care.

Jurkiewicz (2014) utilized semi-structured interviews to discuss the women's experiences. She used a coding system to determine the women's level of knowing and found that 60% of the participants fell within the stage of *received knowledge*, which may inform future research in developing approaches that match the needs of mothers who were in foster care. Jurkiewicz (2014) concluded that the participants' perceptions of empowerment were directly connected to their tendency to engage in reflective practice. She also noted that educational attainment and income had a positive influence on the women's perceptions of self and knowledge. Of note were the women's reports of feeling that community services provided in their areas did not consider their needs as mothers. Jurkiewicz (2014) stated that in the case of foster care, the system is the neglectful or abusive parental figure who passes down harmful generational patterns without providing adequate support necessary to enhance growth. She recommended that services available consider women's unique needs and that service providers correct pathologizing patterns within available systems of care. Jurkiewicz (2014) stated that mothers' capacity for reflective practice increases when they are empowered. Therefore, interventions that are focused on increasing a woman's sense of self and mind, and her relationship to knowledge will likely benefit both mother and child.

Palmieri (1976) advocated for the need to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of women in order to provide a catalyst for necessary change within

intellectual thought in the United States. In this regard, *Women's Ways of Knowing* offers a relevant lens through which to gain a better understanding of women through the complex experience of motherhood and could shed light on how women raised by grandparents function at varying stages of knowing. In order to more fully convey how women make meaning of motherhood, an overview of ego development is presented.

### **Ego Development**

Loevinger's (1980) framework of ego development originated as a means to provide a better understanding of the internal meaning-making of women, mothers specifically. Loevinger (1980) noted a desire to understand personality patterns of women during a time that mothers were blamed for children's failures and unfavorable behavior. As such, this theory may provide relevant framework for examining motherhood identity within the sociocultural context in that the emphasis is on the capacity of individuals' meaning-making. Rather than looking at a single aspect of development, ego development incorporates several structures including relational style, impulse control, cognitive function, and moral development (Krumpe, 2002). The model, which was originally normed on females, offered a framework particularly applicable to women, but is also effective regardless of gender (Loevinger, 1985). Loevinger's theory is a relevant framework from which to conceptualize the internal meaning-making processes of women who are mothers, a primary tenet of this study. Additionally, the model is beneficial in providing a description of the participants' level of development which will add to a rich description of their experiences.

Within the context of ego development, individuals move through stages, based on meaning-making capacity. Loevinger described the stage progression as a process and

the stages themselves as abstract and general (Loevinger, 1980). Research by Manners et al. (2004) revealed that the promotion of ego development among adults can be facilitated by disequilibrating life experiences. In their study, the researchers engaged adult participants in weekly 90-minute training sessions in which program content was modified to fit one or two developmental stages higher than the stage of the participant. Results showed that stages are relatively stable by early adulthood, but progress can and does occur throughout the lifespan given the appropriate circumstances that promote progression.

Loevinger (1976) described ego development as a structure by which personality is organized. It is a theoretical lens which considers the internal experience and perceptions of self within the context of events as well as connections to others and society. The theory is based on a sequence of maturational stages across domains of moral development, cognitive processes, and perceptions of connectedness to others. Loevinger's developmental stages move from simplistic to more complex. Individuals move across a hierarchical range from dependent, egocentric thought and behavior toward greater connectedness and understanding of relationship to self and to others.

The nine stages are: E1(Presocial), E2 (Impulsive), E3 (Self-Protective), E4 (Conformist), E5 (Self-Aware), E6, (Conscientious), E7 (Individualistic), E8 (Autonomous), and the final stage E9 (Integration). Stages are independent of chronological age and are cumulative in nature (Loevinger, 1976). Development can halt at any time, but most adults level off at the E5 (Self-Aware) stage.

Loevinger's development of the theory is particularly relevant to conceptualization of individuals within a family. The theory originally emerged from

Loevinger's work with women, specifically mothers, that later grew to consider families or family members regardless of gender (Loevinger, 1976). The Family Problems Scale (FPS) developed by Loevinger, Sweet, Ossorio, and LaPerriere (1962) grew out of early ego development research. The FPS is an instrument meant to measure daily stressors of family life across the life cycle. Over time, the instrument evolved into a measurement of ego development. Based on available research, ego developmental theory shows a strong relationship to family functioning. For example, research demonstrates that higher levels of ego development are positively correlated with effective parenting skills (Allen, Bell, Hauser, & O'Connor, 1994).

Syed and Seiffge-Krenke (2013) noted that ego development offers an applicable means to understand contextual clues as to why individuals develop at differing rates. The authors found evidence to support the link between ego development growth trajectories and the emergence of identity from adolescence to early adulthood within the family context. The longitudinal study examined ego development across the trajectory from adolescence to adulthood and variables that influence or restrict growth in the context of family. The research was guided by the hypothesis that family factors influence ego development trajectories as adolescents become adults.

Participants included 98 families with adolescent children from varying economic backgrounds. Of the adolescents, 52% were female and 48% were male with a mean age of 14.7 at the onset of the study. The majority of adolescents were raised in two-parent homes (81%), with 19% from single-parent households. Assessments occurred in four phases over the course of 10 years. Researchers used the Washington Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) to measure ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Ego



development was measured in the parents' group at one point over the course of the 10-year study. The Family Environment Scale was used to measure family climate (Moos & Moos, 1981). Assessments were given when adolescents were ages 14, 15, 17, and 24 years of age.

The researchers utilized descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations to identify changes in ego development over the course of the 10-year span. Then, they compared groups with differing ego development trajectories and identified variation in family climate. Finally, they compared trajectory groups, looking for differences as the participants reached the emerging adult stage. Results revealed four trajectories of progression in ego development. These included normative stable ( $n = 48$ ), moderate ( $n = 32$ ), rapid ( $n = 13$ ), and rapid low ( $n = 5$ ). They noted that growth occurs more rapidly during adolescence, leveling off in emerging adulthood. Adolescent participants' scores on average were within the conformist stage during the first and second assessments, at the self-aware stage during the third assessment, and between the self-aware and conscientious stage at the fourth assessment, showing a growth of 1.12 steps in ego development over the course of the 10-year study. Both mothers and fathers scored on average in the conformist range. Promotion of personal growth among the adolescents was significantly influenced by the ego developmental level of their parents.

Limitations include a relatively small sample size, which limits the finding of other potential ego development trajectories. Data was collected over four points in time, at ages: 14, 15, 17, and 24. Collecting data at some point between the age of 17 and 24 may have provided more detail as to variations in ego development. The researchers collected data regarding the parents' ego development at only one point during the study.

Having the parents complete the WUSCT at multiple points along with the adolescents, may offer valuable insight into parallel processes in development within families.

Further, the participants came from a considerable majority of two-parent households (81%), which is not representative of the greater population.

Despite noted limitations, the study considers both child and parent ego development, which offers multiple perspectives. Findings revealed a connection between parent and child ego development, which offers valuable insight into family processes that may foster continued growth. The authors recommend that future research explore individuals' internal motivating factors that may influence ego development.

This integrative literature review substantiates the need to explore qualitatively the experience of motherhood among adults who were raised in grandparent headed families. Ego development is a particularly fitting lens through which to conceptualize the experience of motherhood because it provides a thorough description of development within a systemic context, both familial and societal. Consideration of this theoretical basis could provide a relevant context in which to research adult development and offer insight regarding how adults at varying stages of ego development experience family life.

### **Summary**

Chapter two provided an overview of current research related to the role of mother within the family, an overview regarding individuals who have been raised by grandparents, and the inherent strengths and challenges of this family form to provide the groundwork for the study. Additionally, this chapter offered an overview of how women develop motherhood identity, followed by a synopsis of the relevance of *Women's Ways of Knowing* theory as a framework for understanding women's perceptions of

motherhood. Finally, chapter two discussed the relevance of ego development as a means to develop a deeper understanding of women's maternal identity.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The following section presents the research design that was employed within the study. Further, justification for the design and a rationale for the use of a qualitative approach is presented. A description of the setting, participants, procedures, and a research time line follows.

#### **Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Qualitative research is appropriate for use when little is known or understood about a topic or problem and an initial exploration is needed (Creswell, 2013). Creswell notes that qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable when the problems are complex, variables exist that are not easily measured, or when “silenced voices” are present (p. 48). This study examines the lives of women who had experienced a phenomenon yet to be studied, and a qualitative approach was appropriately utilized.

The study of family relationships and roles presents complexities that are well-suited to a qualitative paradigm as they include dynamic processes of change (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that qualitative research represents a constructivist approach. The research questions are intentionally open-ended, and are designed to elicit “what” or “how” rather than “why” (Creswell, 2013). In the present study, the research questions were aligned with a constructivist and qualitative paradigm that pertained to how women, raised by grandparents, made meaning of their experiences of motherhood. A review of the literature revealed no

studies that examined the perspective of motherhood with women who were raised by grandparents or how women raised by grandparents made meaning of the experience of motherhood. In order to develop an understanding of the complexity of how women raised by grandparents made meaning of motherhood and how they were influenced by messages imbedded in society, a qualitative approach was undertaken. Phenomenology, from the perspective of Moustakas (1994), is described as the process that captures the essence of the experience and then synthesizes the essence of individual experiences into a collective description of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, the phenomenological research approach was justified for use due to its distinct consideration of socially constructed themes.

The aim of this qualitative research was to discover ways in which individuals constructed their understanding of the world. A study focused on the experiences of women realized during the constructing of motherhood and one that illuminated the influences that were present based on having been reared by grandparents was well suited to address this unique perspective. Creswell (2013) notes that a phenomenological study utilizes a qualitative methodology and is geared toward understanding how individuals construct meaning of their own experiences.

## **Design**

This research utilized a phenomenological design to study experiences of motherhood by women who were raised by grandparents. Additionally, the WUSCT-81 was administered and utilized to add depth and richness to the interpretation of the women's interview narratives. Creswell (2013) explained that individuals living through a phenomenon have common experiences associated with the event. Phenomenological

studies provide a detailed description of the lived experience of individuals and seek to discover the common meanings inherent in the phenomenon. He noted that the task of the phenomenological researcher is to condense the individual experiences to a “description of the universal essence” (p. 76).

Edmund Husserl is credited with the origination of phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). He believed that by deeply engaging a small number of individual participants, one might determine the essence of their lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest. Moustakas suggested that phenomenological research be carried out using a well-planned, systematic, and organized method (1994). He recommended that phenomenological research carefully follow a series of procedures which begins with the development of an idea about a topic or problem that has deep personal meaning for those experiencing the phenomenon and is rooted in societal meanings or implications. Then the researcher must conduct a thorough review of relevant literature, and next construct a set of interview questions designed to guide the process of interviews then engages participants in in-depth interviews that focus on the problem or topic of research. Bracketing is used in assembling the questions to reduce bias. Moustakas (1994) also recommends that the researcher organize the data and perform analysis with the intent of discovering textural and structural messages. Finally, the researcher analyzes the data, synthesizing the discovered meanings to determine the essence of the experience.

Research is lacking concerning how women raised by grandparents made meaning of the experience of motherhood. Very little is known about roles in families who have experienced the phenomenon and what family counselors can do to assist them with their unique needs. Semi-structured interviews were designed to determine the

unique lived experiences of women raised by grandparents and were utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of motherhood. Information gleaned from the WUSCT-81 provided rich information that was used to assist in drawing conclusions about making meaning of the motherhood experience through assessing participants' ego development stage.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the influence of having been raised by grandparents on women's construction of motherhood. The overarching goal was to discover important themes relative to the experience of motherhood that emerged through the interview process. The researcher anticipated the discovery of common elements in the meaning that participants would make of having been raised by a grandparent and potential associations to the experience of motherhood. Discovering the essence of the experience can aid counselors, educators, and caregivers in intervening in challenges associated with the phenomenon. Additionally, a greater understanding may assist practitioners in gaining knowledge of previously undiscovered strengths that may support treatment. Specifically, the study was guided by the following research question: What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent?

The following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What themes within the meaning-making of women raised by grandparents may contribute to perceptions of motherhood?
2. What are the influences of gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood by women raised by grandparents?

3. What is the relationship between the participant's level of ego development and her perceptions of motherhood?

In many cases, current approaches to counseling with a diverse array of family-forms remain largely based on the long-standing concept of the nuclear family structure. Some family counseling modalities exist that have been shown to be effective regardless of the construction of the family. However, overall treatment approaches needed to be reconstructed to effectively meet the specific and unique needs of families presenting for family counseling today. Available research tends to pathologize non-nuclear family structures and without effective treatment, problematic generational patterns are likely to persist.

### **Sample Selection and Site**

In qualitative research, sample selection involves choosing participants, choosing the setting, identifying the phenomenon, and societal processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In qualitative research, sampling is purposeful rather than random, as more often seen in quantitative research. The present study utilized mothers who were raised by grandparents.

#### **Participants.**

According to Creswell (2013), sample size in phenomenological research varies between one and 10 participants. According to Polkinghorne (1989), between 5 and 25 individuals that have experienced the common phenomenon should be interviewed for phenomenological research. For the purposes of this study, participants were identified using an online forum. Four participants were recruited directly through Facebook, two were recruited indirectly when others shared the Facebook post, and one was referred by



another participant. Interested individuals were directed to complete a brief initial screening survey which determined if they were appropriate for inclusion. Women who met the criteria for inclusion were invited to participate. Conditions for inclusion were women over the age of 25, who identified as having been raised primarily by their grandparents, who identified as mothers through biological or adoptive means, and were able to communicate in English. Potential participants received a letter requesting their participation, which outlined the purpose and offered a description of the study. Participants were asked to provide written permission to engage in the study.

According to Moustakas (1994), data collection concludes upon reaching saturation, when redundancy is noted in the participant experiences. In the present study, saturation was achieved with seven participants. Regarding the third sub-question which aimed to discover influences of gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood, saturation was reached principally for gender and social class. Although participants revealed in-depth information regarding their own culture, it was difficult to differentiate specific cultural differences in the perception of the experience.

### ***Setting.***

Creswell (2014) noted that a major characteristic of qualitative research is the tendency to interview participants in their natural setting. Interviewing and observing participants in their homes would increase the likelihood that they are able to act and behave naturally. Creswell (2014) also recommended that the study be conducted in a setting that is quiet and free from disruptions or distractions and where audiotaping is possible. As such, the study was conducted in person, and in the natural setting of

participants when possible. It was anticipated that the participants' homes might not be free from distractions, or provide the ability to keep interviews confidential. In order to address this need, participants had the option of choosing to be interviewed at a university-based family counseling center. The choice of settings was given to ensure confidentiality and to assure the comfort-level of participants in sharing their personal stories. The counseling center was chosen as an option for its central location and comfortable environment away from distractions. Some of the participants were located at a great distance from the researcher and were given the option to participate using the technology platform, Skype. All participants chose to be interviewed either in-person or by Skype.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is utilized as the key instrument in collecting data and observing behavior (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is interpretive, lending itself to the potential for bias from the researcher; therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to explicitly discuss personal biases, values, and opinions to ensure that the results are presented in as pure a form as possible (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher in this study, I had personally experienced the phenomenon of motherhood after having been raised primarily by grandparents. As such, I needed to explore my own biases and opinions to guard against hindering the interpretation of others' subjective experiences.

In my experience, societal messages are inclusive of households with two biological parents. As media and societal messages grow and expand, new ideas of family are minimally present, including single mother households, and interracial

households to a limited degree. As a student of counselor education, I am keenly aware of the limited information available regarding the special and unique needs of non-traditional families and experience apprehension that we as practitioners lack vital information that will assist in the best treatment approaches in working with families that differ significantly from the dominant ideal. As a family counselor in practice for over seven years, I have had the privilege of working with families in which the grandparents are custodial parents, or families in which parents have been raised by a grandparent. My awareness of the specific needs in such cases is slightly enhanced by having experienced the phenomenon, but more is needed. Class discussions and my own experiences having supervised counseling interns, has heightened my awareness that the field of counselor education needs more information to work effectively with these unique families. Through the research, I sought to avoid pathologizing this family form by family therapy techniques that are were appropriately designed to meet their needs.

### **Bracketing**

Creswell (2013) stated that it is difficult, but necessary, to identify personal biases of the researcher that may influence or limit the findings. He suggested that researchers should examine ways in which their own personal awareness might enter into the research, and recommended they make efforts to suspend their own understanding. I, the researcher in the present study, am a humanistic and systems-oriented counselor who had worked with children and families over the course of seven years in multiple settings. Over the progression of my counseling experience, I have worked with children and adults who experienced the phenomenon of having been raised by grandparents, and it is critical to note that many have suffered from severe emotional distress due to a

significant disruption in caregiving. The theoretical underpinnings that guide my counseling practice are humanistic in nature, and are aimed toward an open, empathic understanding of clients' subjective experience. In an effort to gain awareness of potential areas of bias, I have studied relevant research and have consulted with peer counselors to determine probable blind spots.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants, the U.S. Department of Health requires that research involving human subjects be approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The College of William & Mary's Human Subjects Committee requires that a properly completed protocol be submitted which includes a brief rationale for the study and a description of the participants and procedures. Additionally, the committee requires a description of any possible risks to the participants and an explanation of any compensation provided. Participants were informed of the researcher's intent to audiotape prior to their decision to participate in the study. They were asked to sign a consent to audiotape form prior to beginning the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from each participant and contained a full description of what participants could expect and possible value of the results. Time was allotted prior to the beginning of each interview to allow participants to ask any questions they may have about the study, the interview process, and informed consent. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they may choose not to continue at any time.

## Data Collection

For this study, Creswell's (2014) style of data analysis for phenomenology was followed in compliment with the foundational approach provided by Moustakas (1994) whereby methods are presented to illustrate the collected essence from the interviews.

The Moustakas sequential approach is itemized in Table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1

### *Moustakas (1994) Sequential Coding Process*

Step 1	Describe researcher's experience with phenomena (subjectivity statement).
Step 2	Develop a list of significant statements.
Step 3	Group significant statements into meaning units or themes.
Step 4	Write textural description using verbatim examples.
Step 5	Write a structural description of how the experience happened.
Step 6	Write a composite description combining textural and structural descriptions to create the essence of the experience.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews as the primary technique. As suggested by Moustakas (1994), the researcher utilized questions related to the topic, which contain inherent individual meanings and social significance. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews either in person, or by Skype, that focused on the topic of motherhood for women raised by grandparents. Each interview began with a demographic questionnaire that noted characteristics pertinent to the study. These included age of participant, age of child(ren), race/ethnicity, educational background, income level, relationship status, and household composition. Demographic data were utilized in reporting themes derived from the interview transcripts. The interview

questions followed a sequential list with follow-up questions interspersed to elicit further themes. Interviews were conducted by one researcher and audio taped to ensure consistency. All audio recordings were manually transcribed. All Participants were offered copies of their transcripts and asked to provide feedback to assure member-checking accuracy of the data. Of the seven participants, one provided corrections to their transcript data. Corrections included clarifying sections of the audio transcript that were inaudible.

The guiding interview questions were as follows:

*Describe your family while you were growing up.*

*How was your family of origin different from other families?*

*Think of the time when you went to live with your grandparent(s). What were you aware of at that time?*

*What was the reason you came to live with your grandparent(s)?*

*What was your relationship like with your parent(s)?*

*What was your relationship like with your grandparent(s)?*

*Give me some examples of what you liked the best about living with your grandparent(s).*

*Give me some examples of what you liked least about living with your grandparent(s).*

*Describe feelings that you're aware of as result of having been raised by your grandparent(s).*

*What does family mean to you?*

*What does being a mother mean to you?*

*Describe how you view the roles and responsibilities of a mother?*

*Think of things you learned from your upbringing by a grandparent that taught you about being a mother. What comes to mind?*

*Describe your relationship with your child(ren)?*

*What would you like to pass on to your child(ren) that you learned from being raised by grandparent(s)?*

Several follow-up questions were utilized to elicit further thematic investigation. Validity of the data was strengthened by the empathic understanding, conversational approach of the interviewer who is a trained counselor.

### **Instrumentation**

The Washington University Sentence Completion Test – Form 81 (WUSCT – 81) was administered to each participant prior to each interview. The WUSCT – 81 is presented in Appendix A. Developed by Loevinger and Wessler (1970), the WUSCT is an assessment designed to measure ego development. It is a projective paper and pencil instrument, consisting of 36 sentence stems that respondents are asked to complete. Form 81 is a shortened version that contains 18 sentence stems and is presented in two versions, one designed for men and one designed for women. The women's version was utilized for the purposes of the current study.

The WUSCT has been shown to have a high interrater reliability ranging from .90 to .96 and a range of internal consistency between .88 and .92 (Redmore & Waldman, 1975). Form 81 has been shown to maintain validity, but the reliability is reduced due to fewer questions (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). The study examined ego-development to

provide deeper understanding through the interview narratives, and was not quantitatively analyzed. As such, the short version was deemed appropriate.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Participants were instructed to choose an alias to protect their confidentiality. Transcripts were offered to each of the participants to review. Participants were instructed to read the transcripts for accuracy and to determine if they'd like to add or change any of the information. After each interview was transcribed and returned by participants, the transcripts were entered into a software program, NVivo, designed to systematically organize and analyze qualitative data.

Moustakas' (1994) approach to data organization and analysis was used for the purposes of this study. As Moustakas suggested, systematic steps of data analysis are necessary to fully explore the lived experience of a phenomenon and to produce a rich description of the essence of the phenomenon. Data analysis began with reading transcripts several times for the researcher to gain overarching impressions. The researcher then horizontilized the data, carefully reviewed transcripts to derive significant statements, and clustered them into groups of common themes. The use of NVivo assisted the researcher in further reducing potential for bias and by uncovering connections that were not immediately visible. From these statements, the researcher developed a textural and structural description of the essence of the participants' lived experience. Additionally, themes of meanings were explored in order to be synthesized and interpreted to provide a robust, comprehensive description of the phenomenon of motherhood by women raised by grandparents.



Saldaña's (2009) coding methods, conducive to a phenomenological research study, were employed. This research focused on the individual level of analysis and according to Saldaña, several methods for coding are suggested for qualitative research. Many of the methods used are founded in the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) to gather, understand, and categorize empirical data. His approach to "The Coding Manual" text "*does not maintain allegiance to any one specific research genre or methodology*" (p. 2). The 2009 text outlines 29 different forms of coding method profiles and he suggests that each method is not meant to be linear in execution, but rather as the research approach requires, the proper method can be applied if applicable. A code, according to Saldaña, is "*most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual aid*" (p. 3). Interpretation of historical events surrounding the essence of the experience of being raised by grandparents was analyzed using the coding methods of attribute, descriptive, initial, in vivo, and pattern techniques. Specifically, the following coding methods were used:

- Attribute coding provides "essential participant information and contexts for analysis and interpretation" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 56). This includes basic information about the participants that may include pseudonym, age, and/or race.
- Descriptive coding was utilized. According to Saldaña (2009), descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 70).
- Initial coding was used minimally in this research study. Saldaña (2009) states that initial coding "breaks down qualitative data in discrete parts" (p. 81). This is

followed by a comparison with other initial codes gathered to search for similarities and differences.

- In vivo coding was utilized in the present study. Saldaña (2009), suggests that in vivo coding or “in that which is alive” refers to “a word or phrase from the actual language found in qualitative data record” (p. 74). Additionally, Saldaña points out that in vivo coding can stand alone as a first cycle of data analysis.
- Pattern coding was used during the second cycle of coding. According to Saldaña (2009), these codes serve to help “identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p. 152). These codes “pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (p. 152).

There are two cycles of coding recommended by Saldaña (2009). They are labeled as first cycle and second cycle coding. During the first cycle of coding, data is themed to include emergent ideas from the research results. During this phase, data is categorized for collective understanding. The second cycle of coding is not always required; however, the purpose of this stage is to develop a sense of theme or theoretical organization from the first cycle coding activities. Theming the data, according to Saldaña (2009), is a “phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 139). Saldaña also describes themes as “ideas as descriptions of behavior within a culture, explanations of why something happened, iconic statements, and morals from participant stories” (p. 139).

The emergent themes from this research study converged and were presented as six conclusions or major findings. Van Manen (1997) proposes that themes are used to “capture the phenomenon that the researcher is trying to understand” (p. 87). This

collection of themes however is not necessarily meant for “systemic analysis” (p. 91). Theming of the data, according to Saldaña, is more appropriate for interview based and participant-generated review (2009).

After all data from interviews was analyzed and interpreted, final data from the WUSCT– 81 was scored. An additional scorer was utilized to ensure interrater reliability. Information obtained from the WUSCT – 81 was then utilized to further explore the participants’ experience and to provide a more detailed interpretation of their experience.

### **Summary**

Chapter three has provided an overview of the methodology for conducting the study and has discussed a rationale for the use of a qualitative design with mothers who were raised by grandparents. Further procedures were presented for identifying and qualifying the sample. Data collection and analysis techniques were outlined as were ethical considerations. Finally, strategies for handling and reporting the data were presented.

## Chapter Four

### Results and Within-Case Analysis

Chapter four describes the findings of the present phenomenological examination. Individual textural descriptions and within-case analyses of each of the seven participants, which were drawn from the interview transcripts, are presented. The primary research question the study sought to further understand was, “What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent?” Sub-questions were:

1. What themes within the meaning-making of women raised by grandparents may contribute to perceptions of motherhood?
2. What are the influences of gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood by women raised by grandparents?
3. What is the relationship between the participant’s level of ego development and her perceptions of motherhood?

Additionally, chapter four includes a summative account of the participants’ demographic data, interview question responses, and scores on the WUSCT – 81. Finally, chapter four presents a summary of the research sites, the descriptive coding, along with counts of each occurrence, and an overview of the analytical procedures. The chapter ends with a presentation of the emergent themes and revisits those themes in the context of the study’s theoretical lenses of ego development and *Women’s Ways of Knowing*.

## **Research Site**

The interviews were held in various locations based on the participant's preference. Whenever possible, the interviews took place in the home of the participant. Several women who responded to the initial invitation for participation were located at a great distance from the researcher, and in these cases, the interviews were conducted using the technology platform, Skype. In the Skype interviews, the participants chose to participate from a private and quiet room located within their homes.

Interviewing using a video internet platform has a few notable pitfalls. Among these, are reduced rapport and the potential for technology issues, such as dropped calls or audio problems. To reduce technology problems, Seitz (2016) recommended testing that connections are adequate ahead of time. To attend to building proper rapport, she recommended that the interviewer pay close attention to facial expressions. Seitz (2016) further offered strategies for increasing the quality of data collection by ensuring that participants are located in a quiet room without distractions, asking them to speak distinctly, and asking clarifying questions. Each of the recommendations were utilized in this study.

## **Analytical Method**

As detailed in chapter three, the analytical method chosen for the present study was based on Moustakas' (1994) method. Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as a process that seeks to capture the "essence" of a shared experience, and then to synthesize the common factors found within individual experiences into a combined description of the phenomenon of interest. The analysis began with reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts to gain a sense of overall patterns and themes that

became apparent. Significant statements were extracted in order to formulate meaning from each interview. From these extractions, themes were shaped and quantified at a very high-level based on the number of times each theme occurred throughout the data. The coding methods developed by Saldaña (2009) were utilized to uncover emergent themes within the data. Interpretation of the raw data derived from the participant's interview transcripts were analyzed using the attribute, initial, descriptive, in vivo, and thematic coding techniques synthesized according to Saldaña (2009) as first and second cycle coding.

From the synthesis of data, descriptions of the experience of each participant, drawn from their own words, are presented below. Themes within each case are organized in the order of most frequent to least frequent. After the themes are provided, analysis of the ego development stage is presented along with relevant textual examples. Scores on the WUSCT-81 were derived following method as described by Hy and Loevinger (1996). An independent reviewer scored the participant responses to ensure agreement on final results. After completion of the within-case analyses, a cross-case analysis was performed and themes emerged and were compared across all cases.

### **Participants**

Seven participants were interviewed independently and at various times ranging over a two-month duration. Prior to each interview, participants completed the WUSCT-81 with instructions given from the researcher. Each interview then took place after the informed consent was signed, the WUSCT-81 was administered, and the demographic data were taken. The interviews lasted for a duration averaging 60 minutes in length. The researcher utilized a field notebook to record additional relevant data. The following

sections catalog participants’ attributes (Table 4.1), identify with pseudonyms, and describe each participant.

Table 4.1  
*Attribute Table of Study Participants*

Participant	Age	Race	Relationship Status	Ages Lived with GP	# and Gender of Children	Education	Yearly Income	Ego Dev Stage
Allie	47	Caucasian	Married	12-18	19F	Masters	>\$100K	E6
Andrea	32	African American	Long-term Committed Relationship	Birth – 3 and 12-18	7F, 10F	Some College	\$36K	E6
Carmen	57	African American	Married	12-17	36M, 28F, 27M, 27M	Masters	\$60K	E5
Constance	47	Caucasian	Married	7mos - 20	24F, 21F, 18F, 14F	Some College	>\$100K	E5
Elizabeth	31	African American	Single / Dating	6 - 18	7F	Bachelors	\$16K	E4
Joy	47	Caucasian	Married	2-13	28M, 27M, 26F, 23F, 19M	Some College	Did not Disclose	E6
Sarah	48	Caucasian	Married	5 - 17	22M, 18F	Bachelors	>\$100K	E6

### **Descriptions of Participants and Individual Case Descriptions**

A detailed exploration of each of the seven participants – to include thematic labels, substantiating descriptions, an analysis of the ego development stage and structural interpretation is provided in the next section. Following that exploratory analysis of each case, an across-case analysis is presented.

#### **Participant #1 “Allie”**

Allie is a 47-year-old, married, Caucasian, mother of one college-aged daughter. She resides in a suburban town in North Carolina where she works in an upper level corporate, managerial position. Allie reports having never participated in counseling. She lived in the home of her maternal grandmother and step-grandfather from the age of

12 until she got married and left home at 18. Allie was initially displaced from her mother at the age of four months when her 19-year-old mother died suddenly. At the time of her mother's death, she had two older brothers. All the siblings were placed separately in the homes of various relatives. She went to live in the home of her mother's brother and his wife. They divorced when Allie was three years old. Her uncle left the home, leaving Allie in the care of her aunt who was related only by that marriage. She explained that the circumstances in the home were not like that of an ideal family:

I remember when I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, being on my period and she took her three boys to the fair and I was told I couldn't go because I was menstruating. I was made to cook for her family, cleanup after them, they weren't required to carry any of those responsibilities.

Allie described the day that she was "forced out" of her aunt's home just before her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday and one month from completing the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She speculated that the decision might have been related to her becoming an adolescent. "I was not given a reason. In retrospect, I think it was having a female coming of age, and her [aunt] not being able to cope with that in a positive, motherly way."

### **Themes**

The following themes, along with sub-themes in parentheses, were noted from the interview: Generational Gap (misunderstanding, overly strict rules, old-fashioned ideas); Lack of Belonging (displacement, peer differences, tentative relationships); Motherhood Modeling (undesirable models, personal growth, empowered woman); and Motherhood Responsibility (flexibility, guide young minds, sacrifice).



**Generational gap.** Allie expressed that the age gap between her and her grandmother negatively influenced the relationship. “There was a generational gap, loving, but I didn’t always feel like we understood each other and I guess because of that gap there were difficulties just having those bonded relationships.” Allie described feeling that her grandmother did not understand her needs, “I think it was a lack of education and understanding of what children really needed from a true family...to get us three kids through what we had going on.” When asked to describe her relationship with her grandmother, Allie responded, “It was tough; she didn’t understand me.” She stressed that her grandmother’s rules and expectations were based on outdated ideas, and these perceptions made an impression on how she felt she could experience life, “I had one boyfriend through all my teenage years and I ended up marrying him because my mother, the relationships she had and having the three children, I felt very aware that having a lot of different boyfriends was a bad thing.” She related an example of an interaction with her grandmother that illustrates the point, “I remember there were some school friends that had stopped just to say hi, and in my yard...I was ‘switched’ just for having a conversation with them because it didn’t look appropriate.” Allie attributed tension and harsh expectations in the relationship with her grandmother to inaccurate comparisons to her mother or other family members and fear that Allie would follow the same trajectory, “I think my grandmother had a fear for me following that same path, and understanding that I had my older half-brother who was in constant trouble with the police.”

She explained her urge to leave the home at her earliest opportunity by expressing, “That my life would be nothing if I hadn’t sought to get out of that because

her restrictions were too severe.” She stressed feeling that her personal growth was being hindered by the circumstances, stating, “when I was younger I can remember how vividly having the thoughts that I had to get out of those constraints that others were placing on me from their socioeconomic or educational understanding and perspectives in order to define my path.”

**Lack of belonging.** Allie experienced multiple displacements and transitions early in life that left her with a sense of not belonging within her family and among her peers. When asked what feelings she was aware of at the time she came to live with her grandmother, she replied, “Not feeling loved, not feeling valued... I remember just not feeling that I belonged anywhere, that I counted as a person anywhere.” She explained that living with her grandmother was a last resort,

She [aunt] sent me to live with her ex-husband, which would have been my mother’s brother, and he had been in and out of trouble so much with law enforcement, he didn’t really have anywhere to live and she knew that but, she could still put an almost 13-year-old girl with someone like that.

She acknowledged that living with her grandmother was likely the best option at the time, “He [uncle] wound up in jail, and if my grandmother hadn’t have been willing to accept me, I suppose I would have just wound up in the foster system.”

Allie was aware of feeling different and separate from her peers at the time. She explained:

As you measure yourself against peers at school, definitely you could see you didn’t have the same opportunities that some of your friends had at school, that you had to go home and you knew what that home was like, it was different.

Another difference Allie noted was not being able to participate in activities that might have enhanced her social and peer connections. She mentioned not being able to participate in, “extracurricular activities, sports, clubs, not really like social clubs...just those extraneous events where kids get together and really interact.” She attributed the lack of opportunities to the financial constraints of her grandmother’s limited income. Another difference that Allie noted between her and her peers, was feeling judged by others,

We had family members who had legal encounters so you didn’t always feel like you were perceived in a positive manner by those around you, outside of your family, maybe judged by some of your socioeconomic standing in a negative way.

Financial constraints were a significant challenge that she felt set her apart from her peers,

...probably the level of public financial assistance that was needed. I remember my grandmother getting assistance to help with me for medical bills, just trying to get healthcare and things like that to provide for me because I didn’t have any parents that were helping her with that.

Allie stated that a result of the lack of belonging that she felt in her childhood contributed to feelings regarding forming strong, connected relationships into adulthood. She noted that, “It made me be stronger in my relationships probably. She explained that she was more wary or tentative in her willingness to connect with others, expressing her tendency “to actually be more careful at the ones [relationships] that I did make, but value them more strongly when they were there.”

**Motherhood modeling.** Allie described how she learned what it means to be a mother through learning what *not* to do, by not following the model that she had as a small child. Referring to the aunt she lived with until she was almost 13, Allie stated, “at some point as an adult, I actually met with her and I said the words to her that the best thing she ever taught me is the mother I would never be.” She explained that she developed a deeper understanding of what a child needs to reach their potential, “I knew that my child would always feel unconditional love, no matter her failures and her successes.” She explained the importance to her of creating the conditions of personal growth for herself and her child,

It allowed me at some point to develop or form the perspective that growth is a process and process is up and down, not good and bad, the process is what it is; when you get to the end, it doesn’t matter how many times you dipped in the radar, but that you actually got through it.

She described motherhood as, “the most valued opportunity” explaining that a mother has the “responsibility to be able to, to guide a young, vulnerable mind into, and particularly having a girl, to allow her to grow into the knowledge that she can be anything.” She remarked on having come to the realization of what it means to be a strong woman and mother, “That’s fulfilling, self-fulfilling, and there’s nothing wrong with being a successful, empowered woman. You don’t have to apologize for that.”

**Motherhood responsibility.** Allie described her views of the responsibilities of a mother. She expressed that motherhood means acting as a guide for children, stating that, “It’s pivotal to be supportive of the growth and development of other human beings that are vulnerable, that are not wise to the world, and guiding them through that process to

develop into their fullest potential.” She expressed the need to work hard to try and understand the needs and desires of children and for parents to not place their own preconceived beliefs on their children. Additionally, she stated that flexibility is an important aspect of mothering, and that mothers need to understand “generations and technology and, and structures and norms. As they change, so too do the lives of our children and you have to adjust for that along with that progression.” Regarding the importance of making the distinction between her own needs and those of her child, she noted that “some of them were identical, but some there were different.” The need to adjust accordingly was conscious, understanding that her daughter was “of a greater socioeconomic position” than she was.

### **Ego Development**

Allie scored at the E6 - Conscientious Stage of Ego Development as measured by the WUSCT-81. At this level, individuals are able to view situations in a complex manner, recognizing that many responses or courses of action exist. Individuals at this level have a more complex differentiated internal perspective and are able to perceive nuances within emotional responses. (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

Her description of her transition to independence, and eventually to motherhood, exhibited language indicative of this ego stage. For example, Allie exhibited an awareness of human imperfections. She expressed a desire for continued growth in her life, but noted that she feared growth would not be possible in the home of her grandmother. She indicated that her grandmother made comparisons to her and her mother, fearing that she would follow the same path as her mother, thus lacking an understanding of her needs for growth. Allie stated that she eventually came to the

realization that, “my mother’s life and choices would not define mine.” Allie’s responses are consistent with the E6 level of ego development in her description of the role of mother. She conceptualized her role of mother within the framework of the larger social context. She described the importance of growth in her mothering, thus indicating a more realistic view of individual differences and how a mother may need to flex to meet the evolving needs of a child.

### **Interpretation**

Allie developed a strong sense of independence from facing multiple transitions at an early age, and found strength within herself to make effective meaning of several tumultuous experiences. Allie’s story shows that her growth as a mother was significantly influenced by time spent with both her aunt and her grandmother. Allie models a history of striving hard to make her own decisions. This could be attributed to her feeling that many of the decisions made on her behalf, at a young age, were not often beneficial. As such, she demonstrates fierce independence and the identity of a strong, empowered woman. Her experiences and independence affect how she chooses to enter into and maintain relationships. She approaches relationships tentatively, but when trust is developed, she connects deeply.

Allie learned how to be a mother, in part, by reflecting on her own needs. This learning occurred when she felt that others in her life lacked understanding and often failed to meet those needs. When compared to her peers, Allie felt that she experienced an overly restrictive home-life. This upbringing helped to shape how she viewed the role of motherhood. Allie developed the understanding that, as a mother, she would be flexible with the changing times and rise to meet the needs of her own daughter. She

based part of her development of her motherhood identity on undesirable models that in effect, demonstrated for her what a mother should *not* to do. Though she expressed feeling silenced during her childhood, she has made progress to ensure that her voice is heard in all aspects of her life.

### **Participant #2 “Andrea”**

Andrea is a 32-year-old, African American woman from a populous city in Virginia. She is in a long-term committed relationship with the father of her two daughters, ages 7 and 10. She has taken some college courses and is currently involved in counseling. Andrea lived with her maternal grandparents from birth to the age of three, then again between the ages of 12 to 18. Initially, she went to live with her grandparents, because her mother was 16 at the time of her birth, and unable to care for her without the support of her parents. When she was three, she and her mother and siblings moved out of the family home. Her mother eventually remarried. Andrea reflected deeply on that time. She noted that aspects of her mother’s marriage contributed to stressors in the family, “that marriage was really rough financially because her husband couldn’t work or wouldn’t work for whatever reason, and my mom wasn’t very frugal.” She described how she felt at the time about the situation, “I felt isolated, and it was uncomfortable” because of the family tension surrounding the circumstances.

When Andrea was 12, the family returned to the home of her grandparents. She described the arrangement at that time, “It was uncomfortable because we went from living in an apartment, to we were all in just one room.” She explained that it was meant to be a temporary situation, “At first it was an expectation that we would move away, but we ended up staying for a pretty long time, until I moved out when I was an adult.”

## Themes

The following themes, along with sub-themes noted in parentheses, were present in the interview transcript: Multiple Transitions (financial constraints, nowhere to go); Who's the Parent? (family conflict, difference in rules, mother as sibling); Gratitude (recognizing sacrifice, peace with decision); Motherhood Modeling (*what not to do, flexible mothering, modeling for children*).

**Multiple transitions.** Andrea experienced multiple living arrangements, which resulted in her developing an understanding of the need to be flexible according to the situation. “The way I do remember just feeling upset, and by the time we moved in with my grandparents, we had already moved a few times, due to evictions and things like that.” Limited finances played an influential role in her family structure. In her description of family-life before living with her grandparents the second time, she stated that, “It was normal life to me. We didn't have a lot of money; my mom was a single mom.” Her mother eventually remarried and Andrea noted that aspects of the marriage contributed to stressors in the family.

Andrea reflected on her time living in her grandparents' home, “I liked that feeling of stability; I also liked that there was always someone home. I liked it and hated it sometimes, but for the most part there was always someone home.” She further explored the elements that she appreciated about that time, “when we lived with my grandparents, I feel like we ate better; my grandmother cooked all the time, and we had family dinner.”

**Who's the parent?** Andrea described experiencing a difference in rules, roles, and expectations between her mother and her grandparents. “...when I was older and I



was wanting to do things I probably shouldn't have been doing, that I knew I had to go through the 'grandparent gauntlet'." When asked about who was in charge, she replied:

I would say my grandfather had the ultimate say, but he was very laid-back. He wasn't an authoritarian. He just kind of let us do what we had to do and in terms of rules, but I never really felt like I had a lot of freedom, especially as a teenager.

When discussing rules and roles within the family, Andrea noted the importance of faith in the home, "My grandparents were very religious, so that's what they were known for. If I had friends come over they would know that they're going to hear some type of spiritual something."

Andrea gave an example about how the differences between the expectation between her mother and grandparents influenced her as an adult:

the funny thing, when I was pregnant with my oldest daughter, I was more afraid of upsetting my grandmother. I felt with my grandmother I was more of a little girl to her, and to say that I'm pregnant would completely shatter that, but she was fine with it, like she wasn't upset, but it was just, mentally it was very hard for me to tell her.

Andrea described her relationship with her mother, "...we didn't have the traditional maternal-daughter type relationship. I feel like because she was really young when she had me, we were more like sisters almost."

She describes developing a sense of responsibility early within the family, "I was privy to way too much information about what was happening, and I was always more the responsible one." She gave an example, "my mom would struggle with money and I would say 'I know that you can probably do better if you had a budget,' and I would

make a budget for her and figure out her problem.” She expressed feelings of frustration with her mother at times, “I would come up with a plan to get her out of debt, and she would never follow it, that frustrated me greatly ... my mom was very much like a live for the moment type of person.”

**Gratitude.** Andrea expressed a sense of gratitude for her grandparents’ sacrifice for her and her siblings, “I always really respected and cared for both of my grandparents.” She further reflected on her feelings about her grandparents’ willingness to care for the family, “I think they did a very good job, and thankless job, because a lot of times we weren’t being appreciative. I know they sacrificed some things in their older years just so we could continue to live with them.” Andrea credited her grandparents with tremendous sacrifice and commitment to their family, “I think the biggest thing I took from living with my grandparents is that they opened up their home to us and let us live there. They took care of us when they had already done what they had to do.”

When prompted to discuss the feelings she was aware of regarding having lived with her grandparents, Andrea responded:

It’s like a little warm, fuzzy feeling, like nostalgia I guess. Some sadness because we don’t have that now. My grandfather passed away, my grandmother’s in a nursing home, so there’s some sadness that the era has passed...bittersweet.

Andrea noted feeling “lucky” to have had the experience of living with her grandparents, and as a result she makes a concerted effort to keep her children in close contact with their father’s parents. She remarked, “I think it makes a child’s life richer.”

**Motherhood modeling.** Andrea explored her ideas of the meaning of motherhood for her. “I would say first and foremost a mother’s job is to nurture her children.” She further explained the need for flexibility in the role and the importance of: recognizing that that’s different for each child, because both of our children have really different personalities. I have to parent them almost, not completely different, but there are certain things that I will do with the older that I won’t do with the younger and vice versa.

She noted that, “out of all of the roles that I have, that’s my most important role.” She stated, “Being a mother means being responsible for someone else and helping them grow into the person that they are meant to be with lots of support and love and care.” She indicated her view of the importance of being a good model for children, “a mother’s role is to be a teacher ...by giving lessons, and also through your own examples... a role model.”

Andrea reflected on looking to women in the family as models to learn about motherhood. She stated that she learned from “doing some of the things she [grandmother] did, or not doing some of the things she did, and not doing a lot of things my mom did.” Further describing seeing her grandmother as a model for learning about motherhood, Andrea stated, “She was always doing things for us. I never really saw her doing much for herself, so I feel like I learned that there is a lot of self-sacrifice.”

### **Ego Development**

Andrea scored at the E6 – Conscientious stage of ego development, as measured by the WUSCT-81. The E6 stage is characterized by a true sense of conceptual complexity and the ability to think in a multifaceted manner. Those scoring in the E6

range have a strong sense of responsibility and are aware that actions have consequences (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

Her statements regarding reflection on growing up in the family structure and her transition into the role of mother were indicative of the complexity of an individual of the E6 level. She noted differentiating between positive and negative behaviors, making the distinction between the person and the behavior. Additionally, she expressed ideas about behavior in terms of action and consequence, for example, Andrea's response to describing her relationship with her children is consistent with the E6 level, because she indicated that relationships are dynamic and evolve over time. "I would say we have a good relationship and hopefully it continues to grow stronger and closer." She continued to explain that she desires changes from the relationships she experienced as a child.

That's an anxiety I have, that as they get older with a little more distance that, I know that happens because that's part of them getting older but, I don't want it to be the way it was with me and my mom, or even my grandmother. I feel like there was always a part of myself that I kind of kept away from them, for different reasons for both of them, so I want to always maintain that emotional closeness.

### **Interpretation**

Andrea was placed in multiple living arrangements during her childhood. With each new arrangement, she experienced changes in the rules and expectations within the household. As a result, she developed an understanding of the need for flexibility. Unique among the participants, Andrea's mother was present in each living situation. She remarked that her grandparents were more in charge of household rules and responsibilities, which compounded role confusion within the household. Andrea

characterized the relationship with her mother at the time as more like a sister than a mother/daughter relationship, with Andrea feeling at times more responsible than her mother. Andrea experienced taking on a heightened sense of responsibility at an early age, which has carried over into her adult life. She recognizes the sacrifice that her grandparents made to care for her and her siblings, and feels lucky to have had the experience. As a result, she feels that children benefit from the influence of grandparents, and she seeks to maintain close bonds across generations in her family.

Andrea learned multiple lessons about what it means to be a mother from living with her grandparents. She looked to her grandmother as a positive role model, noting the importance of modifying what she learned to flex to the needs of her children. She also noted having learned from her mother's example, many things that she will choose not to do while parenting her children. Andrea expressed the importance of setting a good example, being a role model for her children, and seeking to help her children grow so that they may reach their maximum potential.

### **Participant #3 "Carmen"**

Carmen is a 57-year-old, African American woman who resides in a populous suburban city in Virginia. She works as an executive director of a non-profit organization and is the mother of four adult children. She has a Master's degree, is presently working toward a Ph.D., and she reported having sought counseling in the past. Carmen lived with her mother until her father took custody of her and her siblings before she was 10 years old. Shortly after losing custody, her mother became sick with cancer and died two years later. Carmen resided with her father and step-mother for a period of about two years. She reported experiencing emotional and physical abuse at the hands of

her step-mother, which prompted her to return briefly to her mother's home until her death. After that, she went to live with her maternal grandmother when she was 12.

### **Themes**

The following themes, along with sub-themes in parentheses, were noted from the interview: Hindered Belonging (Loving/conflicting family relationships, tentative relationships, role confusion); Seeking Mother (idealization of parents, unrelated/media models); and Flexible Mother (Growth/potential, mother as example, commitment to faith).

**Hindered belonging.** Carmen went through multiple transitions in her early childhood. She described a family meeting in which a decision about her and her siblings' living arrangements was being made:

They were all sitting around the table, and I used to have a habit of balling into knots and hiding in places and people couldn't see me, so I was underneath the table in a little ball, and they didn't know I was there so they were having a conversation about custody, who was going to take us, because nobody wanted to take all six of us.

She discussed how hearing the conversation contributed to feelings of not belonging, "I was amazed to find out that nobody really wanted me...I didn't belong. I was lost and nobody knew how to help me."

She explored her family relationships, which she described in loving terms, but shared that the family experienced a lot of conflict, particularly around the care of her and her siblings. She reflected on memories of her time with her mother just prior to her death:

She was addicted to pain medications so, when she would have to go to the doctor, she would keep me out of school and I would go with her, and she explained to me that she was going to die, and she had a long talk with me, that I was going to mature, my body was going to mature well beyond my years and she tried to impart some things to me at eleven, that I really didn't understand, but she tried and she told me I wasn't going to see her anymore.

Carmen described an awareness that the family environment did not feel supportive or encouraging, "I was aware that something was wrong, that the way that we treated each other and interacted with each other was not right." She remarked that that lack of support contributed to the reasons she left home at an early age. "I tried as quickly as I could to get away from them, and for years I didn't have anything to do with any of my family." She discussed a desire to confront her grandmother about perceived mistreatment by members of her family. She reflected that the conversation that took place with her grandmother was cathartic and resulted in a peaceful resolution. She stated, "When I got saved, I called my grandmother to tell her, and her and I had a really long talk." She noted having told her grandmother, "you almost killed me." We ended-up really reconciling, getting pretty close before she passed...I used to call her every week."

Carmen felt that dealing with family conflict influenced how she approached relationships into her adult life, "I would just stay away from people. I'm an expert at that, I can do that well." Reflecting on how she learned to relate to others, she stated, "I drew this conclusion that either you want to be around me or you don't, and if you don't, I'm not going to be around you. You know I had to make that choice with my family."

She stated that the early family conflict helped her to learn to approach challenges in an assertive manner. Noting that she learned how to communicate differently from her family, “You don’t treat people that way. That’s just not going to get the results.”

**Ideal Parents.** Carmen discussed feeling that at points in her life, she viewed her parents in an idealized manner. She described her feelings toward her father, “My dad was like my hero; I had this idealized typecast of him, of what I imagined him to be, and he’s a really gentle man, and I just know I loved him a lot, no matter what.” About her mother, Carmen stated, “I adored her, and admired her too... she was like my best friend.” She related that she eventually confronted her father about circumstances during her childhood, “I said yeah, you need to make that right; not with me though, but with everybody else, because I forgave him you know.” She attributes the ability to forgive and to be a strong mother to her faith.

**Flexible mother.** Carmen described what motherhood means to her by stating that being a mother means “Love, commitment, sacrifice and responsibility.” She further stressed that “it’s the closest experience you have that is likened to God.” When asked how she learned to be a mother, Carmen responded, “trial and error, and by the teachings from the word of God... and counsel.” She stated that part of motherhood is connected to creating the conditions for growth and by providing the necessary elements that help, “your children become what they were destined to be.” Carmen noted that she saw positive examples within her own family, but recognized that models did not always function in a positive manner. She explored additional models of motherhood that she noticed during her childhood that helped shape her ideas about what motherhood is, “I



guess I looked at it as based on the shows I used to watch, like Leave It to Beaver, My Three Sons, Hazel.”

She described her role as a mother as more of a “facilitator” and not a “dictator.” She stressed that mothers need to act as good examples for their children, “For children I think they get confused, so a leader, an example, you should model, because they do what they see.” Carmen demonstrated a strong commitment to her faith throughout the interview. She reflected that being strong in her faith was something that she learned from having lived with her grandmother, “she was faithful to God, she loved Him and she was committed, that was, she did the best she could where she was.”

### **Ego Development**

Carmen scored at the E5 – Self-Aware stage of ego development on the WUSCT-81. A person at the E5 level can view situations in a more complex manner than earlier stages. An individual at this stage has awareness that a sense of right and wrong is dependent on aspects of the situation including time and place. The E5 level is characterized by a desire to guide and support people who may break the rules or exhibit unwanted behavior, rather than simply punishing them (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Carmen illustrated this point by discussing the conversation she had with her father as an adult in which she wanted to help him make peace with his other children.

Carmen’s responses regarding becoming a mother were also indicative of the E5 ego development level. When talking about her relationships with all her children, she made gender specific distinctions regarding behavior, “It may sound sexist, but for the most part boys tend to be a little more forgiving, let it go than girls; it’s not that they’re not as emotional.” Additionally, Carmen attributed her sense of peace to having a

relationship with God, which came about initially through the teachings of her grandmother. She described her perspective of faith in regard to the love of a mother, “but above all is love, real love and to me the God kind of love, which is all encompassing, it takes care of everything that’s necessary in order to help that, your children become what they were destined to be.”

### **Interpretation**

From her early experiences, Carmen learned that family relationships can be loving and conflicting at the same time. As a result of the early challenges she faced, Carmen approached new relationships more tentatively and with increased caution. She also learned how to cope with challenging situations assertively and to forgive when the situation calls for it. For Carmen, her faith in God has been a major factor in guiding and shaping her life in all the roles she plays. She seeks guidance from her faith and from other respected people in her life.

As a mother, Carmen values the individual needs of her children and seeks to help them reach their potential for growth. She based her knowledge of what it means to be a mother on negative and positive examples from her own life. When positive examples were few, she looked outside her own family to gain a greater understanding and to correct for circumstances that felt unproductive. Although Carmen experienced family conflict early on, she places tremendous emphasis on the value of family. When asked to define what family is to her, she responded by describing unconditional love that involves “commitment, sacrifice, and responsibility.” She cited examples within her family of origin in which she felt loved and described how her definition manifests at present with

her husband and children. She further described the feeling of love for family as “the closest experience you have that is likened to God.”

#### **Participant #4 “Constance”**

Constance is a 47-year-old, married, Caucasian female, and mother of four daughters between the ages of 14 and 24. She resides in a small town in Indiana, where she works in the banking industry. She has taken some college courses and reports having sought counseling in the past. Constance lived with her maternal grandparents from the age of seven months until she was married at the age of 20. Though her parents were married until she was about seven years old, she did not live with them. Among all participants, Constance experienced living in the care of her grandparents across the longest duration.

She described the circumstances leading to being placed in the care of her grandparents, “She [mother] had gotten pregnant and not married. She eventually, actually she married my father while she was pregnant with me, but raising me was not something they could afford, so that’s why my grandparents took me in.” She explored what it was like living in the home of her grandparents, “She [grandmother] was present, but she worked full time, and by the time she came home, because it was still traditional values in our home, she still had to, even though he was home all day, she still had to cook dinner and do the laundry and do the grocery shopping and all of that.”

#### **Themes**

The following themes, along with sub-themes in parentheses, were noted from the interview: Generational Gap (Lack of affection, strict rules, mother as sibling); Peer

Differences (motherless child, no extras, other comparison); and Mother Model (Negative/positive examples, protective, responsible).

**Generational gap.** Constance described the level of affection expressed in the household growing up, “I think that was also a generational thing; PDA [public displays of affection] was not a big thing. As a matter of fact, it was probably only until I moved away, after I got married, that they verbally would say that they loved me over the phone; growing up, that just wasn’t a thing.” She noted family conflict that existed in the family during that time, “They took care of me, and my mother was, I always refer to her as the sister that I never got along with. There was a constant battle of who was going to provide what for me, but they always did.”

Constance described the rules and expectations within the household with her grandparents, “I mean they were very strict. I was raised in a very strict household.” Despite the strict rules, Constance expressed feeling that living with her grandparents was a more stable environment than the alternative, “I had my own room...you know we didn’t by any means live in the wealthy part of town, we didn’t have a big house, but it was a lot better than what my siblings were living in, and it was a better environment.”

**Peer differences.** Constance described differences she noticed between her family structure and that of other children around her at the time:

Her [best friend’s] parents were awesome, and so I remember being really envious of her, because there was just a different connection, and I know it was the generational thing, and it was more fun, and I just felt like if I had somebody younger, that that would be a different situation for me.

She further described things that she noted stood out to her that made her different from other children:

It always felt a little weird when it was mother-daughter things, and then I would really be put into an awkward situation because my mother was still part of my life, she was still there, but I wanted to do stuff with my grandmother. Then I'd feel guilty if I asked my mother to do it, so I was always kind of put between a rock and a hard place with that.

Constance felt different from her peers in that she was unable to participate in extracurricular activities, "No dance lessons, no ballet, no cheerleading, nothing. You get the basics because that's all we could do for you. I loved them, but they were just tired and they were ready to be done."

**Mother model.** Constance noted that, for her, motherhood is, "the greatest joy and the biggest responsibility." She asserted her feelings about her children's choices: "I feel like if they don't make the right decisions in life, that it was my fault." When asked about how she learned to be a mother, Constance stated that she looked to the example that her grandmother set. She explored the positive and negative aspects she learned from the models around her at the time. About her mother, she stated, "I learned as much by her mistakes as I did anything. She credits her mother-in-law with providing a good example for her to follow. She further described her journey to becoming a mother, "I don't think I read a lot of parenting books, that was never my thing. I caught more than I was taught." Constance stressed that she began to make deeper realizations about her mother's place in her life as she got older and became a mother. When describing feelings about her mother having behaved in an unreliable manner, she noted feeling

protective of her own children, stating about her mother, “You’ve done that to me my entire life; I am not letting you do that to my children.”

### **Ego Development**

Constance scored at the E5 – Self-Aware stage of ego development. Her interview responses were indicative of characteristics outlined in the E5 level. For example, she exhibited more complex contingencies for comparison. Ideas of right and wrong are presented in a more complex manner, and are dependent on the time and situation. Constance explored her feelings when she realized her feelings toward her mother,

It probably took me until my 30s, that I finally realized that it didn’t bother me anymore, and that fact alone bothered me that it doesn’t bother me anymore. We don’t have the relationship, but it had just you know, from so many years of trying to make her June Cleaver, that I finally realized that that’s not who she wants to be, and there was nothing I could do about it, but that I’d had a pretty good life besides that, without that.

Also, indicative of the E5 level was Constance’s description of what it means to her to be a mother. She described herself in terms of an active agent in shaping her children’s lives, “I feel like I’m the responsible person that they will model how their life is going to be and so I, I’m constantly questioning if I’ve done the right thing, or not.”

Constance’s responses about gender roles were also consistent with the E5 level. She noted awareness of the dichotomous expectations for her grandmother which eventually translated to her own life:

She had to be the bread winner. She didn't have time for PTO [parent-teacher organization] and all that kind of stuff. Then on the weekends it was, the laundry and it was cleaning and it was whatever other shopping that had to be done, and cooking. I learned that was a role for the mom in traditional homes, that's what I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do.

### **Interpretation**

Constance experienced role confusion as a child in terms of parenting roles. She notes feeling the confusion as young as four years old, when she woke from a nap surrounded by three significant women in her life, and asked them "which one of you is my mother?" Her early experiences shaped her ideas of what it means to be a mother, and developed in her a heightened sense of importance of the role. She describes motherhood as a role she wanted. She explains "I always wanted to be a mom, and I think it was because I knew I could do it better." Constance strives to be her best when it comes to mothering her four daughters. She recognizes the need to find many ways to express love to her children, which she works to convey through actions and affection.

As a mother, Constance strives to adjust the parenting practices she received to provide a better experience for her children. She notes feeling that her mother was often "unreliable," which led her to be a reliable person and to seek out a dependable life partner with whom to share the role of parent. Constance feels a deep sense of gratitude for the willingness of her grandparents to provide a home for her. She noted that the gratitude deepened when she turned 40, when she imagined what it would be like taking on an additional child at that age as her grandparents did. She reflected on gratitude that her grandmother shared her spiritual views and practices with her, which remains with

her into her adult life. Overall, Constance's experience assisted her in developing the idea that family is of the utmost importance in her life. She values strong, loving, reliable family relationships, and strives to provide stability and constancy for her children. She noted the importance of working together as a parenting team with her husband, who she describes as loving and trustworthy.

#### **Participant #5 "Elizabeth"**

Elizabeth is a 31-year-old, African American, single mother of one seven-year-old daughter. She has recently moved out of transitional housing, and is employed as a nursing assistant. She has a bachelor's degree and reports having participated in counseling as a child and as an adult. She came to live with her maternal grandmother when she was removed from the home of her mother by Child Protective Services for evidence of physical abuse at the age of six. She described the reason she was taken out of her mother's home:

When I went to school that morning they found bloodstains on the white T-shirt, and I guess that's when they discovered the marks and stuff, and I didn't come back to her house that night, they went on and took me, I had to go to my grandmother's that same day.

She further described her memory of the physical abuse:

She [mother] used to have me stand on one foot, and she would hit me with the extension cord. I know one time my tooth got knocked out from it. I would go there to look in the living room trying to find that tooth, because my grandma would be the tooth fairy.



The following themes, along with sub-themes in parentheses, were noted from the interview: Confusion (who disciplines, temporary situation, age gap); Hindered Belonging (Missing relationships, seeking a mother); Motherhood Tasks (meaningful tasks, fostering independence, unconditional love).

## **Themes**

**Confusion.** Elizabeth described what it was like living in the home of her grandmother:

My grandmother cooked good meals, and my cousin would come visit sometimes. It was kind of exciting because it was just me and her. It was challenging at times because I didn't understand why I was taken away. I thought I was going to go back to my mom.

She felt that she was living temporarily with her grandmother until she was much older, when she came to understand that the arrangement was permanent, “She [mother] would come down some and visit. I remember her saying that she would come back and get me. But, after a while it got to a point where I knew she wasn't going to come get me.”

Elizabeth explored how she felt her family was different from other families at the time, “I wouldn't get any help with certain subjects, my grandmother wasn't able to help me with certain things, and I remember sometimes I got a little frustrated about it.” She remarked about being treated differently at school than her peers, “The teachers, I think they knew, and they would help. I always thought in the back of my head they knew about the abuse because I would think that was probably why they're so nice to me.” She also noted that she was unable to do things that her peers were doing, such as sleepovers, “my grandmother didn't like me going to people's houses and spending the night.”

**Hindered belonging.** Elizabeth described feeling that she has never experienced a close relationship with either her father or her mother. She explained that at points in her life, she sought out mother/daughter relationships with unrelated women in her life. She stated that she was “looking for that mother figure, so I would cling to older women.” She further explained, “I found out I was lingering for it, especially when I went off to college for the first time, I was looking for these ladies to call them ‘mama’.” She stated that she no longer seeks out these relationships, “after a while I stopped looking for that. I was just like if it happens it happens, if it don't, it don't.” Her feelings of lacking a mother-daughter bond with her own mother have impacted her motherhood practices. She noted that building and maintaining a strong relationship with her daughter is an important task that she works at diligently, because she wants her daughter to feel connected and to not desire to seek mother figures in other women.

**Motherhood tasks.** When reflecting on the elements of her life with her grandmother that helped her feel loved, Elizabeth described the meaningful moments in terms of tasks that her grandmother performed. These included providing good meals for her and making sure she had all that she needed. Elizabeth explored her desire to want to provide these things for her daughter. In addition to household tasks, Elizabeth stressed a strong desire to foster independence in her daughter, “I'm trying to give her responsibility...I'm not going to be a crutch for her.” Elizabeth described how she learned to be a mother, “instinct, it just kind of kicked in because when she was born.” Elizabeth stated that she also looked to examples to learn about mothering. She stated that some knowledge came from, “learning from my mom and grandmother things I can provide to my daughter, but also learning what not to do from other people's mistakes.”

Elizabeth noted the importance of the role of mother for her is connected to providing a family home for children with both a mother and a father. She expressed a strong desire to connect with a significant other to provide a two-parent home for her daughter.

### **Ego Development**

Elizabeth scored at the E4 – Conformist stage of ego development. This stage is characterized by conventional responses that are less complex conceptually than higher stages. Descriptions of interpersonal relationships contain comments about behaviors as opposed to feelings or intentions. Individuals at this level view behavior as right or wrong as opposed to the person (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Elizabeth's interview responses are consistent with this level. For example, she described the qualities of her grandmother that she appreciated in terms of her behavior:

...home-cooked meals, that was the best... around the table, and having a dog.  
Just like a family, cozy, warm, my grandma would get up early in the morning, before I had to be ready for school, and she would cut the heat on, just little things I think about that made it real special.

### **Interpretation**

Elizabeth experienced a great deal of confusing circumstances at an early age. She was unsure about the permanence of her living situation from the age of six until she was in middle school. She also experienced confusion about who was in charge and who had the right to discipline her, which resulted in strong emotions that she felt ill-equipped at the time to cope with. She was placed in counseling at that time in her childhood due to self-harm behavior that resulted from the situation. She spent a portion of her adult

life missing the strong bond between a mother and a daughter and seeking to find that bond in relationships with older women.

Elizabeth learned about being a mother from instinct and from both positive and negative models around her. She equates loving, mothering gestures with task oriented activities, as these were things in her childhood that helped her feel loved and accepted. As an adult, she respects independence in others and in herself. An important element of mothering for her is fostering independence in her own child.

### **Participant #6 “Joy”**

Joy is a 47-year-old, Caucasian, mother of five children between the ages of 19 and 28. She is married and resides in rural Illinois where she is a full-time caretaker for her mother who suffers from physical and mental illness. She reported having taken several classes at a community college, but notes she had to stop taking classes when she became pregnant. She and her sister went to live with her paternal grandparents at the age of two. Her grandfather died when she was about five. Her sister passed away a year later. Joy described the circumstances that led to her being placed in her grandparent’s care:

Mom left because she felt she could not take care of me and my sister. Dad put us there because it was very difficult at that time for him to be able to care for two young children and work, and have any semblance of what he felt like was necessary to have a life.

She reflected on her father’s choice to place her in the care of her grandparents:

I really think that you make choices at the time, depending on the circumstances that you’re going through and I really feel that me and my sister being put with

our grandparents when we were, was a necessary choice for all parties involved at that time.

### **Themes**

The following themes, along with sub-themes in parentheses, were noted from the interview: No regrets (secure/stable, no extras, limited parent/child bond); and Motherhood (flexibility, fostering growth).

**No regrets.** Joy expressed fond memories of her time with her grandmother, “I mean we lived out in the middle of nothing, we lived on a farm, it was just me and her. At first, we had the farm animals, pigs, chickens. She had a huge garden. We took care of that.” She explained that her social activities were limited, “There weren’t a whole lot of extracurricular things but, as far as rules, I mean it was just very kid friendly, very simple.” She described her grandmother as a strong example of a woman, “for the most part [she] was the most steady of mountains that I could ever possibly have.”

Though she noted that she didn’t feel that she missed out on anything during her time with her grandmother, she described the ways in which she felt different from her peers at the time:

I was fairly isolated. I didn’t get to experience a lot of the same things that other kids did, although Gram tried. I was in the Girl Scouts, I did go on some field trips, I didn’t attend a lot of birthday parties, you know how the kids get to go to everybody’s birthday party. I didn’t have that, I didn’t even have that when I was older.

Of her relationship with her parents, Joy stated:

Mom was in and out, you know she was still trying to figure out who she was and where her place on the planet was, but I did see her. The older I got, I spent a little bit more time with her and I went through some of the trials and tribulations with her, but I don't know if you could really say I had a relationship with either of them. It was more of a, 'I see you now, I see you then, okay that's just the way it is,' it wasn't anything special.

**Flexible motherhood.** Regarding her role as a mother, Joy responded, "I'm supposed to make sure that my children can handle the world and life, whatever's thrown at them, then I've done my job." She further explained:

Mothers are responsible for shaping minds, for helping little people grow into big people with some semblance of grace, respect, love and a multitude of other emotions and feelings and ...the list is so endless. To be responsible for themselves, to be responsible for their actions, to understand the difference between right and wrong, to understand why you'd make one choice over another choice, even if both of them are wrong or both are right. To be respectful, that you're not the only person that's been put on the planet.

### **Ego Development**

Joy scored in the E6 – Conscientious stage of ego development. Several of her responses were conceptually complex, indicating differentiated polarities, which is indicative of characteristics of this stage. Her responses were not stereotyped as might be seen at lower levels. On the WUSCT – 81, Joy noted objections to the stem on a few occasions, which is a characteristic of this stage. She expressed an awareness of the complexity of life. For example, while discussing things that she learned from her

grandmother, she stated that “she was just being herself, and I actually think that was a bigger lesson to me than anything else.” In another example, Joy stated, “When you’re young, your complex thinking is just not there, no matter how simplistic you try to make it, or complex you try to make it. It still gave me the ability to cope.”

Additionally, the ability to see circumstances from the perspective of others was presented in several her responses. Joy described her time with her grandmother as a sacrifice on her grandmother’s part, “She did what she could. I know it wasn’t easy, you know thinking back on some of the happenings that took place. I know it wasn’t easy for her to, because she was in her late 60’s when we went to live with her and she was late 70’s when I left.”

### **Interpretation**

Joy recounted having experienced a secure, stable, and loving environment while living with her grandmother. She credited many of the things that she learned during this time to helping her become a strong woman and mother. She attributed the loving environment and the influence of her steady and present grandmother to being able to cope with life’s many challenges. Joy experienced a high level of responsibility as a young child, which has carried over into her adult life. Joy sees herself in many roles, one of which is the role of caretaker. She is a member of the “sandwich generation,” presently taking care of her children, grandchildren, and her mother. Joy experienced challenges of motherhood when she became a mother for the first time during her teen years. She actively seeks to make meaning of her past challenges and mistakes. She exhibits the capability and willingness to flex and bend as changing situations require.

### **Participant # 7 “Sarah”**

Sarah is a 48-year-old Caucasian mother of two children ages 18 and 22. She is married and has two step-children. She has a bachelor’s degree and described her occupation as a homemaker. She resides in a suburban city in Georgia and reported having participated in counseling in the past. She was placed in the care of her maternal grandparents when her parents got divorced at the age of five, and lived there until she was 17. Her family conveyed the message that her mother was unable to care for her due to her work schedule as a nurse. Sarah attributed the decision more to her mother’s alcoholism. During her childhood, her mother lived in the same neighborhood as her grandparents, so she saw her mother frequently.

#### **Themes**

The following themes, along with sub-themes in parentheses, were noted from the interview: Reading Between the Lines (interpreting messages from adults, understanding others’ behavior); Parenting Models (positive influence of grandfather, positive/negative examples); and Motherhood Goals (consistency, realistic expectations, doing what’s best).

**Reading between the lines.** Sarah noted reasons for her mother not being able to care for her, “She was a nurse, and she was an alcoholic, and so I think that played a big part in my going to live with my grandparents. They said it was because of nursing but we all knew otherwise.” She described how she found out that she’d be living with her grandparents:

I remember that nobody told me what was going on, and so one day, I went to my grandmother’s closet in the guest bedroom and all my stuff was in there, and I



was like hey, wait a minute, and so I knew that something was up. I figured well, I guess I just live here now, but I didn't ask about it or say anything or make any trouble at all for anybody, and I just kind of never looked back.

In response to how she felt different from other children her age, she replied, "My mom was a lot younger than most of my friend's moms, and so she was like the hot mom [laugh] and that felt pretty weird." She visited her mother frequently and spent weekends with her at times, but understood that her grandparents were responsible for her. Sarah explained, "My mom wasn't very involved like my other friends, it seemed like their moms were involved in their lives, and I felt different that way."

She described another difference she noticed that illustrated a child's understanding of adult behavior, or "reading between the lines" as:

I remember my mom and dad didn't get along very well, and I don't remember any domestic violence or anything like that but, they just didn't get along and so there was fighting, and there were pretty wild parties where grown-ups were acting like complete idiots, and even under five years old I could tell that was not right.

**Parenting models.** Sarah explored several memories of her time with her grandparents, "I loved my grandfather and he was a great reader, and so we would take trips to the library and get lots of books and he read to me all the time, and really encouraged a lot of thoughtful conversations." Sarah reflected fondly on the influence of her grandfather, crediting him with being a positive role model in her life. She noted enjoying spending time with him as a child, "We also rode bikes together, and we

camped together as a family, so I have a lot of good memories of them, especially my grandfather.” She felt differently about the relationship with her grandmother, stating:

My grandmother was hard for anyone to live with. She was temperamental, she had a terrible temper and she was smart as she could be, but she had no patience for error, and so you know she was just very impatient and she would throw a fly swatter at you.

Sarah reflected on this experience, making a connection to anxiety that she experiences as an adult, “having that kind of unpredictability growing up, it just leaves you with a certain expectation that all hell’s about to break loose at any minute.”

**Motherhood goals.** When asked what being a mother means to her, Sarah replied, “Being a mother is not the same as being a friend, it means doing what’s best for your children, even when it’s not popular, even when they hate your guts for it.” Sarah explored her expectations for herself as a mother. She stated that “it’s important to get it right as much as you can, but I don’t think that everything is riding on your performance as a mother.” She expressed that part of being a mother is behaving in a consistent manner, “being willing to stick by your guns so to speak and do what you know is right.”

### **Ego Development**

Sarah scored at the E6 – Conscientious stage of ego development. Many of her interview responses contained evidence of conceptual complexity, thus corroborating her score. Individuals at the E6 stage show a strong sense of responsibility, justice, and fairness. Sarah demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility in her responses regarding her identity as a mother. For example, Sarah described her perspective of family, “I wanted my children to feel secure, and I wanted them to feel loved and I wanted there to

be order, but not perfection, well I wanted there to be perfection but day two, I knew that wasn't going to happen.”

She noted tolerance for ambiguity as a trait of motherhood, “my grandfather and I used to talk about this... we decided that it's important in a person's life to have a very negative example and a very positive example, and that you can kind of find the middle road I mean you strive toward the positive but those things kind of keep you centered.” Her responses revealed striving for self-improvement, and discernable self-awareness about personal faults, “I guess, I see the role of mother as the most important in a kid's life, that's why it's important to get it right as much as you can.” She expressed that it's not necessary that a mother get it right all the time.

### **Interpretation**

Sarah expresses deep gratitude for the experience of living with her grandparents. Though there were challenges at times, she notes that there were many happy memories and influential moments that have shaped her identity. Sarah credits her grandparents with giving her greater stability than she would have if she had remained in the care of her mother or father. She experienced role confusion with her mother living in the same neighborhood during her childhood. Despite past role confusion, she has developed a strong sense of her own role as a mother.

Sarah reflected on experiencing a strong and valued relationship with her grandfather, which she notes has had a significant influence on her life and how she understands herself and the world. She expresses gratitude for his willingness to impart his wisdom through long thoughtful conversations, which has increased her tendency toward deep reflection. As a small child, she demonstrated the ability to read between

the lines in regard to others' interpretations of situations and events. This skill has carried over into adulthood. Combined with reflective practice ingrained in her by her grandfather, she presents a realistic and flexible view of herself and society. For Sarah, motherhood is an important role that carries tremendous responsibility. She notes that mothers need to be consistent and do what they know is right as much as possible, but not be too hard on themselves when they make inevitable mistakes. She sees the role of motherhood as requiring flexibility to meet the needs of children, but also requiring flexibility in expectations of self.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

Saldaña (2009) presented descriptive coding as a method to “summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of passage of qualitative data” (p. 70). The overarching objective is to work to discern the essence of a phenomenon. Table 4.2 below summarizes the sub-questions and gives textural examples of statements provided by participants that pertain to each question. Subsequently, Table 4.3 provides descriptive codes that emerged from the interview transcripts. Counts of each occurrence are shown and indicate the number of times that item appeared in the data. Afterwards, the meaning and essence of those emergent themes is explored.

Table 4.2

*Research Sub-Questions and Samples of In Vivo Codes*

Sub-Questions	Sample of In Vivo Code
<p>1. What themes within the meaning-making of women raised by grandparents may contribute to perceptions of motherhood?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I actually met with her and I said the words to her that the best thing she ever taught me is the mother I would never be.”</li> <li>• “The biggest [influence] was my grandmother. I learned how not to be a mother by my mother because I was convinced that I was not going to do things the way that she did them and so I always say I learned as much by her mistakes as I did anything.”</li> <li>• “...my mother-in-law, she was a big part of showing me how to mother.”</li> <li>• “My best friend’s mom, she was great. I got to see a lot of the, the good mother-daughter interaction with them.”</li> <li>• “I’ve tried to pick up as much from people; I caught more than I was taught.”</li> <li>• “my grandmother was very controlling and it was just do it or you have something tossed at your head. So that was how I learned to be a mother, very carefully, and TV.”</li> <li>• “my grandfather and I used to talk about this and we decided that it’s important in a person’s life to have a negative example and a very positive example.”</li> <li>• “So I kind of wonder if everybody that is raised by grandparents feels that way, like there’s a little gap between learning to be a grown up and mother.”</li> <li>• “...learning to make the necessary distinction between a mom and a grandmother. We’re losing that because grandmothers raise their children it gets all mixed up in there, and somehow it gets lost.”</li> <li>• “My mom lived in the same neighborhood, so I saw her pretty frequently.”</li> <li>• “You can put up with so much, but you will not let it happen to your children”</li> <li>• “I learned not to question. I didn’t question a whole lot.”</li> <li>• “I always wanted to be a mom, and I think it was because I knew I could do it better.”</li> <li>• “it’s just pivotal to be supportive to the growth and development of other human beings that are vulnerable, that are not wise to the world.”</li> <li>• “I mean motherhood is about self-sacrifice I think.”</li> <li>• “my grandmother was the most powerful role model that I had at that point in time. So I was taught from her that sacrifice, that was a big one because she did sacrifice so much of herself for me.”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I mean I’ve been taking care of someone since I was very young, and to me that’s nothing new.”</li> </ul>
<p>2.What are the influences of age, gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood by women raised by grandparents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “it was still traditional values in our home...she still had to cook dinner and do the laundry and do the grocery shopping and all of that.”</li> <li>• “... it was only until I moved away, after I got married, that they verbally would say that they loved me over the phone; growing up that just wasn’t a thing. I mean I knew they did, it just wasn’t verbalized.”</li> <li>• “she was pregnant with me, but raising me was not something they could afford.”</li> <li>• “my grandparents took me in, and so they, there was a constant battle of who was going to provide what for me, but they always did.”</li> <li>• “I couldn’t do a whole lot of extracurricular things.”</li> <li>• “I remember my grandmother getting assistance to help with me for medical bills, just trying to get healthcare and things like that to provide for me because I didn’t have any parents that were helping her with that.”</li> <li>• “you didn’t always feel like you were perceived in a positive manner by those outside of your family, maybe judged by your socioeconomic standing in a negative way.”</li> <li>• “I had nowhere to go. He [father] wound up in jail, and if my grandmother hadn’t been willing to accept me, I suppose I would have just wound up in the foster system.”</li> <li>• “we didn’t have a big house, but it was a lot better than what my siblings were living in, and it was a better environment.”</li> <li>• “I think the way that my grandfather talked to me and tried to make me analyze things and look at the world, sort of in a thoughtful way. I definitely tried to pass that on to my kids.”</li> </ul>
<p>3.What is the relationship between the participant’s level of ego development and her perceptions of motherhood?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It allowed me at some point to, to develop or form the perspective that growth is a process and process is up and down, not good and bad, the process is what it is.”</li> <li>• “I used my resilience I guess you could say just to be able to get through it.”</li> <li>• “for me I knew I wasn’t my grandparent’s daughter, so there was this sort of gap; not like I was a guest in the home, because I didn’t really feel like that, it was definitely my home but, but it wasn’t.”</li> <li>• “I wasn’t able to be a kid, but I didn’t see anything wrong with what I was doing.”</li> <li>• “Not feeling loved, not feeling valued.”</li> <li>• “I remember just not feeling that I belonged anywhere, that I wasn’t counted as a person anywhere.”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “That I didn’t belong. I was lost and nobody knew how to help me.”</li> <li>• “I wasn’t the little girl that he left and, and it was hard for me to grow through the stages of a female I guess, from being someone’s daughter to being a woman, and my emotions and my mind didn’t get to go through those growth stages. So that was difficult for me.”</li> <li>• “By generations and technology and, and structures and norms, as they change, so to do the lives of our children and you have to adjust for that along with that progression.”</li> <li>• “when you become a mom and get older, hindsight is 20/20.”</li> <li>• “I am at peace.”</li> <li>• “I feel like that’s what shaped the rest of me.”</li> <li>• “I don’t try to complicate things by overthinking it, I don’t try to, to give an audience to something that is, is a time waster.”</li> <li>• “I know who I am, I know what kind of person I am, I know what is important to me.”</li> <li>• “I feel strongly that you have to have self-growth in order to fully appreciate the growth of others.”</li> <li>• “That’s fulfilling, self-fulfilling, and there’s nothing wrong with being a successful, empowered woman. You don’t have to apologize for that.”</li> <li>• “I think if I’d been with my mom as chaotic as her life was at that point, I would not be anywhere near the person I am.”</li> <li>• “Take life with a grain of salt, you know it’s going to throw curve balls and fast balls and kick you in the butt and turn you upside down and stretch you out to your very limits and you know, that’s just life, you have to just deal with it, just take it all with a grain of salt, grin and move on.”</li> </ul>
--	---

Table 4.3

*Emergent Themes*

Research Question	Emergent Themes	Frequency
<i>“What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent?”</i>	Unselfish Motherhood - the most important role identity, self-sacrifice – traditional motherhood tasks are important	74
	Hindered Belonging - Realization of familial rejection – Family structure influences future adult identity. Perceptions of self are formed from context and connections	62
	Generational incongruence - Strict or severe rules/ old-fashioned. Grandparents as parent of parent and assumptions of behavior based on your parent.	55
	<i>A la Carte</i> Motherhood Models - Seeking other women as models to learn motherhood and learning behaviors to eliminate based on mother’s model	43
	Perceived Level of Support - contributes to motherhood identity	41
	Reflective Gratitude – In hindsight, recognizing grandparent’s contribution and gratitude for the experience	33

**Emergent Themes**

**Emergent Theme 1: Unselfish Motherhood**

When discussing the role of motherhood, all seven of the participants indicated that motherhood is a top priority in their lives and a major component of their identity as a woman. All participants described the role of mother as requiring tremendous self-sacrifice. While most participants noted the importance of the tasks of motherhood to nurture and guide their children, six out of the seven remarked on the importance of fostering independence in their children. Three participants described feeling that they may enact the role of mother in excess, becoming overprotective of their children at times.



A frequent theme within the interviews was the idea that mothers must model behavior for their children, requiring the mother to be vigilant in setting an example, and in some cases leaving little room for error. Another consistent theme was that a mother should work hard to understand their children. Most mothers indicated a need to be flexible to meet the needs of children, and noted that specific needs will likely vary among the children within the family. Several mothers stated that they worked hard to give their children opportunities that they feel they didn't have as children. Another frequent theme was a desire to perform traditional motherhood household tasks for children, including: cooking, cleaning, organizing, and volunteering at school.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Hindered Belonging**

A major theme noted within the transcripts was a perceived lack of belonging through various times and situations in life. In this context, belonging is hindered: although the participants experienced challenges with feeling a sense of belonging during childhood, many of them expressed having created a more satisfying sense-of-belonging as an adult. Five of the participants indicated a feeling of being undervalued during the time of life while living with their grandparent(s). Some of the women expressed that the feeling of not belonging has carried over into adulthood and influences their relationships currently. Six participants discussed being unable to participate in extracurricular activities like some of their peers and in most cases, this restriction was due to financial constraints. For most, the lack of opportunity provided them with limited social group interaction and contributed to feeling different from peers.

Most of the participants indicated that they were unable to establish a parent/child relationship with either of their biological parents during their lives. Another common

thread realized suggested that many of the women felt unable to understand what the mother/child or father/child bond should feel like. Many of the participants crafted or learned about the parent/child bond through their relationships with their own children. Further complicating their understanding of family relationships, five of the participants stated that they were in contact with one or both of their biological parents during the time they resided with grandparents. As previously noted, parents are often present to some degree, further confusing family roles and relationships (Soliz et al., 2009). Two of the participants described the relationship with their mothers as that of siblings.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Generational Incongruence**

Six of the participants discussed having felt aware of the age gap between themselves and their grandparent(s). Some described not feeling understood by their grandparent(s). Six participants noted that the rules and expectations within their households were different than they had experienced in other living arrangements or as compared to their peers. The majority indicated feeling that the rules in the household were more strict or severe comparatively.

A theme among the interviews evolved and suggested that the participants felt that grandparents seemed to be inadequately flexible to help meet the emotional or social needs of their grandchildren. In addition, grandparents may not have been aware of opportunities presented that could have allowed for deeper bonding with their grandchildren. One participant noted that she believed the rules were stricter for her based on her mother's past behavior within the grandparent's home. She explained that her grandparents feared that she would follow in the wayward footsteps of her mother, and therefore placed more constraints on her freedom.

#### **Emergent Theme 4: *A la Carte* Motherhood Models**

A prevalent theme among the interviews suggests that women seek out models to learn how to be a mother. All participants indicated that they had witnessed both positive and negative examples of motherhood. Noted as '*A La Carte* Motherhood Models', a general theme evolved as the participants sought-out and chose various models to find qualities that they felt were desirable or not in motherhood. In most cases, the grandmother was chosen as a good model for parenting. In almost every case, the participants noted that they learned from their mother or grandmother more about what *not* to do as a mother.

Three noted that they have come to understand that families are not always biological, and therefore family members can be chosen. Some of the women looked outside their families for models of motherhood. Several of the participants discussed having learned what it means to be a good mother from spending time with friends' families or by watching families on television. Two of the participants disclosed that they had sought to attach themselves to older women, seeking a mother/daughter relationship. Others looked to older women to model what the relationship might look like.

#### **Emergent Theme 5: Perceived Level of Support**

All the participants acknowledged having experienced loving, supportive family relationships at some point during their childhood. Many indicated that though the living arrangements might not have been ideal, they were much better than the alternatives, which might have meant experiencing the instability of staying in the home of their parent or being placed in foster care. Four of the participants described feeling a close

bond with their grandparent(s) that has positively impacted how their lives were shaped. Two participants described having had a close relationship with their grandparent(s) and that they [the participants] strive to follow the example they [the grandparent(s)] set. Two others indicated that they worked hard to shape their relationships with their children, because they wanted to improve upon the level of support they felt from their families.

Most experienced family conflict because of their parents' behavior or because of the living arrangement. In some cases, participants indicated that early conflicts led to struggles developing relationships later in life. A noticeable theme that evolved from this study was that many women left home at an early age to escape the conflict. Three participants expressed feeling that past family conflict taught them to be more cautious with whom they developed relationships. One explained that today she experiences deep relationships, but doesn't trust others easily.

#### **Emergent Theme 6: Reflective Gratitude**

Almost all the participants expressed gratitude for their grandparent's contribution to their upbringing. Several acknowledged the level of sacrifice their grandparents were willing to make on their behalf. In the words of one participant, "I think they did a very good job, and thankless job because a lot of times we weren't being appreciative." A few of the participants have grandchildren of their own, and remarked that caring for them at this stage of their lives would be challenging and exhausting.

Most participants expressed that being placed in the care of their grandparents was likely the best decision available. Many participants reflected that the living arrangement afforded them with more stability and comfort than would have occurred in

other situations. As the participants reflected on this experience, many acknowledged feeling strong emotions. One participant remarked, “It’s like a little warm, fuzzy feeling, like nostalgia I guess. Some sadness because we don’t have that now.”

### **Ego Development Analysis**

This section summarizes ego development stages of the participants as measured by the WUSCT - 81. Rather than looking at a single aspect of development, ego development incorporates several structures including relational style, impulse control, cognitive function, and moral development. Evidence of each aspect of development was present in the interviews of the participants and provided contextual evidence to support participant scores on the WUSCT – 81. Themes noted within the participants’ experiences offered additional clues to the process by which they have come to make meaning of the experience, and how they approach the joys and challenges of motherhood and family life.

Ego development levels among the participants ranged from the E4 – Conformist stage to the E6 – Conscientious stage. The modal stage was E6 – Conscientious. According to Hy and Loevinger (1996), the modal ego development stage of the general population is E5 – Self-Aware, which contrasts with the scores of the participants in the present study. Each of the women in the study had experienced significant life challenges as a child that influenced what it means to be a mother and subsequently relate within a family. Each of the women showed the capacity to engage in reflective practice. Additionally, the participants discussed the importance of supporting the emotional and social growth of children for continued development.

### ***Women's Ways of Knowing***

As described in chapter two, the concept of *Women's Ways of Knowing* provided the lens from which to view the participants' interview responses. In that vein, the participants in this study discussed various times in their lives and explored their understanding during those times. As they reflected on their experiences, they looked back and presented their current understanding, which suggests an evolution in their ways of knowing. Many of the participants were silenced-knowers as children, feeling powerless to improve the circumstances in which they lived, or to comment on them. Over time, most of the women showed evidence of growth in self-awareness and a shift closer to the 'constructed' end. The constructed knowledge level is indicative of an empowered feeling to influence others. Almost all the participants discussed the importance of understanding the awareness and perspective of their children in order to provide the most effective influence, which is a characteristic of constructed knowledge.

### **Summary**

For this phenomenological research study, data was collected through seven interviews with women who are mothers and who were raised by one or more grandparents. The study utilized semi-structured interviews. These interviews were focused on describing the essence shared by the participants as they experienced the phenomenon of developing as mothers. Based on Saldaña's (2009) coding techniques, the researcher employed use of attribute, initial, in-vivo, descriptive, and thematic coding. Data was analyzed using interview transcripts. Six common themes emerged from the analysis. Findings suggested being raised by a grandparent influences the development

of motherhood in unique and specific ways. The following themes are indicative of these influences:

1. Unselfish Motherhood
2. Hindered Belonging
3. Generational Incongruence
4. *A la Carte* Motherhood Models
5. Level of Perceived Support
6. Reflective Gratitude

In summary, the six key findings from this phenomenological study attempted to describe the influence of being raised in the care of grandparents on the development of the role of mother. The participants in the study shared a common theme of understanding how their upbringing contributed to their identity as mothers. Chapter five draws on these results and themes, to provide conclusions and implications.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

The previous chapter presented the findings that emerged using qualitative analysis of interview data from mothers who had been raised by at least one grandparent. Ego development stages as measured by the WUSCT-81 and the foundational *Women's Ways of Knowing* epistemological theory were included in the data to provide depth and richness to the interview data (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Chapter four presented the across-case analyses and ego development stage for each of the participants, and provided examples from the interviews to reinforce the essence of their experiences. Finally, chapter four presented the composite themes gleaned from all participants as well as, resultant interpretations. The present chapter describes the purpose of the study, discusses the research findings in the context of existing literature, and offers limitations of the study. Additionally, chapter five includes implications for future research, counselor education, and family counseling. A personal statement brings the study to a conclusion.

#### **Purpose of the Study: Review and Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological examination was to gain a deeper understanding of the development of the meaning of motherhood for women who were raised by grandparents. The study explored the shared phenomenon of motherhood by women who identified as being raised primarily in the home of one or more grandparents. The concept of ego development was used to add richness to the descriptions of the



participants' experiences. The epistemological framework, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, was used to provide a lens from which to conceptualize the experience. According to Creswell (2013), a sample size of seven satisfied the data saturation criterion suitable for a qualitative study. The findings are not intended to be generalizable to all mothers who were raised by grandparents, but may shed light on important elements that are relevant for future study.

The shared experiences of seven adult women who are mothers were explored in order to develop an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. The participants were initially drawn from a social media platform; ensuing identification progressed through sharing of social media and snow-ball sampling. The initial notice soliciting participation was shared across social media to a wide extent and resulted in multiple inquiries for possible participation coming from diverse locations. Those meeting the criteria, who agreed to participate, were from five different states within the U.S. Single interviews were conducted in-person and by using the technology platform, Skype, when in-person interviews were not possible.

Of the seven participants, four were Caucasian, and three were African American. Six of the seven women interviewed had sought individual or family counseling at some point in their lives, and two were engaged in counseling at the time of the interviews. Many participants related the need for counseling as having been rooted in their early experiences with their families. The study was guided by the following overarching research question: What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent? The sub-questions addressed by the study were:

1. What themes within the meaning-making of women raised by grandparents may

- contribute to perceptions of motherhood?
2. What are the influences of gender, culture, and social class in the development of perceptions of motherhood by women raised by grandparents?
  3. What is the relationship between the participant’s level of ego development and her perceptions of motherhood?

To address these questions, the researcher collected data from seven purposefully-selected women. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted that focused on the participants’ experiences growing up in the home of their grandparent(s) and their experiences of motherhood. The interview data was deconstructed then reconstructed into six cross-case themes that address the umbrella research question (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

*Emergent Themes*

Research Question	Emergent Themes
<i>“What does it mean to be a mother who was raised by a grandparent?”</i>	Unselfish Motherhood - the most important role identity of self-sacrifice and traditional motherhood tasks are important
	Hindered Belonging - Realization of familial rejection; Family structure influences future adult identity and perceptions of self are formed from context and connections
	Generational Incongruence - Strict or severe rules (old-fashioned); Grandparents may impose overly strict rules and regulations on grandchildren as a product of wayward parents due to self-imposed parenting correction based on perceived mistakes
	<i>A la Carte</i> Motherhood Models– Picking and choosing among other mothers as models to learn motherhood and learning behaviors to eliminate based on mother’s model
	Perceived Level of Support - contributes to motherhood identity
	Reflective Gratitude – In hindsight, recognizing grandparent’s contribution and gratitude for the experience

The six emergent themes illustrate the essence of motherhood in women raised by grandparents.

- Theme One: Unselfish Motherhood, discusses the meaning of motherhood for the women, which was expressed as the most important of all role identities, involving self-sacrifice and following ideals of traditional motherhood.
- Theme Two: Hindered Belonging, indicated the participants' long-standing confusion related to finding their place or position within the family, in some cases involving the realization of rejection by a significant caregiver. Participants also indicated recognizing the need to provide a strong sense of belonging to their children. Most participants, though hindered for a time, had found a sense of belonging as adults.
- Theme Three: Generational Incongruence, Participants reported experiencing strict or severe rules or a change in rules from one household to the next, which has influenced how they sought to provide rules and expectations for their children.
- Theme Four: *A la Carte* Motherhood Models, illustrated how the participants described seeking models for learning how to mother, at times picking and choosing traits and techniques from other, sometimes unrelated women. Across all cases, participants noted learning how to mother by learning behaviors to eliminate based on the model provided by their mother or grandmother.
- Theme Five: Perceived Level of Support, illustrated how whether a participant felt supported or not supported within their family constellation influenced future relationships, including relationships with their own children.

- Theme Six: Reflective Gratitude, explains the participants' recognition of their grandparents' sacrifice in raising them, feelings of acceptance of the caregiving situation, and gratitude as a result.

Following the formulation of these themes, the ego development levels of the participants were analyzed. Scores from the WUSCT-81 provided additional data to assist with forming a thick, rich description of the essence of the experience. By examining the participants' ego development level, more detail was gleaned that helped describe participants' meaning-making of the experience. The participants scored between the ranges of E4 (Conformist) stage and the E6 (Conscientious) stage. The modal score for the participants in this study was in the E6 (Conscientious) range, which is a stage higher than the modal score compared to the general population, which is the E5 (Self-Aware) stage. The E6 Stage is indicative of an increase in cognitive complexity. This stage is characterized by the ability to see others' points of view and to perceive situations within the greater social context. The conscientious individual sees multiple choices in life and the ability to alter her own destiny (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

### **Links to Literature**

Although the grandparent-led family structure has been present throughout history, limited evidence may be found in the literature examining the influence on adults who were raised within this family setting. Therefore, minimal evidence exists to support or contradict the findings. The research paucity to date was an instrumental driver for this study. In a related context, McGoldrick et al. (2016) stated that children develop security and a sense of identity through their connection to caregivers. The authors also noted that society develops and maintains impossible expectations for the role of mother

and often ignores the strengths and value of the context within which children often grow up. Emergent themes from the present study provide validity to both assertions.

Conclusive narratives on those themes are provided below.

### **Theme One: Unselfish Motherhood**

The theme of Unselfish Motherhood describes the tendency to view the role of mother as requiring tremendous self-sacrifice, often at the expense of one's own needs. The participants in the study explained the significant importance of understanding the needs of their children and being able to be flexible in responding with nurturance and support according to each need. Hays (1996), drawing from historical ideas, child-rearing manuals at the time, and interviews with women across a range of economic backgrounds, referred to this ideal as "intensive mothering (p. 97)." Hays (1996) described intensive mothering as the societal force pushing women to feel the need to act as self-sacrificing mothers who provide and nurture all children's physical and emotional needs. Hays asserted that the role requirements placed on women are unrealistic and leave limited room for self-interest.

The findings of the present study are consistent with Hays' (1996) assertions, although Hays did not look specifically at mothers who were raised by grandparents. The participants in Hays interviews consisted of women from a variety of family backgrounds. The corroboration would seem to suggest that mothers raised by grandparents are subject to the same societal views placed on the role of motherhood as are women from all family structures. Edwards and Mumford (2005) noted that children raised by grandparents often experience social, academic, and psychological development problems. This study's participants reinforced the Edwards and Mumford (2005)

research to a degree: although the seven women interviewed reported having experienced some social or academic problems during childhood, most were at or above average compared to the general population in ego development, suggesting that their psychological development continued to progress. What is not known is the trajectory of the psychological development. Perhaps development is impacted negatively at some points of the life cycle, but factors associated with being raised by grandparents also may provide adequate support to enhance continued psychological development.

### **Theme Two: Hindered Belonging**

Theme Two refers to the temporary confusion or sense of disconnectedness regarding one's place or position within a family. Maslow (1999) indicated that individuals have a fundamental need to feel connected to others. Similarly, Loevinger's (1976) theory of ego development contends that individuals have a need to gain acceptance and belonging within groups. The family environment is an important element in developing a sense of belongingness (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1989). Further, research suggests that the level to which children feel belonging within a family is directly linked to their well-being (King et al., 2015).

Each of the participants recounted having felt confused as to the roles within their family. In most cases, participants had experienced feelings of rejection or abandonment by a parent, even in the two cases in which the participants' mother had passed away. Both of those participants had reported feeling abandoned by their fathers. All participants had experienced one or more caregiver or family constellation disruptions that brought about a sense of confusion or lack of belonging. Each indicated that their sense of family and identity, as an individual and a mother, had been influenced by their

family structure, lending support to the idea that perceptions of self are formed from context and connections.

Research regarding parental disruption, particularly in cases in which disruption occurs by choice of the parent, reveals the prevalence of emotional distress that results from alienation from a parent. McAdams et al. (2011) reported that individuals who have experienced the voluntary departure of a parent from the family system experience perpetual grief, termed *chronic sorrow*. Orbach (2007) hypothesized children who have been abandoned by a parent can develop insecure attachment and deficits in the ability to manage stressors. He noted that abandonment is significantly detrimental to continued normal, healthy development and a precursor to depression, low self-esteem and suicidal behavior. Timmons et al. (2011) reported that parental displacement is a risk factor for emotional distress. The authors noted that the experience, termed *failed belonging*, often results from parental displacement. The participants who were old enough to remember being placed in the care of their grandparents reported having felt emotional distress around the time the parental displacement occurred. For the purposes of the present study, the term “hindered belonging” is utilized, because although the participants felt a lack of belonging at points during their childhood, each had developed a sense of belonging within their current families.

### **Theme Three: Generational Incongruence**

*Generational Incongruence* refers to the dissonance present in the relationship between grandparent and grandchild related to a gap between their ages. Dolbin-McNab and Keiley (2009) reported findings from a qualitative study of adolescents being raised by their grandparents that suggested the gap in ages was a factor influencing the

relationship. The authors related the relationship dissonance to lack of understanding of important elements of the adolescent's social world, and to overly strict rules and expectations. The participants in the current study confirmed and advanced the existing literature describing the dissonance experienced by others raised by grandparents. The participants in the present study additionally indicated that the relational incongruence was a significant factor in their parenting practices, as it led them to the desire to gain a better understanding of the cultural and societal elements important in the lives of their children.

#### **Theme Four: *A la Carte* Motherhood Models**

The theme of *A la Carte* Motherhood Models refers to the participants' descriptions of choosing models from which to learn how to be a mother. Across all cases, the participants related seeking out models for learning how to mother from women in their lives, whether related or unrelated. Most of the women noted particular models or traits from whom they would choose *not* to learn. In most cases, participants reported not wanting to follow part of the example set by their mother or grandmother. Additionally, some participants reported looking to unrelated women and television shows to understand what it means to be a mother.

As previously stated, a significant body of literature points to the influence of societal messages on the construction of motherhood (Medina & Magnuson, 2009). According to Hayslip and Kaminski (2005), those who experience caregiving disruptions as children often do not experience appropriate parental modeling, resulting in the development of significantly lower parental identities and problematic family functioning. A significant indication of prevalent societal messages is found in popular



culture as presented in television series and sitcoms. A theme within the interview data suggests that models for motherhood were found in television shows when the participant perceived that the models available to them were limited. Participants also looked to their immediate environment for examples of positive motherhood. Models came from other relatives, such as aunts or cousins. Participants also looked to unrelated women, such as friends' mothers, teachers, or other women in their communities from which to learn positive traits and behaviors of motherhood.

### **Theme Five: Perceived Level of Support**

Theme Five illustrates how the level to which participants felt supported or not supported within their family constellation influences well-being and future relationships, including relationships between mother and children. As previously stated, caregiving disruptions during childhood often lead to emotional, behavioral, and social problems, which have lifelong effects. King et al. (2010) reported that adolescents cared for by grandparents exhibit lower levels of internalizing and externalizing problems as in other household configurations. The present study supports the research by King et al. Although the participants may have experienced distress at times during childhood and adolescence, they also may have received a level of support sufficient to promote continued growth and well-being into adulthood as evidenced by educational attainment and ego development scores.

Available research indicates that having been raised by a grandparent significantly influences romantic and family relationships. For instance, Kennedy and Keeney (1988) noted that those raised in kinship care are less likely to attain trusting romantic relationships than those raised in more traditional family constellations. In a review of

the literature, Edwards and Mumford (2005) reported that children raised by grandparents often experience stressors that negatively influences their social relationships. The findings in the present study lend support to this supposition. Most of the participants reported having felt wary of developing new relationships until significant trust had been established. From the standpoint of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Worsham et al. (2009) noted that women who experienced challenges related to their upbringing were more likely to become silenced. The authors emphasized that when women had experienced significant traumatic childhood disruptions, without the appropriate level of support present, their methods of meaning making were passed down to their children through parenting practices. In contrast to the current literature, the women in the present study had achieved a sense of voice at the time of their interviews, though they may have experienced periods of time in which they felt silenced.

#### **Theme Six: Reflective Gratitude**

Theme Six refers to the expressed feelings of gratitude for the care and support that the participants received from grandparents. The previously mentioned study by Dolbin-McNab and Keiley (2009) reported that adolescents in their qualitative study acknowledged that being placed in the care of grandparents was a positive decision and expressed feelings of gratitude for the contribution of their grandparents to their upbringing. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Dolbin-McNab and Keiley (2009). The participants in the current study confirmed the existing literature describing the feelings of gratitude experienced by others raised by grandparents. The participants reported feeling gratitude in hindsight and an understanding of the sacrifice that their grandparents were called upon to make on their

behalf. In some cases, the participants had felt gratitude since childhood or adolescence; others stated that becoming a mother had enhanced their feelings of gratitude.

### **Ego Development**

A central concept of ego development is the assumption that major institutions dedicated to human development, specifically school and family, act to both foster and suppress the development of women (Loevinger, 1976). The findings in the present study corroborate that the institution of family does indeed influence the development of women, and thus, the role of mother. Though it was clear that the identity of mothers who were raised by grandparents was influenced by the family constellation, it is unclear what factors aided in the continued development of the participants. Ego development encompasses several structures in considering development. These include relational style, impulse control, cognitive function, and moral development. The interview data revealed evidence of each aspect of development of the participants. Themes noted within the participants' experiences offered additional clues to the process by which they have come to make meaning of the experience, and how they approach the joys and challenges of family life and the role of motherhood.

The participants in the study exhibited evidence of ego development at or above the modal score of the general population. A possible explanation which may account for this phenomenon is found in consideration of how ego development is advanced. Manners et al. (2004) found that ego development can continue to advance in adulthood given the proper conditions. According to their study, the conditions include exposure to a disequilibrating life experience that is personally significant, interpersonal, and coincides with readiness to make life changes. Becoming a mother can be described as a

life experience that, for many women, may meet those criteria. As women become mothers, and continue to reflect on their own experience, they may develop further capability in imagining others' perspectives, including those of their own parents, grandparents, or caregivers. In the case of women raised by grandparents, this reflective process requires complexity as the experience does not match up with societal norms and expectations. Thus, the process of developing the personal identity of mother may require more complex steps in meaning-making for these women, than those raised in circumstances more aligned with the dominant ideal. This leads to a discussion of the other primary theoretical tenet, *Women's Ways of Knowing*.

### ***Women's Ways of Knowing***

Consistent with this epistemological framework, the participants in this study often described their past and current experiences in terms of "voice" and "silence." For example, in response to an item on the WUSCT-81, Joy completed the sentence, "A woman's voice...." with the words, "should be heard." Other responses were indicative of feeling silenced at points during their lives that it was unacceptable to share an opinion about an important event. For example, Sarah noted her reaction to figuring out that she would be living with her grandparents, "I didn't ask about it or say anything or make any trouble at all for anybody, and I just kind of never looked back." Carmen described the moment when she found out she would be living with her grandmother, "I used to have a habit of balling into knots and hiding in places and people couldn't see me."

As described by Belenky et al. (1986), meaning-making is a process that evolves and changes throughout the lifespan. As the participants varied in characteristics and situations that brought them to live with grandparents, one might expect to see a

pronounced variation in perspectives. Remarkably, despite demographic and situational differences, the participants experienced a great deal of shared reflections, and thus reported similar perceptions of events. A possible explanation for the phenomenon lies in the perceived similarity in social pressures that would have likely been a common denominator for the participants. As Belenky et al. (1986) asserted, social pressures in place that are present during a girl's formative years continue to shape her view of experiences. For this study, participants ranged in age from 31 to 57. Across the 26-year span in their ages, societal pressures regarding the structure of a family have remained moderately stable, thus possibly accounting for similarities in perspectives. These six themes portend a variety of research, counselor education, and family therapy implications, which are described below.

## **Implications**

### **Future Research**

Although research regarding motherhood is abundant in the current literature, very little is understood about the impacts of family constellation on the construction of the role. Because of this gap in the literature, the present study sought to advance the body of knowledge to develop a better understanding of the experience of motherhood for women raised by grandparents. It is expected that discovering the essence of the experience can aid counselors, educators, and caregivers in the intervention of challenges associated with that phenomenon.

The present study sought to discern relevant influences of gender, culture, and social class among the participants. Although the participants in the current study were diverse among a range of characteristics, they were not representative of the general

population. Future research would be beneficial that is more representative of national demographic statistics. A wider range of characteristics could assist in revealing any cultural or cross-cultural beliefs about being raised by grandparents. Although in-depth information was collected from each participant, it was difficult to discern cultural differences in the perception of the experience. More questions were raised: How do women of specific age groups or with children of specific ages view the experience? What differences in beliefs or stigma among ethnic groups may be present?

Although all family and caregiving relationships are significant and influential, the present study was limited to investigating the role of motherhood. Future study that investigates other family and caregiving roles is warranted. More specifically, there is very limited research available that focuses on the role of fatherhood in adult development. A deeper examination of fatherhood among men raised by grandparents would assist family counselors in understanding family dynamics and guiding more effective treatment.

The interview data revealed that the level of perceived support received during childhood is indicative of life satisfaction and motherhood identity as an adult. All participants reported having received love and support within their families and noted that it had an impact on their roles as mothers. More research is needed to specifically determine grandparents' influence on feelings of support or lack of support. Additionally, the reasons that children are placed in the care of grandparents may impact the level of support or distress they experience or these circumstances may influence the process of adjustment as they become adults and mothers. More research that specifies the impacts of the specific reason for parental displacement may reveal previously

undiscovered factors that are present. For most of the participants, the concept of belonging was a concern during childhood and is present, to some extent, in their lives as adults. Studies aimed at discovering a sense of family belonging would help counselors understand the unique needs of clients experiencing this family constellation. A finding in the present study was that of hindered belonging. Quantitative inquiry that examines the difference between *hindered* belonging and *failed* belonging may provide valuable insight into the processes by which resilience may be fostered in adults from a variety of caregiving situations.

Additionally, more research is needed to understand the impact of a grandparent's support on children in their care. Studies do show that children fare better in the care of grandparents than they do in other situations, but little research has been conducted that examines the effects of this family setting as children become adults. Several of the participants noted other situations within their families in which grandchildren were raised by grandparents. Studies that identify generational patterns may reveal repetition of this structure within families, but factors associated with being raised by grandparents may provide adequate support to enhance continued psychological development.

### **Counselor Education and Supervision**

Current trends in the United States reflect exponential growth regarding racial and ethnic diversity. Conversely, the demographics of mental health counselors remain consistent, with the clear majority consisting of white females (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). With a rise in diversity and more complex problems of modern life, the counseling workforce needs to adapt to accommodate changing mental health needs. Further trends show that, considering changing

demographics, new counselors need heightened empathic understanding of clients who differ from their own worldview. Novice family counseling students in particular display initial deficits in empathic understanding of parents (Tempel, 2007).

Research regarding family therapy has emphasized the need for a conceptual change toward systemic thinking and away from a more linear perspective (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Further complicating the learning process, the change in thinking occurs at the same time students are developing counseling skills, learning new theories, and incorporating theoretical frameworks into practice. In recent years, the promotion of a more thorough understanding of diversity and multicultural issues in counseling has been recognized as a critical need, and has thus been more widely included in counselor education programs. According to the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Best Practices (2011), supervisors are required to infuse issues of culture and advocacy into their supervision with their supervisees. Additionally, family counseling students need to change internalized meanings of a “normal” or “typical” family to gain a comprehensive foundation from which to view complex family problems. Assisting counseling students and supervisees in developing awareness of strengths and needs of differing family constellations will further prepare them to work more effectively with families who differ in structure from their own.

When formulating an effective model for counselor supervision, supervisors ideally will pay close attention to the lifespan development of counselors. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) urges specific attention to clients within stages of lifespan development (2016). As clients develop across the lifespan, so also do counselors. Sprinthall (1994) proposed that



disequilibrium and internal conflict are necessary to promote growth. Sprinthall (1994) also suggested that learning can be facilitated through providing the student with a slight mismatch derived from the perspective of one stage above the student's current developmental level. According to a qualitative study by Kaiser, McAdams, and Foster (2012), disequilibrium is necessary to stimulate developmental growth in counseling students. The authors noted that sufficient support and challenge are essential components of a counselor education program that seeks to promote growth. Further, the family counseling internship is a critical setting for students to gain knowledge and skills; and to develop empathy and understanding of others' worldviews (Lambie & Sias, 2009).

### **Family Therapy Practice**

The struggles of contemporary life are numerous and rapidly changing. Individuals whose life experiences have not effectively facilitated the contexts for psychological development adequate to deal with the ensuing challenges face significant hardships that may limit parenting competencies. Lack of capability to meet such demands can create disequilibrium that leads individuals to develop distressing emotions or behaviors and present for counseling. Understanding an individual's internal experience offers insight into their unique worldview, and therefore may provide a valuable framework for counselors to map clients' clinical needs and to plan treatment accordingly (Eriksen, 2008). To effect change, counselors need the ability to appropriately assess clients' developmental level and provide apposite support and challenge to guide clients' psychological growth (Kegan, 1980).

As mentioned previously, Manners et al. (2004) found that the promotion of ego development among adults can be promoted through disequilibrating life experiences.

They noted that stages are relatively stable by early adulthood, but progress can and does occur throughout the lifespan given the appropriate circumstances that promote progression. Ego development levels are relevant to the counseling process and should be considered when working with families. Designing interventions that are aimed at increasing ego development can promote higher levels of meaning-making and greater life satisfaction. As Medina and Magnuson (2009) explored, the construction of motherhood is impacted when children are nurtured in ways different from the dominant ideal, and must be considered by counselors in treatment.

Further study is needed to provide more realistic expectations of motherhood, so that mothers can experience success and perceptions as good mothers more often. Kegan (1980) stated that psychological development can be promoted through the appropriate application of support, challenge, and reflection. Family counselors need to consider development for family members to promote well-being and to assist them in development of healthy perspectives of past events and situations.

Previous research and the current study point to the experience of trauma during childhood, such as disruptive events likely to lead a child to need care from a grandparent, contributes to challenges with effective parenting practices. Practitioners working with mothers and families ideally will consider the mother's childhood history when planning treatment. Additionally, services available need to consider women's unique needs. Care is needed to eliminate pathologizing patterns within available systems of care. As previously noted, Jurkiewicz (2014) stated that mothers' capacity for reflective practice increases when they are empowered. Therefore, interventions that are

focused on increasing a woman's sense of her own mind and her relationship to knowledge through reflective practice will likely benefit both mother and child.

Many of the participants noted during their interviews that service providers, teachers, and others authoritative entities have made assumptions based on the dominant family structure that left them feeling that services were not structured to serve them. For instance, Constance noted, "I remember having to fill out papers at school and it would ask mother's name or father's name, but that's not who I live with, so I always had to mark 'guardian'." As such, this study posits that marketing materials and intake forms for counseling centers or agencies should be written as to not make assumptions about family constellation. Marketing materials might also portray images of more than just the nuclear family. Portrayals of family structures that are more and more common in counseling agencies, such as grandparent-headed families, may provide a more inclusive and comfortable environment for all families.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Although this qualitative study of the experience of motherhood of women raised by grandparents has yielded a greater understanding of the essence of the phenomenon, some limitations must be noted. As with any qualitative research, this study examined a small number of participants; as such, generalizing results to a greater population beyond the participants is not feasible. As the participants were selected through purposeful sampling, the experiences reported are assumed to be specific and unique to the individual participants. An additional limitation is related to the approach taken to recruit for participation. Participants were recruited using the social media platform, Facebook. Further participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Only women with

internet access or who were familiar with other participants would have been exposed to the advertisement.

In the case of the participants in the study, they were, overall, more educated than the general population. All the women had attended at least some college courses. Two had attained at least a bachelor's degree, one a master's degree and one was working toward a Ph.D. It is difficult to ascertain why women who were more educated chose to participate, or if women who more closely meet the educational attainment of the general population might have had different experiences in their meaning-making. Additionally, the participants in this study varied greatly in household income levels. Most of the study participants reported a household income well above the median income in the U.S., which was \$51,939 per year in 2013 (U.S. Census). Study participants' income levels ranged between \$16,000 per year to over \$100,000 per year. One participant chose not to disclose her income level. Although almost all the participants indicated that they experienced significant financial limitations as children living with their grandparents, three of the study participants had a household income level above \$100,000 per year at the time of the study. Jurkiewicz (2014) noted that educational attainment and income has a positive influence on women's perceptions of self and knowledge. This study confirmed that assertion. It is assumed that only those participants who were ready and willing to speak about their experience responded to the advertisement, which may account for the high level of education and ego development of the women who chose to respond. Despite the limitations related to the sampling procedures, the high level of consistency in themes across cases is indicative that the results may yield promising implications.

The women varied in demographic qualities including dissimilarities in age, race/ethnicity, religion, education level, socioeconomic level, and region of the U.S. As there are differences in societal views among diverse populations, it is likely that the meaning that people from differing groups make of their experiences may contrast. The children of the participants varied across a wide range (7-36). Ages of the children of the women may influence their meaning-making. Additionally, the women ranged in age from 31 to 57. Based on the interview data, it was not possible to discern if meaning-making varied according to the age of the mother or her children. Access to a larger, diverse group of participants may have yielded richer, more detailed information from which to draw conclusions.

As with any qualitative research, the presence of researcher bias is always an important consideration. Because I, the researcher, have experienced the phenomenon of being a mother who was raised primarily by grandparents, the ability to maintain objectivity was an important consideration. To ensure increased objectivity, I extensively explored my own potential biases and opinions to guard against allowing my personal experience to hinder the interpretation of the participants' subjective experiences. Additionally, to reduce the potential for bias, I sought counsel with peers and other researchers to uncover any possible blind spots. The utilization of a computer application, NVIVO, further assured a reduction in bias, as did peer reviews by two professionals who possess doctorate degrees and whose dissertations also used the phenomenology method.

An additional consideration is the implication of cause and effect. This research was aimed at providing descriptive data regarding the essence of the participants'

experiences, but identification of the themes may suggest a causal relationship between emotional distress and being raised by grandparents. Even though the interview data revealed that all participants had experienced periods of emotional distress, determining if the factors were related to having lived in the care of grandparents, or if feelings were associated with parental disruption or some other unknown factor was not possible.

### **Personal Statement**

When the idea first arose to do this study, I expected that the process would be challenging and arduous, but also tremendously rewarding. In my own life, the household and family constellation in which I grew up played a significant part in the formulation of my ideas of self, including my identity as a mother and as a counselor. It is the counselor identity in me that kindled my curiosity the most by the prospect of this study. I'm grateful for what I have learned as a result. I am also grateful for the level to which the participants were willing to share the details of their stories, and to shed light on the meaning of the experience for them.

My first forays into examining the literature currently available regarding this family form were met with surprise. I was aware of the potential for distress that was present due to the reasons for placement with grandparents, but from my own experience and the experience of friends and family members who also experienced the family structure, I was aware of the potential for support and accomplishment among people who have been raised by grandparents. While the current literature reveals that children experiencing familial disruption often suffer tremendous emotional consequences, I note that some have achieved extraordinary accomplishments. I think of significant figures who have also been raised by grandparents who have made considerable impacts on our

society, including Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama.

Differences in the meaning that individuals make of the experience can lead to a wide array of life circumstances both challenging and rewarding.

## References

- Ainsworth, M.S., & Bowlby, J. (1989). An ethological approach to personality development. *American Psychologist*, *46*, 333-341.
- Allen, J. P., Bell, K. L., Hauser, S.T. & O'Connor, T. G. (1994). Longitudinal assessment of autonomy and relatedness in adolescent-family interactions as predictors of adolescent ego development and self-esteem. *Child Development*, *65*(1), 179–194.
- Arnett, J. J. (2006). Emerging adulthood: Understanding the new way of coming of age. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (pp. 3–19). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/11381-001>
- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. (2011). *Best practices in clinical supervision*. Retrieved from [www.saces.org/resources/documents/saces\\_best\\_practices.doc](http://www.saces.org/resources/documents/saces_best_practices.doc)
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N.R., & Tarule, J.M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Choi, M., Sprang, G., Eslinger, J.G. (2016). Grandparents raising grandchildren: A synthetic review and theoretical model for interventions. *Family & Community Health*, *39*(2), 120-128.
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2016). *2016 standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2016-cacrep-standards/>
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing from five approaches*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dolbin-MacNab, M., & Keiley, M. (2009). Navigating Interdependence: How Adolescents Raised Solely by Grandparents Experience Their Family Relationships. *Family Relations*, 58(2), 162-175.
- Dolbin-MacNab, M.L., Rodgers, B.E., & Traylor, R.M. (2009). Bridging the generations: A retrospective examination of Adults' relationships with their kinship caregivers. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 7(2/3), 159-176. doi: 10.1080/15350770902851197.
- Edwards, O. W., & Mumford, V. E. (2005). Children raised by grandparents: Implications for social policy. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 25(8), 18-30. doi:10.1108/01443330510629072
- Edwards, O., & Ray, S. (2008). An attachment and school satisfaction framework for helping children raised by grandparents. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(1), 125–138. <http://doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.23.1.125>
- Edwards, O.W., & Ray, S.L. (2010). Value of family and group counseling models where grandparents function as parents to their grandchildren. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 32, 178-190.
- Eriksen, K. (2008). “Interpersonal” clients, students, and supervisees: Translating Robert Kegan. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, (47), 233-248.
- Etten, D. V., & Gautam, R. (2012). Custodial grandparents raising grandchildren: Lack of legal relationship is a barrier for services. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 38(6), 18-22. doi:10.3928/00989134-20120509-02E

- Farrell, B., VandeVusse, A., & Ocobock, A. (2012). Family change and the state of family sociology. *Current Sociology* 60(3), 283-301.  
doi:10.1177/0011392111425599
- George, C., & Solomon, J. (1999). The development of caregiving: A comparison of attachment theory and psychoanalytic approaches to mothering. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 19, 618–646.
- Gilligan, C. (1979). Woman's place in man's life cycle. *Harvard Educational Review*, 49, 431- 446.
- Goldenberg, I., & Goldenberg, H. (2008). *Family therapy: An overview* (7th ed.). Belmont: Brooks/Cole.
- Hays, S. (1996). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood / Sharon Hays*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press.
- Hayslip, B., Jr, & Kaminski, P. L. (2005). Grandparents raising their grandchildren: A review of the literature and suggestions for practice. *The Gerontologist*, 45(2), 262-269. doi:10.1093/geront/45.2.262
- Heywood, E. M. (1999). Custodial grandparents and their grandchildren. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 7(4), 367-372.
- Hy, L.X., Loevinger J. (1996). *Measuring ego development. 2nd ed.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Jurkiewicz, M. (2014). *Former foster youth and motherhood: Attachment and epistemological perspectives* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 3620269)
- Kaiser, D.H., McAdams, C.R., & Foster, V.A. (2012). Disequilibrium and development:

- The family internship experience. *Family Journal*, 20(3), 225-232. doi:  
10.1177/1066480712448787
- Kegan, R. (1980). Making meaning: The constructive-developmental approach to persons and practice. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, (58)5, 373-380.
- Kelch-Oliver, K. (2011). African American grandchildren raised in grandparent-headed families: An exploratory study. *The Family Journal*, 19(4), 396-406.  
doi:10.1177/1066480711417235
- Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M., & Campos, P.E. (2011). Behavior Problems in children raised by grandmothers: The role of caregiver distress, family resources, and the home environment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 2138-2145. doi:  
10.1016/j.chilyouth.2011.06.021
- Kennedy, J., & Keeney, V. (1988). *The extended family revisited: Grandparents rearing grandchildren*.
- Kier, C. A., & Fung, T. (2014). Adult outcomes of being raised by grandmothers: Can social networks play a role? *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 12(2), 141-166.
- Kierkus, C.A. & Baer, D. (2003). Does the relationship between family structure and delinquency vary according to circumstances? An investigation of interaction effects. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 405-429.  
doi:10.3138/cjccj.45.4.405
- King, V., & Boyd, L. M. (2016). Factors associated with perceptions of family belonging among adolescents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(August), 1114–1130.  
<http://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12322>

- King, V., Boyd, L. M., & Thorsen, M. L. (2015). Adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), 761–774.  
<http://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12181>
- King, V., Mitchell, K.S., & Hawkins, D.N. (2010). Adolescents with two nonresident biological parents: Living arrangements, parental involvement, and well-being. *Journal of Family Issues*, 31(1), 3-30.
- Krumpe, S. (2002). *A Phenomenological Investigation of Women's Experience in Family Counseling: Interviews with Ten Mothers*, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Lambie, G.W., & Sias, S.M. (2009). An integrative psychological developmental model of supervision for professional school counselors-in-training. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, (87), 349-356.
- Leder, S., Grinstead, L. N., Jensen, S., & Bond, L. (2003). Psychotherapeutic treatment outcomes in Grandparent-Raised children. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 16(1), 5-14. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6171.2003.tb00341.x
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Loevinger J. (1976). *Ego development: Conceptions and theories*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Loevinger, J. (1980). Some thoughts on ego development and counseling. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 58(5), 389.
- Loevinger, J. (1985). Revision of the sentence completion test for ego development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48(2), 420-427. doi: 0022-3514/85/\$00.75

- Loevinger, J., Sweet, B., Ossorio, A., & LaPerriere, K. (1962). Measuring personality patterns in women. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, *65*, 53-136.
- Loevinger, J., & Wessler, R. (1970). Measuring ego development (Vol. 1). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Manners, J., Durkin, K., & Nesdale, A. (2004). Promoting advanced ego development among adults. *Journal of Adult Development*, *11*(1), 19–27.  
<http://doi.org/10.1023/B:JADE.0000012524.32002.8d>
- Maslow, A. H. (1999). *Toward a psychology of being* (3rd ed.). New York: J. Wiley & Sons.
- McAdams, C.R., III, Dewell, J. A., & Holman, A. R. (2011). Children and chronic sorrow: Reconceptualizing the emotional impact of parental rejection and its treatment. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, *50*(1), 27.
- McGoldrick, M, Garcia Preto, N.G., & Carter, B. (2016). *The expanding family life cycle: Individual, family, and social perspectives* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Medina, S., & Magnuson, S. (2009). Motherhood in the 21st century: Implications for counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *87*(1), 90-96.  
[doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2009.tb00553.x](https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2009.tb00553.x)
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families & family therapy / by Salvador Minuchin*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Mireault, G., Thomas, C., & Bearor, T. (2002). Maternal Identity Among Motherless Mothers and Psychological Symptoms in Their Firstborn Children. *Journal of*

*Child and Family Studies, 11(3), 287-297.*

Moon, S. M., Dillon, D. R., & Sprenkle, D. H. (1990). Family therapy and qualitative research. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 16(4), 357-373.*

Moos, R.H., & Moos, B.S. (1981). *Family environment scale manual*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

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

Orbach, I. (2007). From abandonment to symbiosis: A developmental reversal in suicidal adolescents. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 24(1), 150-166.* doi: 10.1037/0736-9735.24.1.150

O'Reilly, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Twenty-first century motherhood: Experience, identity, policy, agency*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Palmieri, P. (1979). Paths and pitfalls: Illuminating women's educational history. [Review of *Collegiate women: Domesticity and career in turn of the century America*]. *Harvard Educational Review, 79, 534-541.*

Perry, William G., Jr. (1970). *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. (pp. 60-61). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Pusateri, K. B., Roache, D. J., & Kam, J. A. (2015). Grandparents' and young adult grandchildren's identity gaps and perceived caregiving intentions: An actor-partner interdependence model. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, doi:10.1177/0265407514568750*

- Redmore, C., & Waldman, K. (1975). Reliability of a Sentence Completion Measure of Ego Development. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 39(3), 236-243.
- Roe, K. M., & Minkler, M. (1998). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Challenges and responses. *Generations*, 22(4), 25-32.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Seitz, S. (2016). Pixilated partnerships, overcoming obstacles in qualitative interviews via Skype: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 16(2), 229-235. doi: 10.1177/1468794115577011
- Smith, G. C., & Palmieri, P. A. (2007). Risk of psychological difficulties among children raised by custodial grandparents. *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)*, 58(10), 1303-1310. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.58.10.1303
- Soliz, J. (2007). Communicative predictors of a shared family identity: Comparison of grandchildren's perceptions of family-of-origin grandparents and stepgrandparents. *Journal of Family Communication*, 7(3), 177-194. doi:10.1080/15267430701221636
- Soliz, J., Thorson, A. R., Rittenour, C. E., & Murry, V. M. (2009). Communicative correlates of satisfaction, family identity, and group salience in Multiracial/Ethnic families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(4), 819-832. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00637.
- Sprinthall, N.A. (1994). Counseling and social role-taking: Promoting moral and ego development. In J. Rest, & D. Narvaez (Eds.), *Moral development in the professions: Psychology and applied ethics* (pp. 85-89). New Jersey: Lawrence

Erlbaum.

- Sprinthall, Peace, & Kennington. (2001). Cognitive developmental theories for counseling. In Locke, D. *The handbook of counseling*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Standing, L.G., Aikins, S., Madigan, B., & Nohl, W. (2015). Exceptional achievement and early parental loss: The phaeton effect in American writers, presidents, and eminent individuals. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 42(3), 188-199.
- Syed, M., & Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2013). Personality development from adolescence to emerging adulthood: linking trajectories of ego development to the family context and identity formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104(2), 371–84. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0030070>
- Tempel, L. R. (2007). Pathways to the clinician's experience of empathy in engaging single mothers at risk for physical abuse of their children. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 35(4), 257-265. doi:10.1007/s10615-007-0106-4
- Timmons, K.A., Selby, E.A., Lewinsohn, P.M., & Joiner, T.E. (2011). Parental displacement and adolescent suicidality: Exploring the role of failed belonging. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 40(6), 807-817. doi: 10.1080/15374416.2011.614584
- Tyrka, A. R., Wier, L., Price, L. H., Ross, N. S., & Carpenter, L. L. (2008). Childhood parental loss and adult psychopathology: Effects of loss characteristics and contextual factors. *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 38(3), 329-344. doi:10.2190/PM.38.3.h
- United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2013). U.S. health workforce



- chartbook: Part IV behavioral and allied Health. Retrieved from  
<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/supplydemand/usworkforce/chartbook/>
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2010
- U.S. Census Bureau (2014). *Co-resident grandparents and their grandchildren: 2012*. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration Publication No. P20-576) Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Valdez, C. R., Chavez, T., & Woulfe, J. (2013). Emerging adults' lived experience of formative family stress: The Family's lasting influence. *Qualitative Health Research, 23*(8), 1089-1102. doi:10.1177/1049732313494271
- Van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario, Canada: The Athlone Press.
- Walsh, F. (1998). *Strengthening family resilience*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Walsh, F. (2012). *Normal family processes* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Guilford.
- Westenberg, P. M., Blasi, A., & Cohn, L. (1998). *Personality development: Theoretical, empirical, and clinical investigations of Loevinger's conception of ego development*. Mahwah, [N.J.]: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Worsham, N., Kretchmar-Hendricks, M., Swenson, N., & Goodvin, R. (2009). At-risk mothers' parenting capacity: An epistemological analysis of change through intensive intervention. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 14*(1), 25-41.
- Yorgason, J. B., Gavazzi, S. M., Kamp-Dush, C., Yarcheck, C. M., Chang, S. L., & Stockdale, L. (2014). Mental health and disrupted family processes in the lives of court-involved African American and Caucasian youth being raised by grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues, 35*(10), 1279-1297.

doi:10.1177/0192513X13481

Zalewski, M., Cyranowski, J., Cheng, Y., & Swartz, H. (2013). Role of maternal childhood trauma on parenting among depressed mothers of psychiatrically ill children. *Depression and Anxiety*, 30(9), 792-799.

## **Appendix A**

### **Letter to Participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision at the College of William & Mary. I am also an individual and family counselor at New Horizons Family Counseling Center. In order to fulfill the requirements of my degree, I am conducting a research study to investigate how women who were raised by grandparents experience motherhood.

To obtain information for this study, I would like to interview women who are mothers who were raised primarily by one or more grandparents. If you agree to participate, I will need your commitment to meet me at a place that is convenient for you to be interviewed and to complete an assessment. We will meet in a quiet, private room. The interviews will be audio and video taped for later transcription. Your participation and identity will be kept confidential and will not be used to identify your responses. I will provide you copies of your interview transcripts so that you can verify them for accuracy and make any corrections you would like. When the study is complete, I will send you by mail a copy of the study results.

The interview is expected to take approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours. I realize that time is precious for you, but please consider that research in this area is limited. Your participation in the study will assist counselors and other service providers to better serve families in which a parent grew up in the home of a grandparent. I hope that your participation in this study will be a beneficial experience for you. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you think you would be interested, or if you'd like to ask questions before making your decision to participate, please don't hesitate to call me at (757) 345-5588 or email me at [rlsheffield@email.wm.edu](mailto:rlsheffield@email.wm.edu). I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Sheffield, M.Ed., LPC

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

I understand that I am volunteering to participate in a research project for the purpose of investigating women who were raised by grandparents experience of motherhood. This research is being conducted by Rebecca Sheffield as part of her requirements for a doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at the College of William & Mary. The study will begin in December 2016 with an interview and a brief assessment that will take approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours to complete and will be audio and video taped for transcribing.

Participants' identity will be kept confidential and will not be used to identify responses. A copy of the interview transcripts will be provided to the participant so that they can be verified for accuracy and changed if desired. When the study is complete, a copy of the study results will be mailed to the participant if requested. Participation in the study will assist counselors and other service providers to better serve families in which a parent grew up in the home of a grandparent.

It is expected that participation in this research project will be a positive experience for those involved and will result in providing valuable information and deeper understanding about what it means to be a mother who was raised by her grandparent(s). There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort anticipated, however counseling will be provided at New Horizons Family Counseling Center if participants desire. Participation is voluntary, and refusal to participate will not result in any adverse circumstances or penalties. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Your identity will remain anonymous and all information will be kept confidential. Any information obtained by participation in this study will not be released in any way to any person.

I am aware that I may report dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study to the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Lee Kirkpatrick at 1-855-800-7187 or consent @wm.edu. I am aware that I must be at least 18 years of age to participate. My signature below signifies my voluntary participation in this project. And that I have received a copy of this consent form.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Print Name

## Appendix C

### Demographic Questions

Name

Race

Age of participant

Number of children

    Age(s)

    Gender(s)

Residence

Relationship status

Household composition

Income level

Educational attainment

Employment status

Did you live with your grandmother, grandfather, or both?

Did you live with your maternal, paternal grandparents, or both?

What age were you when you came to live with your grandparent(s)?

How long did you live with your grandparent(s)?

Have you ever sought counseling? If so, for what concerns?

Have you ever sought family counseling? If so, for what concerns?

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Questions**

Describe your family while you were growing up.

How was your family of origin different from other families?

Think of the time when you went to live with your grandparent(s).

What were you aware of at that time?

What was the reason you came to live with your grandparent(s)?

What was your relationship like with your parent(s)?

What was your relationship like with your grandparent(s)?

Give me some examples of what you liked the best about living with your grandparent(s).

Give me some examples of what you liked least about living with your grandparent(s).

Describe feelings that you're aware of as result of having been raised by your grandparent(s).

What does family mean to you?

What does being a mother mean to you?

Describe how you view the roles and responsibilities of a mother?

Think of things you learned from your upbringing by a grandparent that taught you about being a mother. What comes to mind?

Describe your relationship with your child(ren)?

What would you like to pass on to your children that you learned from being raised by grandparent(s)?

## Appendix E

### SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST FOR WOMEN (Form 81)

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Abbreviated Form

Instructions: Complete the following sentences.

1. Raising a family
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. A man's job
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. The thing I like about myself is
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What gets me into trouble is
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. When people are helpless
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. A good father

7. When they talked about sex, I

8. I feel sorry

9. Rules are

10. Men are lucky because

11. At times she worried about

12. A woman feels good when

13. A husband has a right to

14. A good mother



15. Sometimes she wished that

16. If I can't get what I want

17. For a woman a career is

18. A woman should always

Vita

Rebecca L. Sheffield

rlsheffield@email.wm.edu

- 2017 **The College of William & Mary, CACREP Accredited**  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision  
Cognate: Family Counseling  
Dissertation: Making Meaning of Motherhood: A Phenomenological Investigation  
of Mothers Raised by Grandparents
- 2011 **The College of William & Mary, CACREP Accredited**  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
Master of Education in Marriage and Family Counseling
- 2004 **Christopher Newport University**  
Newport News, Virginia  
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology