Abstract

Title of Dissertation: MOTHERS' TRANSITIONS TO THE EMPTY NEST PHASE

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Much of the sociological research on women as mothers focuses on the transition into motherhood or the work and pleasure of raising children. This dissertation uses mixed methods to examine a rarely studied aspect of motherhood – the transition out of day-to-day parenting and into the empty nest stage of the life course. Three very different data sources and analysis techniques are used to develop a rich understanding of how women's daily routines are affected by this transition, as well as what these changes mean to the individual women going through them.

The first analytic component draws on time diary data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to explore two transitions – the initial transition into motherhood and the gradual changes that occur as children grow. This analysis focuses on labor force engagement, care work, and leisure activities of women as they move through the childrearing years. The second analysis, based on a series of 12 in-depth interviews with

women whose children have recently left home, concentrates on the perceived meaning of the transition into the empty nest phase. New sources of meaningful activity and the effect of this transition on women's relationships are also described. In the third substantive section, longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Survey-Young Women (NLS-YW) are used to investigate differences in labor force, helping work, and psychological well-being outcomes between empty nest mothers, mothers with young adult children living at home, mothers with adolescent children living at home, and women without children.

Together, these three analyses paint a picture of the transition into the empty nest as one dominated by emotional changes – lower levels of depressive symptoms, new feelings of freedom, and changes in relationships. While some evidence of new activity was found, especially among the women interviewed for the qualitative analysis, the transition to the empty nest is not typically associated with substantial changes in labor force engagement or other activities.

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by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Suzanne Bianchi and Joan Kahn for the inspiration, guidance, and support they gave me throughout graduate school, most especially during the dissertation process. I also appreciate the time and attention that the other members of my committee, Melissa Milkie, Kris Marsh, and Elaine Anderson, gave to this project. I am grateful for the encouragement and excellent advice I received from Katharine Abraham, in earlier stages of my dissertation as well as in other work.

I also owe a great deal to my fellow graduate students. Mike Ryan, Brittany McGill, Cat Warner, and Sarah Kendig provided invaluable feedback, moral support, and friendship.

My family has been enormously supportive throughout my graduate school years. Albert, Jack, and Eleanor, thank you so very much for your love, patience, and support. I couldn't have done it without you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> *Janet, speaking about having time to herself in the empty nest phase*: It's the first time it's really happened. It's an adjustment…, because you're so used to: "What time do I have to make dinner? What time are they coming home? Does this one have to go this place or that place?" You have to recalibrate your whole life. Kind of nice, but it's definitely an adjustment. … We are finding a new way.

Janet was a very involved mother. She worked full-time while her two children were growing up, but made the time to volunteer with their extra-curricular activities. Janet and her husband had a traditional division of labor in the home, with Janet taking most of the responsibility for housekeeping and child-rearing. For more than 20 years, Janet structured her life around the needs and desires of her children. Janet describes a need to "recalibrate" her life in response to her children growing up and leaving home. The forces that shaped the day-to-day rhythms of life changed, driving a need to make adjustments to those rhythms.

Janet has found a number of new ways to use her time, including spending more time in hobbies like reading and needlework, caring for her aging parents and sick husband, and thinking forward to retirement and travel. Still, she feels a little aimless – she says that there are no real norms for this stage of life. She describes the empty nest phase as "my time," but is still pondering the most fulfilling way to use these years. She has had long conversations with her friends about being in the empty nest phase and is seeking a new job.

This dissertation examines many of the features of the empty nest stage that Janet touches on above: adjustments in the routines of daily life and employment, changing relationships with others, and psychological well-being. I begin by briefly describing the historical and current

social context of mothering in the United States. I then define some of the terms that I use throughout this dissertation. Next, I describe the analyses I conduct and lay out the structure of this dissertation.

Social Context of Motherhood

The United States experienced sweeping social change during the 1960s. One aspect of this change was the women's rights movement and the subsequent shift in the roles of women. Women increasingly attained higher levels of education, pursued professional careers, and tried – with some measure of success – to "have it all" by balancing work and family. The women of the early baby boom generation, born beginning in the late 1940s, were the first cohort to come of age in this era of social change. This group was the first to begin their adult lives with the goal of combining career success and family. They served as trailblazers, both in providing examples to future generations of women and in altering the institutions of work and family to be more accommodating of one another.

In the years since wives and mothers began their wide-scale participation in the formal labor force, a body of sociological literature analyzing women's work and family roles has flourished. This literature comprehensively covers the transition into parenthood, mothers' parenting practices, and mothers' experiences of work-family conflict. However, there is very little on the other end of the story – the transition out of day-to-day parenting and into the empty nest stage. Part of the reason for this is demographic. Life spans were shorter. Previous generations of women spent more time actively parenting because they had more children, and earlier ages at first birth meant less of a gap between launching one's own children and the arrival of grandchildren to help care for. Another part of the reason that the transition into the

empty nest stage is not well-represented in the literature is that this transition is not a clearly marked moment. Children's independence increases gradually. Adult children may even make several moves in and out of the parental home, making it difficult to confidently identify when the nest is permanently "empty."

The culture of mothering has also changed during this time period. Associated with the shift to having fewer children is increased subscription to very intensive modes of parenting, which are used in the hope that they will produce high quality, productive members of society.

The first wave of baby boomers is now in their late 50s and early 60s. Most have launched their now-adult children from the parental nest. These baby boomers enter this stage of life with a vastly different set of experiences, resources, and expectations than previous generations of empty nest mothers. They have higher levels of education, much more work experience, and are much more likely to be economically self-sufficient. These boomers are poised to reshape the empty nest stage of life, just as they created new ways to be mothers. Of course, this cohort is not a homogeneous group of women. Variations in human and economic capital and family structure, in particular, are likely to be reflected in the aspirations and opportunities women have in the empty nest stage.

Terminology

The empty nest stage is hard to define, given the fluidity of living arrangements among young adults. When a mother enters the empty nest stage is partially subjective – two families may have different answers as to whether a certain child has officially moved away from home. One of these families might think that having a child away at college means that they are empty nesters, but another family might view financial support of the college student and the child's

return to the parents' home during school breaks as indications that the child has not yet been launched from the nest.

In general, in this dissertation I identify a mother as being in the empty nest stage of life if all of her children are not currently living in her home and are not expected to live in her home permanently in the future. This definition includes children who are away at college. The secondary datasets I use, however, typically specify that adult children away at college should be counted as household members. Interview respondents typically have children attending college and view themselves as empty nest parents.

The transition into motherhood is generally easy to identify through the initial birth or adoption of a child, or by becoming a step-parent through marriage. On the other hand, there is no real transition *out* of motherhood – once someone becomes a mother, she retains that status for life. However, the day-to-day activities of mothering definitely slow as children become more independent. Rather than a transition out of motherhood, I refer to this cessation of active parenting as a transition out of day-to-day mothering.

Finally, although other scholars have suggested referring to this stage of life as "postmaternity" (Gullette, 2002), I dislike the implication that women are no longer maternal simply because their children have reached adulthood. I prefer the "empty nest" terminology from popular culture. I typically refer to this time as the "empty nest stage" or "empty nest phase" of life, reflecting the life course perspective that is drawn upon throughout this dissertation.

Data and Analysis

This dissertation examines mothers' transitions into the empty nest stage and their experiences during this time. There are several main areas of experience on which I focus. Three separate sources of data provide different insights into the effects the transition to the empty nest stage has on mothers' experiences. These areas of experience and data sources are described briefly below, but in more detail in the substantive chapters that follow.

The first main area examined is labor force engagement. The sociological literature has a great deal of research on how motherhood affects women's labor force participation. Mothers are less likely to be employed than non-mothers, mothers work fewer hours than non-mothers, and mothers earn lower wages than non-mothers (Budig & England, 2001). These differences are often attributed, at least in part, to mothers directing their time and energy commitments away from the labor force and investing that time and energy into their children. However, as children transition into adulthood, they require fewer of these resources from their mothers. Some mothers may take this opportunity to reinvest in the labor force.

There are other activities that mothers may turn to as new sources of meaning as they move out of the intensive parenting years, such as care work, volunteer commitments, or leisure pursuits. Women whose children are young adults are likely to also have aging parents or in-laws. Some may have grandchildren or ailing relatives. All of these connections may lead to new care-work demands on women's time, even as they are doing less care work for their own children. Similarly, many mothers volunteer with their children's schools or extra-curricular activities. As their children leave school, there are fewer institutional demands on women's volunteer time, but some mothers in the empty nest stage may seek out other venues in which to volunteer. Finally, many mothers find themselves spending less time on hobbies and other

leisure activities when they have children. The transition out of day-to-day mothering and into the empty nest stage may provide an opportunity to revisit old pursuits or take up new ones.

The third area of experience covered by this dissertation is psychological well-being, broadly defined. The transition out of active day-to-day parenting is a significant event that is likely to deeply affect women's sense of self. This may have effects on women's levels of depressive symptoms, global happiness, sense of fulfillment, and even their relationships with significant others.

No one source of data can address all of these areas of experience, so this dissertation draws on three separate data sources, the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), the National Longitudinal Survey – Young Women (NLS-YW), and a set of 12 in-depth interviews with women who have recently transitioned into the empty nest phase. The ATUS is a time diary study that records 24 hours of activities among a nationally representative sample. This allows a detailed examination of the ways in which people actually spend their time. Measures that assess labor force engagement, care work and volunteer commitment, and leisure activities can be created. One advantage of time diary studies is that they do not suffer from the sort of social desirability bias that may be found in surveys with more stylized questions. A disadvantage of the ATUS is that it lacks background information on fertility history and family structure, so it is not possible to positively identify women with adult children who no longer live at home.

The NLS-YW is a long-running longitudinal survey that began with a sample of young women in 1968 and was repeated semi-regularly through 2003, for a total of 22 waves. Survey topics typically included labor force experience and family composition details. One advantage of this survey is that it is possible to build a detailed family structure and labor force history. A disadvantage is a lack of survey comparability between waves; some questions are not

consistently asked from wave to wave. However, the topics in the final questionnaire include some from each of the areas of experience described above; there are comprehensive questions on labor force engagement, involvement in volunteer activities and care work, and measures of depressive symptoms and happiness.

Finally, I interviewed 12 women whose youngest children have recently moved away from home. These women were selected using a snowball sampling technique. All respondents had a stable marital history and at least some college education. These requirements were intended to insure that the women in the sample had a high degree of choice in the activities they are pursuing as empty nest mothers. Interview topics were wide-ranging, but included the emotional impact of the transition into the empty nest phase, changes in employment and other activities in connection with that transition, and changes in relationships with spouses and others. As with any study with a small sample size and non-random selection, the results of this analysis cannot be generalized to the entire population of mothers in the empty nest phase. However, the ability to investigate the details and meanings of the lived experience of women's lives is a real strength.

These three sources of data have complementary strengths. Using all three data sources to look at similar, but not identical, outcomes in the main areas of interest provides a more complete, nuanced picture of the effects of the transition into the empty nest stage than any of the data sources would provide individually.

Structure

This dissertation proceeds with three substantive chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter is written in journal article format, each with an independent review of current research and a

data and methodology section. Each chapter contains the analysis and results related to one of the data sources used. The analyses are presented in the order in which they were performed, as the results from each analysis influenced the particular research questions examined in the next chapter.

The ATUS time diary analysis is presented in Chapter Two. This investigation takes advantage of the very large, nationally-representative sample size to take a very broad view of the way mothers' time allocation patterns shift with the age of their youngest child, from the transition into motherhood to the transition out of day-to-day parenting. The results of this descriptive analysis provide a picture of the magnitude of the shifts in time allocation mothers make as their children age, and provide a backdrop for the subsequent chapters.

Findings from the qualitative, in-depth interviews are presented in Chapter Three. Because the results of the ATUS analysis suggest that changes in time use patterns are small during the transition to the empty nest stage, this chapter focuses on a very select group of empty nest mothers. The respondents in this chapter are more privileged that most American women and therefore have more options available to them if they want to make changes during this time. The chapter examines the changes in activities that these mothers made in response to their children's transition to independent adulthood, but also explores the emotions and meanings associated with becoming an empty nest mother and the ways in which relationships with spouses and children evolve during this transition.

Chapter Four contains the results from the NLS-YW analysis. Some of the findings from the first two substantive chapters seem inconsistent with one another. For example, the women I interviewed had a number of examples of new volunteer and active leisure activities that they had taken up during their time as empty nest mothers, but there was little evidence for this in the

time use analysis. The NLS-YW analysis was structured to provide results that speak to the major weaknesses of the first two analyses – the lack of information on non-co-residential adult children in the ATUS and the very narrow pool of respondents to the in-depth interviews. I draw upon the very detailed data on women's fertility and family composition histories to accurately identify empty nest mothers in the NLS-YW, which contains a much wider sample of women than the interviews. The survey topics available in the NLS-YW allow examination of many outcomes touched on in the earlier studies, such as labor force engagement, care work, and mental health and happiness.

Although the three analyses were inspired by one another, they are each written as standalone articles. I discuss linkages among the chapters in the conclusion. Chapter Five pulls together the findings from each chapter and discusses them in relation to one another and the theoretical perspectives that are threaded throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 2. Work-Family Conflict and the Competition for Mothers' Time across the Life Course

An extensive literature has sprung up around the study of work-family conflict. Although these institutions interact in many ways, time is a central component of the conflict between work and family. The model of the successful employee is someone who is constantly available to the employer, with few outside demands on his or her time (Williams, 1999). On the other hand, children – especially very young children – require a great deal of time and attention, which, despite changing norms of father involvement, is still frequently given primarily by mothers. These competing demands are a primary cause of work-family conflict for women.

Of course, the demands that children place upon their mothers are not constant during the years children spend in their parents' homes. Various milestones in children's lives may be associated with changes in their mothers' lives as well. For instance, perhaps women's time use patterns change in response to their children's entrance into the grade school years, adolescence, or when they finally reach adulthood and move away from home.

This chapter assesses the nature of work-family time competition for women in a broad range of family stages, ranging from young women without children through empty nest mothers. Of course, work and family are not the only claims upon women's time, so measures of leisure activities, volunteer work, and care of the self are also included.

American Time Use Survey (ATUS) time diaries from 39,053 women are used to assess how women in different stages of motherhood allocate their time. Time diaries allow a very broad range of human activity to be considered as outcomes. This is especially beneficial for

measuring productive activity outside of the labor market and participation in leisure activities, both of which are important for understanding the daily lives of mothers.

Background

In this section, I discuss previous research on motherhood and women's time. First, I describe the work-family time competition hypothesis that underlies much research on work and family. Next, prior work on how women respond to work-family conflict is described in two parts aligning with two distinct phases of the life course: the transition into motherhood, and mothering as children age. Finally, I discuss other sources of demand for mothers' time.

Work-Family Competition and Conflict

Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1993, originally published in 1977) brought the connection between work and family to the forefront of sociological study. She argued that work and family do not function independently of one another – they are not "separate spheres." Rather, they have significant influence on each other and often come into conflict with one another. Although Kanter discussed a wide variety of ways in which work and family interact with one another, the issue that has become dominant in the study of work and family is how the amount of time and the timing of work and family demands are at odds with one another. Work and family are both understood to be greedy institutions, consuming great deals of time, energy, and devotion (Blair-Loy, 2003; Coser, 1974; Hays, 1996). It is frequently assumed that any investment in one area is inextricably linked to a withdrawal from the other and vice versa. Although this is clearly not always the case (e.g., women's increase in employment is not directly proportional to a decrease in child care time (Bianchi, 2009; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson, 2004)), the idea that work and family are in constant competition with one another for

time is well-ensconced in the sociological literature. Competition for time is not the only form of conflict between work and family – scholars also examine role conflict (Milkie & Peltola, 1999) – but time is often a central or underlying theme in work-family research.

Work-family research finds that mothers often react to these time conflicts by reducing their commitment to one arena or the other. On the work side of the equation, middle-class, dual earner couples manage work-family conflicts through one partner "scaling back" on labor force commitment by placing time limits on work, by having one partner pursue a career while the other has a job, or by trading off prioritizing one career over the other (Becker & Moen, 1999). Similarly, many of Arlie Hochschild's respondents in *The Second Shift* (1989) reduced their time in employment to create more time for the tasks of the second shift. On the home front, families may also scale back by outsourcing many of the functions that have traditionally been performed through unpaid labor in the home, from child care and housework to the planning of children's birthday parties (Hochschild, 2005; Lair, 2007). Of course, the demands of children for mothers' time and energy are not consistent over the life course, and so the degree of conflict and the strategies used to ameliorate that conflict change as children mature.

Work-Family Competition and the Transition to Motherhood

There is an abundance of literature on how motherhood affects women's labor force activity. Despite well-documented increases in women's labor force participation rates during the 1970s and 1980s, married women with children under six were about 10 percentage points less likely to be employed than were married women in general, as of 1998 (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Similarly, married women with children under six were less likely to work full time than married women without children (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). The change in women's labor force attachment is immediately apparent upon the transition to motherhood. Longitudinal analyses

indicate that, on average, women work between seven and 10 fewer hours per week after having children (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Gjerdingen & Center, 2005).

Some of the time that women withdraw from the market upon becoming mothers is reallocated to time spent in childcare. Although some women care for younger siblings or other relatives prior to becoming mothers, for most women the transition into motherhood is associated with a large increase in the amount of time spent in child care.

Housework time also increases across the transition to motherhood: It is estimated to increase from two to 15 hours per week upon the transition to parenthood (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Gjerdingen & Center, 2005). In general, time diary data show that women with children in the home spend approximately three more hours on housework per week than do women without children (Bianchi et al., 2000).

Work-Family Competition as Children Grow Up

Mothers differ substantially from non-mothers in the amount of time that they spend in employment, unpaid labor in the home, free time activities, and the other people with whom they spend time. However, mothers are not a monolithic group. Younger children are much more demanding of their mothers' time and energy than older children. Mothers' time allocation patterns therefore evolve as their children age and their needs change.

Mothers become more likely to be employed as their children get older; as of 2010, 54.5% of women with children under the age of three were employed, while 71.2% of women with children between the ages of six and 17 were employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). This increase is associated with higher average hours in paid work for mothers of children over six, but very similar proportions of married mothers with preschoolers and married mothers with school aged children work part time (Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi, 2009). However, there is little

recent research on whether this trend of increases in employment as children age extends across the transition into the empty nest phase. Moen (1991), drawing on data from the 1970s, found that this transition was not associated with a shift of time into employment.

On the other hand, mothers' time in unpaid labor in the home decreases as their children get older. Milkie et al. (2009) estimate that mothers of preschoolers do 46.5 hours of unpaid work per week, while mothers of older children do 36.6 hours per week. This difference is driven by decreases in the amount of childcare women do as their children age, rather than decreases in the amount of housework they do (Milkie et al., 2009). This finding that childcare decreases as the age of the youngest child in the family increases is consistent across the literature (Rapoport & Le Bourdais, 2008; Bryant & Zick, 1996; Sayer et al., 2004).

Alternate Uses of Mothers' Time

The extent to which mothers reallocate time to the labor force as their children age remains an open question. A complicating factor is that there are a number of other areas in which women could spend time no longer needed to care for their children. Some women may find that their time is taken up with other caregiving responsibilities. Others may dedicate their time to volunteer activities. Some women may take the opportunity to invest in themselves through activities that cultivate cultural or social capital.

As children grow up and become increasingly independent, women may find that other care-giving responsibilities replace child care. Increases in longevity have led to an aging population and higher dependency ratios (Lee & Haaga, 2002). Many women in midlife care for aging parents or ailing spouses (Dentinger & Clarkberg, 2002). Women with lower levels of involvement in the labor force when their children are young are more likely to become caretakers of others when their children are grown (Young & Grundy, 2008). Care-giving may

also take the form of caring for a grandchild; more than 25 percent of the young children of employed mothers are cared for by relatives, many of whom are grandmothers (Ehrle, Adams, and Tout, 2001).

Mothers whose children need a decreasing amount of day to day parenting may engage in volunteer activities. "For individuals, volunteering provides a sense of well-being, of making valuable contributions to society, of paying something back, of being able to compensate or substitute volunteer roles for others that may have fallen away, and for maintaining a sense of being part of an on-going agenda" (Hendricks & Cutler, 2004, p. S252). As with care-giving, volunteer activities may be an alternative to paid employment. Moen (2001) reports that many retired women describe their community service activities as playing an important role in their retirement. For women with school-aged children, schools and extra-curricular activities provide a constant stream of volunteer opportunities.

Arlie Hochschild, in *The Time Bind* (1997), discusses the "potential selves" that parents develop during the years when both employment and family responsibilities are highly demanding. "A potential self is a set, not of imagined present alternatives – activities one 'might have done' or ways 'one might have been' – but of imagined future possibilities. Often we visualize what we might do in the future in order to prepare ourselves for that future" (p. 235). These potential selves may involve hobbies or creative outlets that are simply too time consuming for parents of young children. The relative freedom of the stage of the life course when the daily responsibilities of parenting are waning may allow mothers to pursue interests that have been in mothballs for years.

Statement of the Problem

The literature on work-family conflict assumes a direct competition between these two institutions for time. This competition is felt most strongly by mothers of young children, who often reduce their time in labor force activities in order to make time to care for their children. As children grow up and gradually become more independent, the time demands of motherhood lessen. The time competition hypothesis that underlies much work-family research might predict that mothers would recommit the time freed up by this transition out of day to day parenting to paid employment.

This paper asks the following questions: First, how do new mothers reallocate their time in order to meet the demands of parenting during the earliest, most intensive years of child-rearing? Second, do mothers reinvest in the labor force time that is no longer needed for child care, once the toddler years are behind them and they begin the gradual transition out of day to day mothering? What other activities do mothers pursue when they have the time available to them? And, how does the transition to the empty nest – the final step in the transition out of day to day mothering – affect women's time use?

I use women's time diaries from the American Time Use Survey to examine the time use tradeoffs that are being made at different stages of the life course. A longitudinal study would be ideal for this sort of question, but there are obvious advantages to the ATUS: the very large sample size and the very detailed activity categories offer a unique opportunity to explore a much wider range of outcomes than would be possible in a panel survey.

Method

About the American Time Use Survey (ATUS)

The ATUS is a nationally representative time diary survey. It has been conducted on an on-going basis since 2003, drawn from the outgoing rotation of the Current Population Survey (CPS). A total of 98,823 respondents completed time diaries between 2003 and 2009. ATUS respondents retrospectively describe the activities they did over a 24 hour period, beginning at 4:00am on the previous day and ending at 4:00am on the day of the diary interview. Only one respondent is selected from each participating household; only household members aged 15 and older are eligible to be selected. Saturdays and Sundays are oversampled, as are members of households with children or racial minorities. For most activities, respondents also report where they were and who they were with during the activity.

The sample used in this analysis consists of all women between the ages of 20 and 60 (n=39,053). Women with own household children between the ages of zero and 24 (n=23,546) are categorized by the age of their youngest child in the household. This information is gathered from the household roster, which lists all members of the household and their relationship to the respondent. In the ATUS, step-children and adopted children are not distinguished from biological children, so all are included in this analysis.

Dependent Variables

Time use researchers often divide the 24 hours of the day into four broad categories: personal care, market work, unpaid productive activity, and free time (Robinson & Godbey, 1997). These categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. This analysis begins with these four categories, then looks at some important sub-categories within each group. See Appendix 1

for a detailed description of the activities included in each variable. Most variables simply total the number of minutes devoted to the activity during the diary day, but some count the number of times during the diary day that the activity occurred or simply indicate whether the activity took place at all during the diary day.

Personal Care. The major category of personal care consists of time spent sleeping or sleepless, time spent grooming or otherwise taking care of oneself (although not exercising), and time spent eating and drinking as a primary activities. The major category also includes travel time directly related to any of the previously listed activities. Sleeping, grooming, and eating/drinking are each examined separately as well.

Labor Force Activity. The labor force major category includes time spent in paid employment, time spent seeking work, and time spent in work-related activities. The major category also includes time spent in travel directly related to the above activities. Several subcategories are also examined, as mothers often alter their work patterns to accommodate their childrearing responsibilities. First, I examine the number of minutes per day that women spend in labor force activities, minus commuting time. I also measure the number of episodes of labor force activity each woman reports. Two additional measures assess whether the respondent reported working while at home during the diary day and whether the respondent reported working after 6:00pm on the diary day.

Non-Market Work. Activities in this category are obviously important for mothers. Non-market work includes all unpaid productive activity, such as housework and performing carework for others, plus travel time related to the previous activities. In addition to the major category, I examine seven subcategories. First is housework, which includes work done around the home, like food preparation, cleaning, and laundry as well as shopping for goods and

services. Four child care subcategories are also examined: physical care of children (feeding, clothing, bathing); activities related to children's education (reading to children, helping children with homework, attending meetings at children's schools, etc.); playing with household children (playing games and sports, doing arts and crafts, etc.); and other care of household children (dropping off/picking up children, planning and organizing on children's behalf). It is important to note that child care activities in the ATUS lexicon refer to the care of household children under the age of 18, but not necessarily the respondent's own children. That is, not all child care is done on behalf of the respondent's own children. Further, any care of children who are over the age of 18 will not be included in the child care variables, but rather in the "care of adults" variable. This variable captures helping and caring activities done for adults, whether in the respondent's household or another household. Finally, I examine time spent caring for and helping non-household children.

Free time. In much time use research, "free time" is a residual category of activities that are neither personal care, market work, nor non-market productive activity. In this case, the major free time category includes leisure time, educational activity, volunteer work, religious activity, exercise, and any time that is coded as "unable to code." On average, less than ten minutes per diary day falls into the "unable to code" category. Travel related to any of the above activities is also included. I examine several subcategories. "Cultural leisure" includes adult education, doing sports, visiting museums, and doing other activities that might be thought to develop cultural capital. "Social leisure" includes activities with the main goal of socializing, such as hosting or attending gatherings. "Media leisure" includes watching television or movies, listening to the radio, computer use for leisure, and reading. "TV Watching" is a subset of media leisure. Volunteering includes any volunteer activity done on behalf of an organization.

Independent Variables

The main independent variable in most of this analysis is motherhood status. For women with own household children, this is based on the age of the woman's youngest child on the household roster. The mothers, all at least 20 years old, are grouped into 10 groups based on the age of their youngest child living at home: 0-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15, 16-17, and 18-24. As young adult children typically move away from home between the ages of 18 and 24, the final category may be biased toward women whose children stay home longer. However, the ATUS does count children away at college on the household roster, which will help to mitigate this bias. Women without children under the age of 25 on the household roster are broken into two groups based on their own age: 20-40 and 41-60. These ages were selected to ensure that most women who have not yet had children fall into the younger group and women whose children have already reached adulthood and left the parental home are in the older group.

It is important to note that the only information available on a woman's children comes from the household roster; there are no independent questions on whether a woman has ever had children, her age at childbirth, or whether she has children who no longer reside in her household. Therefore, it is not possible to distinguish between women who have not had children and women whose children live elsewhere. Because most minor children live with their mothers, I am able to catch the vast majority of women with children under 18. Further, as most women in the United States have children – about 82 percent of American women have had at least one child by their early 40s (Dye, 2008) – most of the women in the group of older women without children in the home will be empty nest mothers. In most regression models, women between the ages of 20 and 40 without children are the reference category.

One portion of this analysis compares mothers of one child under the age of two to similarly aged young women without children. The group without children is limited to women aged 23 to 34, which is within one standard deviation in age of the mean age of the new mothers. In these regression models, the women without children are again the reference category.

A number of control variables are included in the analyses. First, there are several demographic variables: race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, other), education (less than high school, high school diploma/GED, some college, bachelor's degree or higher level of education), and age, coded as an integer variable. Several family structure variables are also included, as family structure is likely to have a strong effect on women's time use: a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of non-own children under 18 on the household roster; marital status, based on the presence or absence of a spouse or unmarried partner on the household roster; and the total number of own children in the household. Spouse's income (coded into quartiles) and a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of an employed spouse, serve to summarize the woman's economic status. Women without a spouse or unmarried partner are included in these variables; they are assigned to the "no employed spouse" category and the "no or low spouse income" category. The woman's own income is not included in these models because income is an outcome of employment and would be inappropriate to use as a predictor. Finally, a variable indicating whether the diary day was a weekday or weekend day and a series of dummy variables for the season of the year control for variation based on when the survey was administered.

Table 2.1 shows the weighted percentage distributions/means of each control variable for each of the main motherhood status groups. Most of the variation between the twelve groups is in mean age, which increases steadily from the group of young women without children (27.3) through the groups of mothers by age of youngest child to the group of middle aged women

without household children under age 25 (52.3). Women with very young children in the home are less likely to be White and more likely to be Hispanic than women with older children in the home. Young women without children have higher levels of education than the other groups, but otherwise, education levels are fairly consistent across groups. The difference in marital status between young women without children and the other groups is striking; only 28 percent of the young non-mothers are married, but more than 70 percent of each of the groups of mothers with minor children is married.

Similarly, Table 2.2 shows the same descriptive statistics, but for the limited sample of first time mothers of young children and similarly aged women without children. The mothers are slightly more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to have completed a college education. Again, mothers are much more likely to be married than women without children.

Analysis Plan

In order to assess how activities changes as women make the transition into motherhood and the subsequent gradual transition out of day-to-day parenting, I use the cross-sectional time diary data of the ATUS to approximate a comparison across the life course. There are limitations on the causal statements that can be made from such a study, but the large sample size and rich detail of the time diaries allow for a nuanced examination of the ways in which women with infants differ from women without children, and how women with children in different age groups differ from one another. When examining the results, it is important to keep in mind that the final category that approximates empty nest mothers also includes women who never had children.

Most of the outcomes in this study are the number of minutes per day in a certain type of activity. For these measures, outcomes are continuous outcomes, so ordinary least squares regressions are used. Two labor force variables – the likelihood of working at home during the day and the likelihood of working after 6:00pm - have dichotomous outcomes, so logistic regressions are used. For all analyses, a normalized weight, in which each respondent's weight is divided by the average weight, is used. The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides fully imputed data for all of the variables used in this analysis, with one exception. For spouse's income, any respondents with missing data are grouped into a separate category.

Results

This section describes the results from the analyses. All results are statistically significant unless otherwise specified.

The analysis begins with comparisons of the time use of new mothers and childless women of roughly the same age. Table 2.3 approximates the transition into motherhood by comparing the time use of women with one child aged zero to one to similarly aged women without children. The table focuses on a broad-based look at the four major time use categories: personal care, market work, non-market work, and free time. These categories are completely exhaustive of all activities in the ATUS lexicon, and so account for all 24 hours of each woman's day. The differences between these two groups in their time use patterns are quite substantial. New mothers spend about half an hour less time per day in personal care, almost two hours less time per day in market work, and about an hour less time per day in free time activities or leisure than do women without children. On the other hand, new mothers spend over three hours more

time each day in unpaid productive activity than women without children. This suggests a fairly dramatic change in time allocation with the birth of the first child.

There are a few demographic variables that stand out in this comparison of new mothers to similarly aged women without children. Black women spend less time in unpaid labor than White women, but more time in free time activities. Higher levels of education are strongly related to spending more time in market work, but less time in personal care. Of the household structure variables, the presence of a non-own child in the household is associated with increased levels of non-market work and decreased time in free time activities, but marital status does not have many effects. Intriguingly, the economic control variables – spouse income and spouse employment status – do not have strong effects on any of the major categories of time use. Weekdays are unsurprisingly related to larger amounts of time spent in market work but less time spent in the other major categories.

In Table 2.4, the same four major categories are analyzed for the full range of motherhood status categories. This analysis, although based on cross-sectional data, uses a sample of person days from a representative sample of women to create a picture of how women's time allocation patterns are likely to change as they transition first into motherhood and then gradually out of the day to day responsibilities of active parenting. The findings for the first two motherhood status categories, although similar to what was reported in Table 2.3, differ because the group of women without children includes a wider range of ages (20-40 rather than 23-34) and because the group of mothers of infants includes some women with older children. The first and most obvious finding is that there is remarkably little variation in the amount of time women spend on personal care as they move into and out of the intensive phases of mothering. Although women with infants spend about 18 fewer minutes per day in personal care

than young women without children, other differences are not statistically significant despite the very large sample size. Of the control variables, higher levels of education, increased age, more own household children, and weekdays are all associated with less time in personal care. White women spend the least time in personal care.

Time spent in market work, on the other hand, is strongly related to motherhood status. Women with a child under age two work 85 fewer minutes per day than young women without children. This negative effect erodes over the preschool years such that mothers of grade school children spend about the same amount of time in paid work as childless women. By the time a mother's child is a teenager, mothers actually spend more time in market work than younger women without children. Part of this may be explained by lower employment rates among young women without children who are still completing their education but it also may reflect the growing need for mothers of older children to earn income that may be needed for children's post-secondary education. Consistent with the increased need for money for older children, the positive coefficient for paid work tends to taper off as children in the home reach adulthood or leave altogether. Unsurprisingly, higher levels of education are associated with more time in market work, as is completing the time diary on a weekday. Women with greater demands on their time in the household (women with non-own household children, women with more own household children, and married women) spend less time in the labor force. Similarly, women with higher levels of financial support from their spouses also spend less time in employment.

Time spent in non-market work is very strongly correlated with motherhood status. Compared to young women without children, mothers of infants spend more than three additional hours in non-market work per day. The amount of time in unpaid labor decreases gradually through the preschool and school age years, until mothers of 14-15 year olds spend

only about 13 minutes more on unpaid labor than young women without children. Mothers of older teens and middle-aged women without children actually spend less time in unpaid labor than do young women without children. Of the demographic characteristics, Black women spend less time in non-market work than White women and higher levels of education are associated with less time in unpaid labor, but older women spend more time in these activities. The household structure covariates have the opposite effect on non-market work as they had on employment; non-own children, more own children, and the presence of a spouse all increase the amount of time women spend in non-market work. Higher levels of spouse income and having an employed spouse are both associated with additional time in non-market work. Less time is spent on non-market work during weekdays.

The relationship between motherhood status and free time activities is more straightforward; mothers with minor children spend less time in these activities than do young women without children, and the difference is largest (over an hour per day) when children are youngest. Mothers with adult children and middle-aged women without children spend similar amounts of time in free time activities to young women without children. This suggests that women do eventually get back the leisure time they had before childbearing, but only when their children become adults. Black women spend more time in free time activities than White women, but Hispanic women and women of other racial/ethnic identities spend less time than White women. Higher levels of education and increases in age are associated with less time in free time activities. Interestingly, the family structure variables do not have a strong effect on time in free time activities, nor does spouse income. On the other hand, having an employed spouse is associated with less time in free time activities, and less time is spent on free time activities on weekdays.

Next, I take a look at some more detailed subcategories of time use within each of the major categories, to get a better sense for the nuances of how time use varies with the age of women's youngest children. Table 2.5 presents results for several subcategories of personal care: sleep, grooming, and eating/drinking. One intriguing finding here is that women with infants do not report significantly less sleep than young women without children, but they do report less time grooming and eating. All groups of mothers report significantly less time eating and drinking than young women without children, but the differences are not especially large, under twelve minutes per day.

Detailed analyses of time spent in market work are found in Table 2.6. Minutes per day in work looks very similar to the major market work category presented in Table 2.3, as one would expect given that the only difference is that the major category contains related travel time. Several additional measures are assessed to examine the extent to which mothers restructure their work days to accommodate their caregiving responsibilities. Only employed women are included in these analyses. First, I look at the number of work episodes on the diary day, with the expectation that women with young children may work fewer days per week or may be less likely to bring work home with them in the evenings. If this were the case, mothers of young children would be less likely, on average, to report working on the diary day, and less likely to report multiple episodes of work on the diary day. There is very little support for this supposition, although women with infants report slightly fewer episodes of work. Next, I estimate a logistic regression on the likelihood of working at home on the diary day, as mothers may be more likely to telecommute in order to maximize the time they spend with their children. Again, there is little evidence to support this; there are no statistically significant differences in the odds ratio of working at home by motherhood status. Finally, I estimate another logistic

regression, this time looking at the probability of working after 6:00pm. Mothers, especially those with young children, may be less likely to work in the evening, again to maximize time with their children. The women who are least likely to work in the evening are those with early grade school children, perhaps because of children's need for help with homework.

The next set of regressions, in Table 2.7, displays results for a wide variety of subcategories of productive activity within the household: housework, several categories of care of household children, care for adults (both household and non-household), and care of non-household children. There are very few significant differences in the amount of time that women spend in housework activities by motherhood status. Child care is a very different story. There are two types of child care that make up most of the time spent caring for children: the physical care of children and playing with children. Both of these types of child care are at their highest when children are very young. In the case of the physical care, mothers of infants spend close to two hours more time than young women without children. Playing with children is almost as large, with an hour difference between young women without children and mothers of infants. Mothers return to the levels of young women without children in terms of physical child care by the time their children are in the late elementary school years, the age at which most children are more than able to dress, feed, and bathe themselves. On the other hand, differences in time spent playing with children last until children are grown. Time spent in the education of household children and other child care activities both peak during the grade school years, but decline to levels similar to those of young women without children by the time children are teens. Overall, levels are very low in the time spent caring for or helping adults and non-household children. There are very few differences in the amount of time spent caring for and helping adults. The positive coefficient on this variable for those with a youngest child, age 18-24, in the home is

probably picking up "child care" for adult children who remain in the home. Care of non-household children is actually lower for mothers of young children than it is for young women without children; one possibility is that some of these young women without children have step-children who visit, but do not live in the household. Mothers of teens and middle-aged women without children are similar to young women without children in the amounts of time they spend caring for non-household children.

Finally, in Table 2.8, I present results for a variety of free time activities. First, is "cultural leisure," in which I include adult education, playing sports, and doing other activities that might be thought to develop cultural capital. Time spent in cultural leisure is much lower among mothers than among young women without children, and the difference is largest when children are youngest. Middle-aged women without children never quite regain the amount of time that younger women without children spend in cultural leisure activities. "Social leisure" includes activities with the main goal of socializing, such as hosting or attending parties. The evidence for variation in the amount of time spent in social leisure is actually quite weak. Overall, mothers may spend slightly less time in these activities than young women without children, but the differences in minutes per day are small (less than 10 minutes). "Media leisure" includes watching television or movies, listening to the radio, computer use for leisure, and reading for leisure. Overall, women spend a good deal of time in media leisure, but mothers of preschoolers spend 17 or 18 minutes less per day in media leisure than young women without children. Mothers of young adults and middle-aged women without children actually spend about 18 more minutes per day in media leisure than do young women without children. Because watching television is such a large component of media leisure, it is also analyzed separately. Patterns of television watching are similar to media leisure overall, although the difference

between mothers of young children and young women without children is not as great and the difference between mothers of young adults/middle-aged women without children and young women without children is actually larger. Finally, volunteer work includes any unpaid activity done on behalf of a volunteer organization. There are very few differences by motherhood status, although mothers of infants spend slightly less time in volunteer activities than young women without children.

Discussion

Consistent with prior research on the transition into motherhood, ATUS data comparing first time mothers of infants to similarly aged women without children show that young mothers allocate their time very differently than women without children. New mothers spend a great deal more time in unpaid labor than do women without children. They find that time by spending less time in paid employment, free time activities, and personal care. As children age, time in employment increases, time in child care decreases, and leisure time increases.

The research questions posed earlier asked how new mothers reallocate time in order to meet the demands of parenting at its most demanding, and how mothers again reallocate time as their children age out of the intensive childrearing years. At the heart of this question is the time competition hypothesis that underlies much research on work-family conflict. The time use data presented here provide evidence that new mothers withdraw time not just from the labor force, but also from personal care and free time activities, in order to meet the time demands of motherhood. As child care demands lessen, time is reallocated back to each of these areas.

The timing of these reallocations is intriguing. The differences between mothers of infants and young women without children in time used for personal care are small, and therefore not difficult to make up, which suggests that finding enough time for personal care is a priority

for mothers. Likewise, ramping up labor force activity also seems to be a priority; parity with young women without children is achieved by women with elementary school aged children and time spent in paid labor goes up from there (at least until children are well into adolescence). Furthermore, among employed women, there are very few differences in the likelihood of working at home or in the evening across motherhood status. These findings are certainly consistent with conceptions of the labor force as a greedy institution competing with family for time; once basic self-care needs are met, time freed up from the demands of childrearing is funneled first into paid labor. Leisure activities are at the bottom of the priority list.

The review of the literature proposed several activities that women might spend more time doing as their children mature, such as caring for elders or grandchildren, volunteer work, or finding time for self-development. The evidence for these is mixed. Although research has found that many women do spend time caring for elderly relatives or young grandchildren, these types of care work do not appear to be correlated with the age of a woman's own children. Similarly, there is very little relationship between age of children and time devoted to volunteer work. As to self-development activities, time in social leisure is quite flat, but time in cultural leisure activities gradually increases as children age. The caveat to this finding is that cultural leisure activity levels are never as high as among young women without children, largely because education is often a large time commitment for young women without children.

One shortcoming to time diary data is that I am unable to assess the reasons that women choose to allocate time as they do. Watching television and other time spent in media leisure increases with the age of children. One possibility to consider is that women's time allocation decisions may be constrained by the schedules of others. Activities such as watching a television program or reading a magazine can be done at any time of day for any length of time. These sorts

of leisure activities may be easy ways to fill gaps that slowly develop as children become increasingly independent. Other activities, such as taking up a sport or making a regular volunteer commitment are more likely to require coordinating with others' schedules.

One finding that is clear from the data is that there are no strong inflection points in the transition out of day to day parenting, at least on average. Rather, there is a gradual shifting of time as children get older. Also important is that the transition process seems to be mostly complete by the time children are teens. That is, the time use patterns of mothers of teenagers look a lot like the time use of middle-aged women without children. The departure of children from the parental home is certainly a meaningful transition for many women, but there are apparently few systematic changes in time use that accompany emptying the nest, although this finding is tempered by the inability to concretely identify empty nest mothers. The next chapter takes the consistency of time allocation by mothers of adolescents through empty nest mothers as a starting point, asking a group of mothers whose children have left home how their time changed as they transitioned out of day-to-day parenting, and why they made the decisions they did.

One of the key tenets of the work-family conflict literature is the competition for time between the institutions of work and family. This examination of the time use patterns of women in different stages of the life course provides support for the time competition hypothesis. New mothers clearly spend less time in the labor force and more time in unpaid labor than similarly aged women without children, and mothers spend less time in unpaid labor and more time in employment as their children age. But, there are other components to the day that should also be considered when considering work-family conflict. As children age and demands for mothers'

unpaid labor lessen, women reallocate time back to employment at a much faster rate than to leisure activities.

Chapter 3. What Comes Next? Mothers in the Empty Nest Phase of Life

Women's lives have changed dramatically since the women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Women became much more likely to combine work and family roles; they married later and divorced more frequently; they delayed childbearing and had fewer children, but mothered those children more intensively. Many aspects of women's evolving life courses have been thoroughly studied, especially motherhood. For example, researchers have used a variety of techniques to investigate the consequences of the transition into motherhood. This transition is a significant one. Upon becoming mothers, women tend to become less attached to the labor force as they spend much more time and energy on the unpaid work of home and family.

Despite the scrutiny that has been applied to the transition into motherhood, and the cultural forces that make this transition so consequential, very little attention has been paid to the opposite transition, out of day-to-day mothering. Partially, this is because this transition can be quite gradual, unlike the easy-to-identify transition into mothering. Children grow up over the course of 18 to 20 years, and during those years, they become more independent and gradually require less of their mothers' time, attention, and guidance. Even after children reach adulthood, parents may continue to provide support to their children.

The launching of children from the parental "nest," when the last child leaves home, serves as the most significant marker of this transition out of day-to-day mothering. However, little is known about the way that the transition to the empty nest phase affects the day-to-day rhythms of women's lives, their psychological well-being, or their relationships with others.

As the women of the Baby Boom generation move into the empty nest phase, the question of how this transition affects mothers becomes even more relevant. This cohort is of unprecedented size and enters this stage of life with a unique set of experiences and resources. As the social norms associated with empty nest mothers are still largely undefined, the choices made by today's empty nesters may pave the way for future generations of mothers. Two important shifts in mothers' behaviors over the past decades may shape the experiences of newly empty nest mothers. First, the women of the Baby Boom generation invested much more in their own human capital and labor force experiences than previous generations of women; these resources and experiences may open up more possibilities to women whose children have grown up. On the other hand, today's new empty nest mothers were among the first to subscribe to the ideology of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996), which could make the transition more difficult.

This chapter draws upon in-depth interviews with twelve women whose children have recently moved away from home to investigate the effects of this transition on their lives. In particular, I focus on what women do to find new sources of meaning, how their day to day lives change, and how their relationships with spouse and children change. While the sample size is limited, these discussions offer the opportunities to delve into the meanings associated with different choices and the emotional aspects of this significant transition.

Background

Life Course Perspective

The life course perspective is a useful framework for thinking about the ways that individuals' lives are affected by change. There are four central themes within the life course perspective: the idea that lives are lived within historical contexts, the timing of events within

lives will be consequential, that lives are lived interdependently and linked to one another, and that human actors have agency (Elder, 1994).

The life course perspective points to the importance of the way an individual is embedded in particular social and historical positions. The same type of event may have a completely different set of consequences in different times and places. This investigation into the lives of women who have recently emptied their nests is timely because the generation of women entering this phase of life is unlike previous cohorts in several ways. These women are in a different demographic position, their work, education, and family backgrounds are unlike those of previous generations, and strong cultural forces arose during the lifetimes of these women.

The effects of events depend not just on the larger social context, but also on the timing of the event in the individual's life. The transition into the empty nest stage is likely to have different effects for a woman in her sixties who is also shifting into retirement than for a woman in her forties with years of labor force participation ahead of her. Two related concepts help situate the timing of an event within an individual's life course. Trajectories are long-term patterns of behaviors and roles. Transitions "refer to changes in status (most often role transitions) that are discrete and relatively bounded in duration, although their consequences may be observed over long time periods" (George, 1996: p. 250). A young person growing up and moving away from the parental home is in the midst of a transition to adulthood – a transition that likely has many significant effects. Conversely, as a mother's young adult children move away, she also moves through a transition out of day-to-day mothering and into the empty nest stage.

The idea of linked lives is an important one for the study of empty nest mothers. This is the notion that because individuals are embedded in networks of social relationships, a change

that affects one person's life will resonate through others' lives. For example, a parent's job loss will place more bread-winning responsibility on the shoulders of the other parent and will reduce the opportunities available to children. In the case of the transition to the empty nest, the mother's experience is largely a consequence of events that happen in her child's life.

Finally, the life course perspective's emphasis on human agency recognizes that people are active players in shaping their own life courses. While members of a cohort may have many similarities, or undergo certain transitions at similar times in their lives, their reactions and decisions will not be uniform. The life course perspective helps identify patterns of behavior, but does not predict it for a given individual.

This Generation of Empty Nest Mothers

Demographically, today's mothers have a longer life expectancy than did previous generations. A 55 year old woman was expected to live an additional 18 years in 1900, and an additional 22 years in 1950, but a full 28 years as of 2006. In addition to living longer, today's women are expected to be healthier as they age (Hayward, 2006). The continuing trend of delayed fertility may affect these mothers, too, as it means that they have longer to wait before becoming grandparents.

The work and family histories of this generation provides them with a different set of resources than previous generations. First, a much higher proportion of this generation of women attended college and graduated from college (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler, 2001). These women also spent a great deal more time in the labor force than their predecessors, with an unprecedented proportion staying in the labor force even during their childrearing years (Blau et al., 2001). This group also had more tumultuous romantic lives than previous generations, with

much higher rates of divorce (Hughes & O'Rand, 2004). This combination of trends means that the women entering the empty nest phase today have greater access to their own financial resources, but may also have more financial responsibility and less access to resources from a spouse when there has been a marital disruption.

Two important cultural trends have also shaped the lives of this generation. Many of the women who are today becoming empty nesters came of age during the 1960s and 70s, during the height of the feminist movement. This movement, in addition to encouraging women to pursue higher levels of education and careers, has promoted a general culture of achievement among middle class women. Another strong cultural trend has been an evolution in parenting styles. Intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) is a broadly-accepted parenting ideology that dictates that mothers should spend a great deal of time, energy, and money raising their children. However, parenting practices are not universal. Middle class mothers engage in "concerted cultivation" of their children, in which children's time is managed to maximize cultural capital acquisition through many structured activities and adult-child dialog that emphasizes reasoning skills. Working class mothers prefer a strategy of "natural growth," in which children have much more free time and adult-child interaction is much more oriented towards instruction-giving than dialog (Lareau, 2003). Cultural trends that promote careers for mothers as well as intensive mothering through concerted cultivation mean that many of the women whose children are now growing up have worked hard to be successful both in the public sphere and as mothers.

Prior Research on the Empty Nest Stage

In the popular press, the effects of the empty nest stage tend to focus on the mother's mental health and emotional well-being. Perhaps for this reason, much of the academic research

on this topic focuses on this outcome as well. For example, Wheaton (1990) finds that mothers' distress upon children's departure depends on the quality of the relationship with those children. Other research finds that during the first year after the launch of young adult children, mothers report better moods, increased well-being, and fewer daily hassles (Dennerstein, Dudley, and Guthrie, 2002).

Some researchers have hypothesized that the transition to the empty nest stage would change mothers' engagement in the labor force and other activities. As of the 1970s, the transition to the empty nest phase, or even the anticipation of this transition, did little to increase women's labor force participation (Moen, 1991). The time diary data in the previous chapter show that the amount of time spent in market work, leisure activities, and housework varies little between women with teenaged children in the home and women without children in the home.

Similarly, studies have found moderate, mostly positive results when examining the effect of the empty nest stage on marital relationship quality. The transition to the empty nest phase has been found to slow down the general decline in marital quality associated with the increasing duration of the marriage (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, and Campbell, 2005) and to lead to significant improvements in marital happiness (White & Edwards, 1990). The length of marriage is apparently related to the effects of the empty nest stage on marital quality; relatively short marriages are more likely to end after the transition to the empty nest phase, but longer marriages are less likely to dissolve (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, and O'Rand, 1998).

There are related bodies of research that focus not on the specific transition to the empty nest stage, but on certain age ranges (e.g., midlife) or other transitions, like retirement. The research done on the so-called "third age" offers some insight into the empty nest stage transition. The third age is defined as the years between the family-focused and career building

phase of life and the decline of health in old age (Moen & Spencer, 2006). The transition into the empty nest phase is not defined as a key feature of this literature, but because they occur after the child-rearing years have ended, the empty nest stage and the third age share many features. Moen and Spencer (2006) describe the third age as "a period of life with few shared norms and as yet few clear-cut possibilities," but note that the individuals moving into this time of life bring with them their experiences with highly gendered institutions and norms. Research on what people expect to get out of life during the third age indicates that plans mostly revolve around leisure, especially after age 50 (Timmer, Bode, and Dittman-Kohli, 2003). Women, in particular, are likely to report that they want time for themselves, and are more inclined to plan educational and cultural activities.

Research Questions

The life course perspective's concepts of linked lives, transitions, and historical specificity create an expectation that the transition to the empty nest stage will have a substantial impact on mothers, especially the current cohort of newly empty nest mothers. This large group of women spent a great deal of time and energy raising their children, and that time and energy can be devoted to other pursuits as the children leave home. Mothering is not just a task, but for many an important facet of self-identity. Mothers' lives are linked to their children's lives – as those children need their mothers less, the mothers' lives change as well. As part of this change, the "mother" aspect of identity recedes in importance, making room for others. Further, this cohort has available to them the resources that come with higher levels of education and greater labor force participation, making a wider range of empty nest stage activities possible. These factors – the freeing up of time, the shifting self-identity, the availability of resources – lead to

the expectation that the transition to the empty nest phase will have a substantial impact on women's lives in the form of new sources of meaning, new activities and interests, and shifts in relationships with family members.

Broadly, this paper asks how the transition out of daily mothering and into the empty nest stage affects women. In particular, the following questions are addressed:

- Is the transition to the empty nest stage a significant event for mothers?
- Where do mothers find new sources of meaning once they are no longer mothering in person on a daily basis?
- How does the transition into the empty nest phase affect day to day life?
- How does the empty nest stage affect women's relationships with their spouses and children?

Methods

This study is based on interviews conducted with twelve women whose newly adult children have relatively recently left home. Research on qualitative methods indicates that thematic saturation for in-depth interviews typically occurs around the twelfth interview (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Respondents were sought through a snowball sampling technique. In requests for interviews, I specified that I was seeking women with at least some college education, in a long-term marriage, whose youngest child was between the ages of 20 and 24, and whose children had left home within the past several years. Many of these youngest children are still in college.

This select group of women was targeted because of the complicated relationship between work and family. Women with long-term marriages were sought because unmarried

women are much more likely to have an obligation to work than married women, and may therefore have less flexibility in their choices for the empty nest stage. The education restriction was made because women with at least some college education are more likely to be able to pursue career-type employment – and the most likely to maintain a connection to the labor force when their children are young. The hypothesis that today's empty nesters will seek out new activities and new sources of meaning in the empty nest phase is based partially on the supposition that these women have greater access to resources and a wider array of choices than previous generations. If these types of new activities are to be found in a subsample of women who have recently made the transition out of day-to-day parenting, they are likely to be found among well-educated women with stable marital histories.

The interviews were semi-structured. Respondents were asked questions about work and family life when their children were young, what it was like when their children moved out, and what day to day life is like as an empty nester. When possible, interviews were recorded. The interview schedule is provided in Appendix 2.

A grounded theory approach was taken to coding interview notes and transcriptions (Charmaz, 2006). During the first phase of the coding process, initial codes were developed from the data. After the initial codes were analyzed and some themes were developed, a second, more focused pass was made through the interview data. This focused coding fleshed out theoretical categories and brought similarities and distinctions to the fore. Contradictory examples were also identified during this stage.

All twelve of the respondents are white, married women. All took at least some college courses; of the ten who have bachelor's degrees, half also have graduate degrees. Ten of the respondents have been married to the biological father of their children since before the children

were born, but two divorced and remarried while the children were growing up. All of the respondents' husbands are employed, and while some respondents reported concerns about saving for retirement, all are financially stable and solidly in the middle to upper middle class.

Despite a high level of education in the group, they can be grouped into three broad employment trajectories. Career-track workers were generally continuously employed in the same field, with increasingly responsible positions. Ellen, Hannah, Naomi, Nora, and Rachel fall into this category. Non-career workers worked while their children were growing up, but generally in positions that allowed them to focus primarily on their families. Gwen, Janet, Kathryn, and Sherry make up this group. Finally, stay at home mothers largely withdrew from the labor force when their children were born. Hope, Joanna, and Sally are included in this category. See Table 3.1 for more details on the respondents.

The quotations in the following section are drawn from transcripts and edited for clarity, brevity, or to maintain anonymity. Ellipses replace the use of "um" or similar words, repetitions, or other deletions. Quotes were edited carefully to maintain respondents' meanings.

Results

A "Watershed Moment": Transitioning out of Day-to-Day Mothering

The transition to the empty nest phase was indeed a big moment for many of the mothers in the sample. This milestone comes with a lot of emotion, both positive and negative. Most of the mothers expressed both types; common sentiments were sadness about their children's departures and a sort of *anomie* surrounding losing the day-to-day mothering role, but also pride in their children's accomplishments, relief at having successfully raised their children, and excitement about having time to themselves.

Gwen, a writer with two children in college, compared her children moving out to being pregnant the first time, in that life will never be the same and there is no going back to a previous stage. “It’s a watershed moment. It’s a milestone. … It’s a really big deal.” Ellen, the long-term manager of a local advocacy organization, was unusual in finding her only child’s departure to be very difficult, partially because she was also about to lose her job.

> I’m going to focus on [my husband’s business], but it does leave vacuums. I have to be honest. Because my life with [my child] is so void of the kinds of issues that so many of my friends have, … it’s not realistic that it’s all rosy. I am having a difficult time. I think if [my child] were still in high school and this were happening, I wouldn’t be the same kind of time that I’m having now. So that’s really real. I think the presence of children provides a purpose that is unique. Anybody can get a job, you know, and have to go to work, but being a parent to a child – because it’s emotional, people can go to work and forget about it the moment they leave the office – but having a child is … it’s blessingly fulfilling and consuming … and without it, it is difficult.

On the other end of the spectrum was Hannah, an attorney with a federal agency with one child in the beginning stages of his career and the second in college. She and some friends with children the same age as her younger child held an “empty nest party” after their children went off to college.

> We invited a bunch of other couples whose only or youngest was [my child’s] age. … And then when I got everyone together, the prevailing sentiment was, “Yea!!” I mean, you don’t want to broadcast that too much to your kids, but it really is a nice sense of freedom about having more control over your time and what you’re doing.

The transition to the empty nest phase, then, was experienced by the mothers in the sample as a momentous occasion, but emotional responses to this transition were mixed and varied.

New Sources of Meaning

Mothering provides a sense of purpose. When young adult children move out, mothers face a sudden loss of meaning. Several mothers in the sample reacted to the transition to the empty nest stage by seeking new, meaningful activities. Others ramped up involvement in long-standing activities, but a third group struggled to find substantive ways to fill the newly available time.

Sally, in particular, made a conscious effort to find a new pursuit that would provide regular intellectual stimulation and interaction with others. When Sally's first child was born, she decided to leave her career in public relations and devote herself to raising her children and supporting her husband's career. Over the years, she developed her artistic interests into a second career, eventually publishing several books. However, Sally was never formally employed while raising children, and once her younger child left home for college, she found herself thinking fondly of the camaraderie and structure she remembered experiencing in the work place.

Sally considered looking for a job, but thought the probability of finding a good fit was negligible. Instead, she looked for other activities that would provide similar benefits. She began a new yoga class, signed up for a couple of professional development courses, and registered for a conference. But her most significant new commitment was as a volunteer docent at a local museum. This required quite a time commitment; before even beginning to lead tours, Sally attended weekly classes for four months and did a considerable amount of reading about art pedagogy and the specific types of art displayed in the museum. As a docent, Sally is committed to leading several lengthy tours of the museum per month.

Sally, an artist, enjoys the content of her activities at the museum, but she also derives pleasure from other aspects of being a docent. First of all, the weekly classes, in particular,

provided structure in her life. Before her children went away to college, the rhythm of daily life in the household revolved around her children's schooling and activities – and, in recent years, the college application process. Sally described herself as "unbelievably sad" during the first few months as an empty nest mother. Having a weekly docent training class to attend and a stack of literature to read each week provided structure and routine. Another large benefit Sally gets out of the docent program was adult interaction. Like many of the mothers in this sample, Sally said that her house seemed very quiet once her children moved away. The docent training program and her volunteer position provided a forum for regular contact with a group of people with a common interest.

Gwen's experience was different. Like Sally, she withdrew from the labor force for a few years when her children were very young, but found a good part time job as a writer when her younger child was a toddler. She continued in this role through a job sharing arrangement as her children grew up. Gwen was very involved in her children's schooling and extra-curricular activities. Her children had very active social lives, and since Gwen was usually home in the afternoon, her house was often full of teenagers.

For Gwen, her younger child's departure for college was an emotional transition. As a very involved mother, her sense of purpose in life was tied up in caring for her children. When her children – and their friends – went away to college, Gwen's house seemed empty and quiet. However, Gwen has not sought out any large, new projects the way Sally has. Instead, she has increased her involvement in things she was already doing. For instance, she and a neighbor have made an afternoon dog walk a regular habit, rather than something they did occasionally. Similarly, Gwen joined a women's chorus while her children were in high school. Now that her children have left home, Gwen is more likely to join her carpool partners for dinner before

practice. Gwen also reports that she and her husband are more likely to do something social with friends on the weekends.

Gwen is also considering increasing her hours in the labor force. She says that she does not feel old enough to be thinking about retirement yet and she enjoys her work. She may have the opportunity to switch to full time employment at her current job, or perhaps increase her hours to 80 percent. The extra earnings would help her family pay for college tuition, save for retirement, and take the European vacation they have been planning. Still, she feels conflicted about the possibility of full time work. "It feels like a luxury to be working half time – it makes our lives easier and we eat better meals – but in some ways would make better sense to bring in more money."

Like Sally, Gwen very much enjoyed the social aspects of motherhood. She liked participating in school events and extracurricular activities, and she enjoyed the time spent with her children and their friends. The prospect for relationship building is a key factor in the activities she is enjoying most now that her children have left the home.

In contrast to Sally and Gwen, Rachel has had difficulty setting a new course in the empty nest stage. Rachel was very devoted to her sales and marketing career when her son, Lucas, was growing up; she describes visiting her office and being very excited to return to work when he was just two months old. She is very proud of her professional success. Rachel divorced Lucas's father when Lucas was in preschool. Lucas split his time evenly between his parents' homes. Rachel remarried during her son's elementary school years to a man with two similarly aged children; her step-children typically spent weekends at her house.

Upon her son's departure for college, Rachel found that she suddenly had "oodles of time" that she was not sure how to fill. She has been very reflective about her success as a

parent. She is proud of her son's achievements and pleased that her high income provided so many opportunities for him, but also wonders whether she could have done more. Her ponderings have also led her to ask herself, "What am I going to get my fulfillment from next?"

Rachel has long enjoyed her work and taken pride in her successes in the labor force, but her enthusiasm seems to be waning in the empty nest phase.

> I love my job, but, I don't care about work anymore that much. It doesn't float my boat as much. Being around my husband and being around family seems so much more important. … Work never ends. It doesn't have the same feel as in your 30s or 40s. In your 50s, you've got all this experience and you're good at what you do, but just not as enthusiastic. … I'm clearly thinking about not working more than before. I take too long to get ready in the morning. The older I get, the more time it takes to get ready. … I'm probably only working eight hours a day now – there were times when it was ten to twelve hours per day.

However, Rachel has had trouble figuring out what she should do now that there are no longer day-to-day demands on her time as a parent and she is losing interest in her career. While she says she has plenty of interests, she finds it difficult to actually do something. Instead, she finds herself watching a lot of television and doing jigsaw puzzles. She attributes part of this inertia to the sudden change in the pace of her life. "While you're busy, you get a lot done. After all those years of the machine being on and you turn the machine off, you don't know how to be." Still, she is trying to find an activity that will spark her passion.

> I've made lists. Jigsaw puzzles. Jogging, skiing. There is a class called body pump – it's a weight lifting class. Reading – I try. I would like to try to read more. I get involved in a book and if I put it down for too long I get mad. I should cook more. I'd like to. And I do have this Rosetta Stone – I'm trying to learn Arabic. Those are the things I'd be inclined to do, plus painting, but I haven't managed to do it yet. I'm struggling with self-discipline. It's just too much time – you can't watch that much TV! I can do something, but I haven't figured out what yet. … I feel like I should be learning a language or cooking or doing something that we as humans deem important.

Sally was very motivated to find a new core activity that provided structure to her time and opportunities for interaction with like-minded people. Gwen, who already had the structure of her part time job, was more interested in building relationships. Rachel, on the other hand, has largely been motivated by accomplishment. As an empty nest mother, she feels that she has accomplished something important in raising her son and step-children, but that they are now finished products out of her hands. Work could be a source of achievement, but Rachel has already been quite successful in that area and does not feel strongly motivated to set new goals. Instead, she has been unsuccessfully seeking a new passion that will engage her drive for accomplishing tasks and achieving goals.

Sally's, Gwen's, and Rachel's stories have been told in depth, but the mothers in the sample can be divided fairly easily into three groups: those who have found major, new, meaningful activities, like Sally; those who have built upon pre-existing interests and activities, like Gwen; and those who are still at loose ends, trying to find a new source of meaningful engagement, like Rachel. However, despite differences in the ability or inclination to find a new path in the empty nest stage, the mothers in the sample were much more unanimous in describing the new ways that both old and new activities were experienced.

New Freedoms in Daily Life

In many cases, as the mothers in the sample became empty nesters, changes to day-to-day routine were not substantial. This is similar to findings from the time diary analysis reported in Chapter Two. However, the mothers reported that the days felt very different. Partially this was because the house was emptier and quieter than they were used to, but also because the pace of

activities and the rate of multi-tasking slowed considerably. Sherry, a part-time librarian, summed this up:

> My schedule is pretty open, but I do manage to fill it. … I'm more relaxed, my life is a lot more relaxing. I remember days that were just a whirlwind – I don't know where the day went. I don't feel that way anymore. I can finish thoughts and projects. It's almost as though there's a backlog of stuff that I'm getting through bit by bit. That's what it feels like.

Many of the mothers also spoke of a new sense of freedom. Hope, a part time office manager for a small non-profit whose two children are in college, said:

> I'm free. I don't have to check in with anybody. Well, my husband, but he doesn't care what I do. He's at his yoga tonight. You know, there's no one who needs my time. My youngest, we delayed her driving as long as we could, because she's not the most focused person in the world. So a lot of times I had to take her places or pick her up… I just don't have to check in with anyone and it is so freeing. It is like growing up all over again, and instead of having to report back to your mother, I was reporting to kids, and now I'm back to living my own life. If you want to go out to dinner, or, gee, even a movie, you don't have to check with anyone or see if anyone wants to come or argue over which movie to see. … My husband goes sailing with a free conscience in the summer. I can see friends. I'm involved with my synagogue. … And [I'm]going back to things I used to do, like craft fairs, and things on the weekend that I may not have had time for before.

Hope's sense of freedom has several sources. First is the feeling that she no longer has to coordinate schedules with anyone. Unlike her children when they were in high school, Hope's husband works long hours and keeps a set schedule; Hope does not feel obliged to coordinate her schedule around his and she is never responsible for his transportation. This sentiment was echoed by several other mothers. The freedom from the obligation to be home to "cook a healthy dinner for the kids" was an especially common theme among respondents. Once the children moved away from home, the mothers no longer felt constrained by the need to prepare and serve a certain type of meal at a certain time of day.

Second, Hope feels like she has more choice over the content of her activities. Her own preferences for restaurants or movies or weekend outings matter much more with her children away at school. This, also, was mentioned by other respondents. Sherry and her husband are going farther than most in this regard; they are planning to buy a small apartment in a nearby city in order to spend leisurely weekends at the movies, concerts, shops, and restaurants they prefer.

Finally, Hope's statement indicates that she has more freedom to choose the people with whom she spends her time. Like many mothers, Hope was involved in her children's activities, so her circle of acquaintances tended to be the parents of her children's peers. Now, however, she can select activities and build friendships on her own terms. Still, old habits die hard, and Hope said she has had to learn to introduce herself other than as her children's mother.

> You know, at our book club, we sit around and we introduce ourselves each time, and I think for the longest time, I would define myself by my kids' ages. You know, 'Hi, I'm Hope and I have two children and they're in this grade and this grade.' Now I'm forcing myself to define myself in other ways, so I'm not defined by my kids and my kids' ages.

Many of the mothers in the sample did find that their social circles were largely structured around their children during the parenting years. Hannah, for instance, participated in a book club that consisted primarily of other mothers from her child's soccer team. Nora, who spent several years as a stay at home mother when her son was young, developed a supportive group of friends among other "at home" mothers in the neighborhood. But as their children moved out and their schedules became less child-oriented, the mothers I spoke to reported that their relationships changed.

New freedoms were also evident in plans for the future. With their children successfully launched, the women in the sample reported that they were able to begin making plans for a child-free future. In most cases, these were not long-term plans, but rather upcoming vacations

centered on adult interests rather than children. Hannah's planned cycling trip to the Netherlands falls into this category. A common thread in the mothers' descriptions of their plans is that they all provided a sense of pleasurable anticipation. While the mothers in the sample planned for the future when their children were at home, the transition to the empty nest phase provided the freedom to develop plans specific to the mothers' own interests and the free time to enjoy the anticipation that accompanied those plans.

Shifting Relationship Dynamics

As the mothers in this sample shifted their focuses away from parenting, many experienced changes in their other relationships. Some spent more time with friends, especially women friends, and some found new groups of friends. But, for the married women in this sample, the differences in their relationships with their husbands were especially important. This change in the marital relationship was not unanticipated by many of the mothers. Nora, an editor whose only child is in college, worried that she and her husband would have trouble redefining their relationship after so many years of focusing on their son, Jason.

> I was terrified about how my husband and I would get along. … My husband went into a depression as soon as [Jason] left. I did not. I was more concerned about how I would get along with [my husband], than I was worried about Jason. … So my husband's frantic. I'm actually quite calm and excited for Jason, and very quickly I thought, "Wow, I do have a whole new life ahead of me!" … [My husband] and I, after he got over his shock - it probably took two, if not three, months - and after he saw that Jason was very, very happy, he started to relax, and we started to go out more, and we did rediscover that, oh yeah, we do have things in common. We like just going out and having dinner together.

Like Nora, other mothers reported actively seeking out activities to share with their husbands, now that they were no longer so focused on their children's activities. Hannah and her

husband have picked up some old interests, such as attending concerts, and found new things to do together, including long distance bicycle rides. They are planning vacations around these interests and generally enjoying the opportunity to do things as a couple. Hope, on the other hand, is having less luck finding activities that she and her husband will both enjoy. She doesn't share his passion for sailing, and is skeptical about a proposal he has made:

> My husband's talking about, since I'm not a sailor, my husband's now talking RV. I'm like, 'I don't think so!' I don't think I could go around in a little box. We're trying to force ourselves to do things together and not just sit around and watch TV, although that's really easy and comfortable.

Finding joint activities to replace children's soccer games or band concerts was one aspect of the evolution of the marital relationship, but not the only one. Joanne, a retired secretary, reported that she and her husband have carried on doing many of the same things together since their three children left home, but the dynamic between them has changed.

> I have noticed one thing with myself, with my kids gone and all, I'm more vocal now. I just say, 'You know, I'm not doing that,' or, 'I don't care what you think, this is what I think.' Before, with the kids around, I just thought I had too much to deal with, I'm not going to deal with [my husband]. … I guess a lot of women just say, 'OK, whatever you say.' And I think I was like that at one time. But now I say, 'No, I don't think so.' And it's a shocker to them when you start doing it.

Naomi, a senior level administrator at a large university, also felt the dynamic in her marriage shift when her child moved away from home. It seemed to her that she and her husband were entering a new stage of their relationship, after years that were defined by the presence of their child in the household.

> I think that one of the things that will be interesting, and I think that we have to work at it, is how my husband and I can almost develop a new relationship. … I'd like our focus to shift a little more towards each other, rather than also always worrying about what [our daughter is] up to. Maybe it's because we've been frantic parents, and that's why she

> spent the first year of college saying she didn't want to talk to us. You asked about community service. … I think it would be neat if we did something together, even if it was only a couple of hours a month, besides gardening.

However, not all of the mothers reported that their relationships with their husbands changed when they became empty nesters. Rachel and Kathryn, who both remarried while their children were at home, did not experience as many changes. Rachel, whose blended family included her son and two similarly-aged step-children, said that she does have more time to spend with her husband, but does not feel like the nature of their relationship has changed.

> We were very much a "couple couple." We didn't let the kids into the bedroom, didn't let them disrupt our romance. Not much has changed. I didn't feel a huge a change. … Our situation could be different because we didn't meet as young – just met 13 years ago, in the context of having had bad marriages. We both have this motivation. We chose to be happy and do all those things. It would be different for those couples who married right out of high school or college.

The mothers in the sample, especially those who had gone through the original transition into parenthood with their husbands, found that the transition out of day to day parenting brought changes to their relationship, from new shared activities to a new dynamic between them. But the couple relationship was not the only one affected; there was widespread agreement that the parent-child relationship was altered by the child's departure from the parental home, even when the child returned for summers or after college graduation.

Most of the children of the women in this sample moved away from home when they went to college. However, not all of the young adults moved very far away from home. Hannah and Naomi have children who attended schools very close to their parents' homes, but lived on campus. Hannah described making a concerted effort to make certain her son felt like he was truly "away" at school, keeping in touch via phone or e-mail, and only seeing him on occasions

when other college students visit home. Naomi saw her daughter similarly infrequently, although this boundary was more enforced by her daughter.

> Her freshman year, I think we saw her outside of breaks maybe two or three times. We had coffee occasionally, but I'd call and say, 'I'd love to see you, would you like to have a cup of coffee?' And she would reply, 'No, Mom, I'm away at school, remember?'

Janet, a currently unemployed program administrator, had a child with a delayed departure from home. Her daughter, Amanda, stayed at home and attended a local community college for a couple of years after high school because of some health concerns, before going away to a four-year institution. Like Hannah and Naomi, Janet was cognizant of her daughter's need for increased independence, even though she was living at home. However, because Amanda was still in her parents' home, her increased independence was more explicitly discussed through negotiations about evolving responsibilities and privileges. Janet feels like they were successful in supporting Amanda's growing independence, although in many ways it was easier for Amanda to really be independent when she finally went away to college.

For those whose children moved farther away for college, the transition was more obvious to both parties, and the relationships moved in a new direction without the need for discussion. All of the mothers in the sample reported that they were in regular contact with their children, although for some mothers that meant daily phone calls or text messages, while others talked to their children once a week or so. However, there was widespread agreement that the nature of their relationships with their children changed once those children moved away. The independence of their young adult children is often understood as an indication that a substantial portion of their jobs as mothers is done. Rachel, for instance, described enjoying her children's visits home because of the camaraderie she experiences with her children and their friends. She enjoyed hanging out and singing karaoke with them. This is a different type of interaction from

the ceaseless responsibility of parenting a younger child. Rachel explains, "When they're little, you're always on point. When they come home, it's more fun just being with them!" Nora similarly enjoys interactions with her young adult son. Now, she says, she can view him as a "real adult" – she no longer needs to think of him primarily as the son she is responsible for, but can relate to him as his own person.

Although the mothers in the sample universally reported enjoying interactions with their young adult children, most of them agreed that they preferred to keep their in-person interactions on an occasional basis. As Janet said, she enjoys their company and is always happy when her children come to visit, but she does not especially want them to stay for too long. She and her husband have developed new habits and routines since the children have left the nest; an extended stay would disrupt those routines. Hannah's older child, Adam, lives in the same metropolitan area. She appreciates his proximity, but sometimes finds his visits inconvenient.

> There are times, for example, when Adam will sometimes decide to come up to [our area], because he's playing some volleyball game or seeing some friends, and he'll call us that minute, like 'I'm in [the next town] and I'm coming over,' like we're just waiting for him to call. They don't always think about the fact that you have a life, too.

This change in the nature of the parent-child relationship is also evident in the way most of the mothers in the sample feel about the prospect of a child "boomeranging" back into the parental home. Most of the mothers said that they would want to help their child and would do what they could to accommodate a child moving back in, but, in general, this is not viewed as an ideal outcome for parents or child. Gwen and her husband faced this sort of situation when their elder daughter, Amy, finished college. Amy moved home briefly after graduation. Gwen liked having her at home, but knew that Amy would prefer to be independent, and that she would benefit from being on her own. When Amy was offered an internship position in a city several hours away,

Gwen and her husband helped her move, gave her a loan for a deposit on her apartment, loaned her a car, and paid for an inexpensive health plan. Gwen said, “It would be less expensive to help her if she were at home, but it was better for her to move. She’s doing well now.”

Kathryn was keen for her children to view their move out of the home as permanent. She said, “I’ve found an immediate use for the extra bedrooms. When [my elder son] left home, we were able to make an office. When [my younger son] left, we finally got a guest room, and we put the treadmill in there.” Ellen, on the other hand, took the opposite approach. She has kept her daughter’s room exactly the same, in the hopes that her daughter will one day return home to live. However, most of the mothers in the sample were less enthusiastic about the prospect of their children moving back home.

Conclusion

Four research questions were asked above: Is the transition to the empty nest stage a significant event for mothers? Where do mothers find new sources of meaning once they are no longer mothering on a daily basis? How does the transition into the empty nest phase affect day-to-day life? How does the empty nest stage affect women’s relationships with their spouses and children?

As expected, the mothers in this sample uniformly found the transition to the empty nest phase to be a very significant experience. A minority of them used the time and energy they gained upon their children’s departure to take up significant new activities, with volunteer activities being especially common. However, all reported that day to day life was experienced differently in the empty nest stage: they had more freedom to choose what they did, when they did it, and with whom they spent time. Relationships with husbands and children also changed as

a consequence of this transition. Although none of the women in the sample reported a change in marital quality, most said that the nature of their marriage had shifted in tone to a more romantic relationship. As children became adults, the mothers began to think of the mother-child relationship in more companionate tones.

One recurrent theme in the interviews is the way in which the empty nest stage offers a fresh opportunity for mothers to focus on their own interests. This is consistent with Timmer, Bode, and Dittman-Kohli's (2003) research on Germans in the third age of life. Sometimes, this focus takes the form of leisure, and this is consistent with the time use findings presented in Chapter Two that middle aged women without children at home spend more time in leisure than do mothers of teenagers. However, what became clear in the interviews is that this "me time" is not necessarily something that will show up in quantitative analyses. Many of the mothers in the sample reported that the freedom to choose more of the details of their activities gave new meaning to those activities, even if they were very similar to ways they spent time while raising children. For instance, watching a movie with a child and watching a movie as an empty nest mother may look the same in time use studies, even if the events are experienced very differently. Another factor is the fact that many of the interests the mothers in the sample report pursuing involve a lot of planning and anticipation. This active anticipation of future events tailored to one's own interests is another way that the qualitative experience of being an empty nest mother will not be reflected in the currently available quantitative sources of data.

The two cultural trends discussed earlier might provide some context for understanding this focus on pursuing one's interests in the empty nest phase. The feminist movement promoted the validity of women pursuing their own interests. On the other hand, the growth of the ideology of intensive mothering meant that many mothers found little space for their own desires during

their child-rearing years. The transition to the empty nest phase allows the opportunity for those interests to be resurrected.

Time use research shows no indication that empty nest mothers spend more time in volunteer work than do mothers of teens, but a full quarter of the respondents in this sample report substantial new volunteer commitments in the empty nest phase. One potential explanation for this apparent contradiction is that these women were all active volunteers in connection with their children's activities. While none of the women interviewed reported consciously substituting one type of volunteer work for another, it may be that the volunteer activities of the child-rearing years are replaced by new volunteer commitments in the empty nest stage. The net balance of zero or little change that results from this sort of change in activities may mask a real change in the types of volunteer behavior.

Finally, previous research has found a moderate connection between the transition into the empty nest phase and marital quality. Most of the respondents in this sample reported that their marital relationship did in fact change across that transition. However, the change was not necessarily one of quality. Couples who were good partners in parenting were also good romantic partners in the empty nest phase, but the nature of the relationship underwent a transformation not picked up in quantitative measures of relationship quality. A typical survey measuring marital quality might ask, "How satisfied are you with your marriage?" or "How often would you say the two of you typically have unpleasant disagreements or conflicts?" Many of the women in this sample described a shift in the nature of the relationship, but would likely have given similar answers to these questions before and after their children left home.

This investigation into the effects of the transition to the empty nest stage on women's lives is not without limitations. First and foremost, a small sample of a very select group of

women prohibits generalization of these findings. Non-white women, single mothers, and economically disadvantaged women are all likely to report very different experiences, both in parenting and in the empty nest stage. It is also important to note that because of the sample restrictions, only women whose children left home at what is considered to be the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner were included in the study. Women whose children linger in the parental nest, or women whose children leave home under less auspicious circumstances, may find that the transition out of day-to-day parenting has different meanings and effects on their lives. Even women whose children's initial move away from home is successful may have less rosy views of the empty nest stage if their children later experience major difficulties.

Nonetheless, this study provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of women's lives, as it illuminates some of the ways in which the experience of the transition out of day-to-day mothering and into the empty nest stage affects the activities women do, the meanings associated with the activities of day-to-day life, and their relationships with spouses and children. Despite these limitations, the results presented here do indicate that the transition to the empty nest phase is a significant event for women. There is variation in women's success in finding new sources of meaning in the empty nest phase, but this transition out of day-to-day mothering alters the experience of daily life and offers more freedom to women.

Chapter 4. Market Work, Care Work, and Psychological Well-Being Variations by Motherhood Status

The findings on the transition out of day-to-day parenting and into the empty nest stage in the previous two chapters are somewhat contradictory. Time diary research suggests that mothers' time allocations are fairly stable by the time their youngest children are in middle school. Other than a slight increase in leisure and a slight decrease in paid work, there seems to be very little difference in the ways empty nest mothers spend time in comparison to mothers with adolescents still in the home. On the other hand, in-depth interviews with new empty nesters provide thick description about the transition's effect on mothers. This research suggests that the activities of empty nest women feel very different from those of the child-rearing years, and that for at least some women, new sources of meaning are found in new activities.

Each of these prior studies has limitations. The time use study lacks the data necessary to distinguish empty nest mothers from childless women. The conflation of these two groups could possibly mask some of the difference between empty nest mothers and mothers with children still at home. Additionally, it uses cross-sectional data to draw inferences about changes across the life course, rather than tracking actual changes in the lives of individual women. The qualitative paper, on the other hand, has a very limited sample of relatively privileged women. This privilege may allow opportunities to seek new sources of meaning that are unavailable to a wider range of women.

This chapter draws on longitudinal data, which offer several advantages. The National Longitudinal Survey – Young Women (NLSYW) is rich with the details of women's lives over 35 years, including their family lives and their careers. This detail also permits the accurate

identification of empty nest mothers as those women who spent many years raising co-resident children who have since left home. The NLSYW, which began interviewing 5,159 young women in 1968, last collected data in 2003. By this time, many members of the original cohort had raised and launched their children. Others still had adolescent or young adult children at home. And some women remained childless. This sample allows comparisons of outcomes between well-defined groups.

The outcome variables available in the NLS-YW are another asset of this dataset. Several variables, such as those on labor force activity and caring work, are comparable to measures created in the time use study in Chapter Two, but others on women's psychological well-being are more relevant to the experiential findings reported in Chapter Three.

I begin by discussing the background literature that frames this project. Next, I provide more detail on the NLSYW and the analysis techniques employed. After describing the results of the analyses, I conclude with a brief discussion.

Background

Life Course

Because individuals are embedded in networks of social relationships, a change that affects one person's life will resonate through others' lives. Motherhood is highly structured by linked lives: Mothers often structure their lives around the needs of their children. Raising children "takes a village," so mothers' lives are also linked to the lives of other caretakers of the children. Changes in children's or partners' lives therefore have consequential effects in mothers' lives as well. The launching of children from the parental nest is in many ways about the child's movement into adulthood and independence, but this change also affects the child's

parents. This transition may mark a turning point, as parents move out of a day-to-day parenting role. If nothing else, there is one less schedule and set of preferences for parents to accommodate in daily life.

Motherhood is often thought of as a status, but it can also describe a trajectory. This long-term trajectory begins when women become mothers, moves through the infant, preschool, school age, and adolescent parenting years, and then recedes in prominence as children reach adulthood. Empty nest mothers and childless women all live without children and the daily caregiving responsibilities associated with raising children. However, they followed different trajectories to arrive at their current stage of life.

The transition into motherhood is accompanied by a great deal of change in women's lives, prompting long-term consequences that may distinguish mothers from non-mothers years later. Similarly, as a mother's young adult children move away, she also moves through a transition out of day-to-day mothering and into the empty nest stage.

Motherhood and the Labor Force

The relationship between motherhood and the labor force is complex. Women typically reduce their time in paid employment upon becoming mothers, as the amount of time they commit to family responsibilities goes up (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). However, the low levels of labor force attachment among new mothers are not permanent, as mothers of older children are more likely to be employed than mothers of preschoolers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011) and also work more hours per week than mothers of younger children (Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi, 2009).

Several theoretical positions attempt to explain how motherhood affects women's labor force engagement. Some of these are purely economic. Theories of specialization suggest that the level of work a family has to do in order to care for young children requires the parents to specialize in either caretaking or breadwinning; as men earn more than women on average, specialization generally means that women reduce their labor force commitments (Becker, 1981). On the other hand, the financial costs of rearing children may draw women into the labor force, especially as children approach college age.

Other theories focus on structural factors. For example, Williams (2000) describes the "ideal worker" model that is assumed by the major institutions of the labor force. This ideal worker is fully committed to job and employer, and is assumed to have someone else at home to manage the domestic aspects of life. For most mothers, especially in cohorts past, this simply was not the case. The structural requirements of the labor force – working a certain minimum number of hours, at a certain time of day, in a particular location – present challenges for mothers (and others) with caretaking responsibilities. In fact, Stone (2007) found that many mothers who had "opted out" of the labor force cited the incompatibility of the demands of their careers with the needs of their children as a major impetus for their decision to leave work.

Finally, there are a number of cultural factors that many influence mother's interactions with the labor force. The current cultural zeitgeist calls for the practice of "intensive mothering," in which mothers are understood to be irreplaceable to their children. They are expected to personally care for their children through large expenditures of time, energy and resources (Hays, 1996). This cultural schema of devotion to family is in direct conflict with a parallel schema of devotion to work (Blair-Loy, 2003). The qualities expected in an intensively-parenting mother – nurturing and self-sacrificing – inherently conflict with the self-interest and profit

maximization expected in the capitalist labor force (Hays, 1996). The clash between the expected characteristics of mothers and workers, in combination with the primacy placed on mothering, may push some mothers out of the labor force, or at least into a different position in the labor force.

It is important to consider education in any discussion of mothers' labor force attachment, as the human capital acquired through education provides access to different opportunities and rewards for employment. Furthermore, mothering practices vary considerably with level of education (Lareau 2003), with more highly educated mothers engaging more intensively in cultivating their children's abilities. Some previous research has also found that the motherhood wage penalty is less onerous for women with high levels of education (Budig & Hodges, 2010; Davies, Joshi, and Peronaci, 2000), although other analyses find that mothers with higher skill levels pay a larger penalty than women with lower skill levels (Wilde, Batchelder, and Ellwood, 2010).

These factors all speak to the ways in which we might expect mothers to have different experiences in the labor force than women without children. In general, childless women are expected to have stronger labor force attachment than all groups of mothers. On the other hand, the likely effects of the transition into the empty nest phase are less clear. From an economic perspective, the demand for labor in the home, and thus specialization, is diminished. The financial implications of the empty nest stage may depend on parents' sense of obligation to fund their children's higher education or to assist them financially in other ways. For some mothers, the transition out of day-to-day mothering creates an opportunity to earn and save money for retirement. Structurally, it may be difficult for women who have been on a certain labor force trajectory to change paths after so long. Cultural theories of women's labor force participation

point to the ways in which the schemas of work and motherhood conflict with one another, but offer few expectations for what happens when children grow up. Together, these theories of mothers' labor force attachment provide conflicting predictions for how empty nest mothers will differ from those who have teenagers or young adults still at home.

Motherhood and Helping Work

Motherhood is, of course, highly associated with a particular kind of helping work – child care. However, there are a wide variety of ways in which people provide assistance to others. Formal volunteer work involves providing time and labor to help an organization. Informal care may include helping elderly parents, a sick neighbor, or a friend or relative. There are two main theoretical streams of thought that seek to explain what drives people to help others. The first focuses on social networks and the second draws upon exchange theory.

Social networks seem to be reciprocally related to one's likelihood of performing helping work. This sort of engagement with others helps one build social capital (Coleman, 1988). On the other hand, people who have large social networks are likely to have more opportunities to engage in caring work (Wilson, 2000). While individual connections are important, institutional memberships also motivate people to give their time (Wilson, 2000). Social networks and institutional memberships provide opportunities for interaction in which people may be asked to provide some type of assistance.

While social networks theory focuses on the opportunities people have to perform helping work, exchange theory looks more closely at individuals' motivations for these types of interactions and the rewards they get for engaging in them. In many cases, people help others because they anticipate needing help in the future, or because they have received help in the past

and wish to repay that assistance (Wilson, 2000; Gerstel, 2000). In this sense, the exchange of assistance is generalized, rather than a direct one-to-one transfer. People also do helping work because they receive a sense of satisfaction or well-being in exchange for their efforts (Hendricks & Cutler, 2004).

Both of these theoretical perspectives can be used to examine how women in different stages of the life course might devote more or less energy to helping others through formal volunteer work. Motherhood brings with it enhanced social networks as connections are made around children. Motherhood also draws women into new institutions, many of which request mothers' volunteer efforts. This is particularly true of the school system, which places many demands on mothers' time (Warner, 2011). Mothers of school-aged children are much more likely to volunteer than both mothers of preschool children and women without children (Rotolo & Wilson, 2006).

It is unclear how children's transitions to adulthood affect mothers' volunteer efforts. On one hand, as children become more independent and mothers become less involved in their day-to-day lives, mothers' social networks and institutional engagement shrink. However, women without child care responsibilities have more time available for other helping work and a history of volunteering with their children's organizations may predispose them to seek other volunteer work. Although little previous research has investigated the volunteering habits of empty nest mothers directly, some research on women in midlife and early old age suggests that volunteer work is common among women in the typical age range for the empty nest stage (Moen, 2001; Robinson & Godbey, 1997; Caro & Bass, 1997).

Similarly, the strong social network that is connected with having children may also provide mothers with more opportunities to do informal care work. Having children may also

motivate mothers to model the sort of care-taking behavior they would like to see in their own children someday, when they are likely to need help (Cox & Stark, 2005; Kahn, McGill, and Bianchi, 2011; Wilson, 2000). While formal involvement in helping work may decline as children grow up and mothers' ties to organizations weaken, personal care-taking is informal by nature and therefore not subject to change in response to shifts in organizational ties, except in so far as fewer volunteer commitments frees time for care work. Elderly parents are frequent recipients of informal care work (Kahn et al., 2011). The increase in mothers' time availability associated with children's transition to adulthood may allow mothers to assist others more frequently, and the timing of this transition may coincide with their own parents needing more assistance.

Together, the theory and research on helping work suggests that mothers as a whole are more likely to volunteer than are childless women, but empty nest mothers are less likely to volunteer than are mothers with teenagers still in the home. Similarly, it is expected that mothers are more likely to engage in informal care work than women without children. However, the timing of mother's children reaching adulthood and their parents reaching old age suggests that women with adult children may be more likely to perform care work than mothers with teens at home.

Motherhood and Psychological Well-Being

The relationship between motherhood and psychological well-being is complicated (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). First, children introduce more daily strains into women's lives. Children require a great deal of time and attention, and although fathers have taken on more child care responsibilities over the years, much of this work is still performed by mothers (Sayer

et al, 2004). Children also create work in other areas; for example, new parents typically do more housework than their childless counterparts (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). The work of parenting is demanding enough that parents may have difficulty performing sufficiently well in other arenas. Work-family conflict, for example, is exacerbated when children are in the family (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), as parents try to balance the demands of work with the needs of children for care.

While the daily strains associated with parenting may have a negative effect on women's psychological well-being, the increased social integration that comes along with having children is likely to have a positive effect. Through their children, parents have opportunities to become integrated into both formal organizations, such as schools, and informal groups, such as neighborhood-based playgroups or carpools. This social integration provides social support for parents, an important resource for psychological well-being (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). Parents report higher levels of social integration than do their peers without children (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003).

Finally, being a parent is a very salient, normative role. The self-concept changes in response to becoming a parent (Cowan & Cowan, 1999), and simply filling a socially-proscribed role can have positive effects on an individual's self-concept. However, the effects may depend at least in part on the mother's evaluation of her performance as a parent. Parents who feel that their children have turned out well have more positive outcomes in different measures of psychological well-being than those whose children are less successful (Ryfe, Schmutte, & Lee, 1996).

Given the different effects that parenthood might be expected to have on women's psychological well-being, research on the psychological well-being of parents of adult children is

mixed. Parents of adults – who no longer experience the daily strains of parenting young children – have been found to be happier than those with young children (Nomaguchi, 2012). Some studies find that parents of adults have similar levels of distress as their childless counterparts (Evenson & Simon, 2005; Pudrovska, 2008), but others find that parents in midlife have higher levels of distress than those without children (Burses et al, 2009). There is also a lack of agreement about the effects of adult children living with parents versus independently. Pudrovska (2008) found that having adult children living at home is unrelated to parents' distress, but Nomaguchi (2012) found that adult children staying in the parental home lowered parents' self-esteem. Of course, the fact that psychological well-being is likely to persist over time may mean that mothers pre-disposed to distress may raise children with different abilities and inclinations to move away from home.

One possibility for the lack of clarity on the effects of adult children on mothers' psychological well-being is that prior researchers have not given sufficient consideration to the reasons why some young adults move out of their parents' homes and others do not – or why some move back in. It is often assumed that adult children living with their parents do so because they are unable to support themselves. However, it is also possible that children may choose to stay in the family home because they make important contributions to their families. For instance, an adult child with a parent in poor physical health may decide to stay in his or her parents' home in order to provide assistance. In fact, Choi (2003) found that children's needs for help and parents' needs for help were approximately equally likely to motivate adult co-residence between adult children and their parents.

Hypotheses

Labor Force. The theoretical perspectives around motherhood and the labor force agree on one thing: that women without children will be more successful in employment than mothers. Although there is less clarity on how women in different stages on their motherhood trajectories will fare, the lessened competition between work and family experienced by empty nest mothers may allow them to refocus on labor market activity, despite potential structural barriers. I predict:

A. Childless women will be more likely than mothers to work, and among working women, childless women will be more likely to work longer hours at higher wages, than empty nest mothers.
B. Empty nest mothers will be more likely to work than mothers with children – either teenaged or adult – at home, and will work longer hours.

Care Work. Performing helping work is consistent with current cultural notions of motherhood. Mothers' enhanced social networks – both institutional and social – provide demand for this type of work. To some extent, these networks shrink upon mothers' transitions to the empty nest phase. I predict:

C. Childless women will be less likely to do formal volunteer work and less likely to do informal care work than mothers.
D. Empty nest mothers will be less likely to do volunteer work and care work than mothers with children at home, especially mothers with adolescent children at home.

Psychological Well-Being. Theory and research demonstrate a complicated relationship between motherhood and psychological well-being. Women who become mothers have opportunities to develop social networks that women without children lack and receive the

benefits to self-concept of filling a socially normative role, but also experience greater daily strains. Although the evidence is mixed on the effect of children's transitions to adulthood, there is some indication of a positive effect of the transition into the empty nest stage. I predict:

E. Childless women will have higher levels of depressive symptoms and report lower levels of happiness than women with children.
F. Empty nest mothers will have lower levels of depressive symptoms and higher levels of happiness than women with children still in the home.

Data and Methods

One of the challenges associated with studying women who have reached the empty nest stage is that few surveys have sufficient data on fertility histories and household composition over time to distinguish women who raised children to adulthood and whose adult children no longer live with them from women who remained childless throughout life. Using longitudinal data with extensive information on fertility and the survival of children who may live elsewhere solves this problem. The National Longitudinal Survey – Young Women (NLS-YW) follows an initial cohort of 5,159 women from 1968 through 2003. Respondents ranged in age from 14 to 24 at the time of the first interview. Surveys were conducted every one to three years, with a total of 22 waves. The original focus of the NLS-YW was on the labor force and related topics, so there are consistent data on human capital development, employment, and family structure throughout the survey. Other topics are included from time to time.

There are a number of ways that longitudinal data can be used to study women's transitions out of day-to-day mothering and into the empty nest stage. This study draws upon the longitudinal data to create measures that accurately represent women's parenting and marital

histories, but the analysis is cross-sectional in its execution. This structure allows examination of the ways in which past experiences influence outcomes at midlife, drawing upon variables that are only available from the final wave of the survey.

The analytic sample for this paper consists of the 2009 women who participated in the 2003 survey, were interviewed at least 20 times, and who have sufficient data to be classified as mothers with older children at home, empty nest mothers, or childless women. These women were ages 49-59 at the time of the 2003 interview. The restriction to the women present in the 2003 survey is necessary because all outcomes are measured as of 2003. Respondents who did not participate in almost all of the waves are excluded because information from the household roster at each wave is used to determine motherhood status as of 2003.

This paper focuses on the ways in which motherhood status is associated with labor force outcomes, helping work, and mental health or happiness at midlife. Three dependent variables cover labor force outcomes. The first is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether or not the respondent is currently employed. The second dependent variable is a continuous measure of the usual number of hours per week that the respondent works for pay. Only employed women are included in this analysis. Similarly, the third labor force measure is the log of the hourly wage for currently employed women.

Two of the dependent variables speak to women's commitments to helping others. The first is a dichotomous variable that reports whether the respondent performed any unpaid volunteer work during the past 12 months. The second is a dichotomous measure that reports whether the respondent regularly spends time caring for, helping, or taking care of others, specifically people with disabilities or chronic illnesses. This variable is formed by combining

responses from one question about caring for household members and another about caring for non-household members.

Finally, two dependent variables address emotional well-being. The first is a measure of overall feelings. The question asks, "Taking things altogether, would you say you're very happy, somewhat happy, somewhat unhappy, or very unhappy these days?" The variable was recoded so that 1 equals very happy and 0 equals all other responses. The second is an indicator of depressive symptoms based on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), which is made up of 20 questions that assess how frequently during the past week the respondent had feelings that might indicate clinical depression (Radloff, 1977). The questions are scored so that experiencing negative feelings more frequently results in a higher score. The scores from individual questions are simply added together to form the scale. This scale is used as a continuous measure, with a higher score indicating a higher likelihood of depression. This scale has a standardized Cronbach alpha coefficient of .998.

A series of dummy variables that capture motherhood status are the main independent variables in each analysis. There are four groups of women: The category empty nest mothers includes all women who had at least one biological, adopted, or step-child who lived with them for at least eight waves of the survey, who reached at least 15 years of age while living at home, and who were no longer on the household roster as of the 2003 survey (n=1,091). The second group, mothers with adult children over age 20 living at home, includes all women who had at least one biological, adopted, or step-child who lived with them for at least eight waves of the survey and whose youngest child living at home as of the 2003 survey was at least 20 years old (n=365). The set of mothers with teenaged children living at home includes all women who had at least one biological, adopted, or step-child and whose youngest child living at home as of the

2003 survey is between 12 and 19 years old (n=229); this group of women is, on average, younger than the other three categories, and much more likely to have delayed childbearing past age 20. Finally, the category of childless women includes all women who never had a biological, adopted, or step-child living with them during a wave of the survey (n=254).

Theory and previous research suggest that empty nest mothers may find themselves somewhere between childless women, who do not have a background of motherhood, and mothers whose adolescent or young adult children are still living at home. For this reason, empty nest mothers are used as the reference category in all models.

There were some NLS-YW participants who were not eligible for any of these categories. These respondents were excluded from the analysis. Women with children age 12 or younger at home (n=40) form one of these groups. Women who had children at home for only a short time (n=42) were also excluded, as it is not clear whether they should be considered empty nest mothers or women without children. In many cases, these short term mothers were married to men with children for a relatively brief period. As with any dataset, the data in the NLS-YW are not without error. A few women had data irregularities that did not allow them to be classified in any of the previously mentioned groups (n=29).

As level of education is correlated with both parenting practices and many of the outcomes examined here, women's educational attainment is a second area of particular interest. This is represented by a series of three dummy variables, representing those who have a high school diploma or less education, those with some college experience, and those with a bachelor's degree or more education. The group of women with no college education is used as the reference category in the analyses.

A set of other variables are used as control measures. To capture some important aspects of marital history, a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent is currently married is used, as is a variable that indicates a history of divorce. A series of dichotomous variables are used to indicate husband's income from wages or salary, farms, or businesses: no reported husband's income, income in the first quartile, income in the second quartile, income in the third quartile, and income in the fourth quartile. Women without husbands are included in the "no reported husband's income" category. Two dichotomous variables are used to cover fertility history. One of these indicates an early first birth (by the age of 20), and the other designates a woman who had three or more children. In terms of demographic characteristics, another dichotomous variable indicates whether a woman is white or non-white and age is reported as a continuous variable. Finally, a dichotomous variable indicating poor self-reported health is included. This variable is used because mothers' poor health is correlated both with adult children's decisions to live at home or elsewhere and with many of the outcome variables described above.

Table 4.1 provides descriptive statistics on the respondents in each of the motherhood status categories. The women in these groups differ in some important ways. Childless women and those with adolescent children still at home have the highest levels of education, while empty nest mothers are the most likely to have stopped schooling at the high school level. Childless women are much less likely than the other groups to be currently married; they are therefore less likely to report income from a spouse. Of the mothers, empty nest mothers are most likely to have had an early first birth, but least likely of the groups of mothers to have more than two children. Women with adult children at home are less likely to be white than the other

groups. Despite these women all coming from the same broad age cohort, empty nest mothers are, on average, slightly older than the other groups, especially women with teenagers at home.

The analysis is intended to assess the effects of motherhood status on labor force, care work, and psychological well-being outcomes in midlife, with a special focus on educational attainment. The analysis follows the same three stages for each of the seven dependent variables. For each of the outcome measures, I begin with a regression model that includes only the motherhood status variables. This first model simply shows how the four groups of women differ, without controlling for their characteristics. The second stage of the analysis incorporates the educational attainment measures. Education is highly correlated with childbearing decisions and with the outcome measures. These models help to interpret the differences between the findings drawn from the interviews with highly-educated women in Chapter Three and those from the nationally-representative time diary analysis in Chapter Two. The third, full model adds the full set of control variables. For the dichotomous dependent variables, I use logistic regressions. For the continuous variables, OLS models are used. The regressions are weighted using the 2003 panel weight from the NLS-YW.

Results

Labor Force Attachment

Table 4.2 presents results from the analysis of employment status. In Model 1, which only contains the motherhood status variables, it appears that mothers with teenagers at home are more likely to be employed than are empty nest mothers. Childless women and women with adult children at home, on the other hand, also have higher odds of working than empty nesters, but the differences are not statistically significant. Although women with teenagers are slightly

younger, on average, than empty nest mothers, it is likely that mothers with younger children are more likely to have invested in their careers in early adulthood and delayed childbearing. In Model 2, there is evidence that this is the case. Higher levels of education are associated with a greater likelihood of employment, but the difference between mothers of teens and empty nest mothers is no longer statistically significant.

Model 3, the full model, suggests that educational differences in employment are in turn moderated by other factors. In this analysis, women who have ever been divorced (and therefore needed to support themselves) are more likely to be employed, but women who are currently married are less likely to be working for pay. The financial support women receive from their husbands has curvilinear effects; those women with no spousal income and those with the highest are the least likely to be employed. Increasing age, higher parity and poor health are also associated with lower levels of employment. In other models, not shown here, the control variables were added to the model individually. The only addition that resulted in increasing the p-value of the education variables above the significance threshold is poor health.

The next table, Table 4.3, explores associations between motherhood status and usual hours worked for employed women. In Model 1, employed childless women work approximately two hours more per week than employed empty nest mothers. As with employment status, the picture changes considerably when educational attainment is taken into account. Not surprisingly, having a college degree or more education is associated with working more hours. Once education is included in the model, the difference between childless women and empty nest mothers loses statistical significance. It also appears in this model that, net of education, women with teenagers work 2.25 fewer hours per week than do empty nest mothers. The full model maintains the relationships found in Model 2. Model 3 also indicates that currently married

women work fewer hours than unmarried women, and that women in poor health spend less time in market work than those in good health.

The final analysis of labor force outcomes, log of hourly wages, is presented in Table 4.4 which shows OLS regression results. Model 1 finds that childless women and mothers of teenagers both earn higher wages than empty nest mothers. However, controlling for educational attainment (Model 2) explains away the significant bivariate effects of motherhood status on wages. As expected, women with more education earn higher wages. Consistent with research on motherhood wage penalties, having three or more children is associated with lower wages. Poor health also predicts lower wages. On the other hand, having a spouse with earnings in the top quartile is associated with women earning higher wages.

Previous theory and research led to the predictions in Hypothesis A that childless women would be more likely to work, would work longer hours, and would earn more money than empty nest mothers. Employed childless women work more hours and earn higher wages than employed empty nest mothers, but the differences are explained by childless women's higher levels of education. There is some support for the Hypothesis B, which predicted that empty nest mothers would have greater attachment to the labor force than mothers with children still at home, as empty nest mothers work slightly longer hours than mothers with teens at home, even in the full model.

Helping Work

Table 4.5 displays the results of the first of the two analyses that examine women's commitments to caring for and helping others. In these models, volunteer work is the dependent variable. In Model 1, mothers with teenagers at home are almost two and a half times as likely to

report volunteer commitments as empty nest mothers, but childless women and women with adult children living at home volunteer at very similar rates as empty nest mothers. Model 2 suggests that formal education affects women's likelihood of volunteering; women with a college degree are more than four times as likely to volunteer as women with only high school education. Including education in the model also changes the relationship between motherhood status categories. Controlling for education reduces the size of the coefficient for mothers of teenagers but they remain 1.8 times more likely to volunteer than empty nest mothers. Childless women are actually less likely to volunteer than are empty nest mothers. The third model is very consistent with the second, except that the difference between childless women and empty nest mothers is no longer statistically significant. Poor health is a deterrent to volunteering.

In Table 4.6, which shows regressions for informal caregiving, results from Model 1 indicate that childless women are less likely than empty nest mothers to spend time informally helping or caring for disabled or chronically ill friends or family members. This relationship is maintained in Model 2 after controlling for education. Unlike the other outcome variables examined so far, education does not seem to influence the likelihood of performing this type of care work. Model 3, which includes all of the control variables, shows few statistically significant relationships aside from childlessness. The lone exception, poor health, is actually associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in care work.

I predicted in Hypothesis C that childless women would be less likely to perform helping work than empty nest mothers. This hypothesis was supported in the finding that childless women are less likely to provide informal help to others, but there was no statistically significant difference between childless women and empty nest mothers in the likelihood of engaging in formal volunteer work. Likewise, Hypothesis D – the expectation that empty nest mothers would

be less likely than mothers with children still at home to perform helping work – received limited support. Mothers with teenagers at home are more likely than empty nest mothers to engage in formal volunteer work.

Psychological Well-Being

The final two analyses examine the relationships between motherhood status and two indicators of psychological well-being. Table 4.7 shows the results for global happiness. Model 1 indicates that childless women are significantly less likely to report being very happy than are empty nest mothers. Model 2, which controls for educational attainment, shows a much more complex picture. Education is strongly and positively associated with happiness. However, including education does not eliminate the effects of motherhood status on happiness, but instead enhances them. Empty nest mothers are more likely to report being very happy than any of the other groups of women; childless women are just under half as likely to report being very happy.

Including the control variables in Model 3 demonstrates that many other factors have an association with happiness. Women who are currently married are more than twice as likely to report being very happy and women whose husbands provide more income report higher levels of happiness, but women who are in poor health are much less likely to be very happy. These controls somewhat lessen the effects of education and motherhood status, but higher levels of education are still associated with a greater likelihood of being very happy, and empty nest mothers are still the most likely to report being very happy.

The final analysis, presented in Table 4.8, examines the relationship between motherhood status and depressive symptoms, as measured by scores on the CES-D. In Model 1, there is no statistically significant difference between the motherhood status categories and score on the

CES-D scale. However, controlling for education in Model 2, greatly alters the motherhood effects, revealing significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms among childless women as well as mothers with teenagers at home relative to empty nest mothers. Moreover, higher education is very strongly associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms. When the full set of controls is included in Model 3, the relationships change again. Higher education is still associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms, and having teenaged children at home is still associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. However, there is no longer a statistically significant difference between childless women and empty nest mothers' levels of depressive symptoms. An additional test, not shown, in which only current marital status was added to Model 2, indicates that it is the relatively high proportion of unpartnered women in the childless category that drives the difference between childless women and empty nest mothers in levels of depressive symptoms in Model 2. Poor health is very strongly associated with a high score on the depression scale.

Hypotheses E and F addressed the relationship between motherhood status and psychological well-being, as represented by reported happiness and depressive symptoms. Hypothesis E, which predicted that childless women would have lower levels of psychological well-being than empty nest mothers, was supported. Empty nest mothers are more likely to report being very happy than are childless women. Differences between empty nest mothers and childless women's depressive symptoms are not statistically significant. The expectation that empty nest mothers would be better off than women with children at home (Hypothesis F) was supported, but the difference was limited to women with teenaged children still at home. Empty nest mothers are more likely to report being very happy than women with teenagers still at home,

and report lower levels of depressive symptoms. Women with young adult children at home were not statistically significantly different from women whose children have left home.

Discussion

Sociological theory and previous research on motherhood suggested a number of ways in which mothers with young adult children still at home and childless women would differ from women who have become empty nest mothers. In this chapter, I focused on three areas of experience; labor force outcomes, involvement in helping work, and psychological well-being. This section reviews the findings in each of these areas, discusses the special role that education plays in this analysis, and describes future research that could provide greater clarity in how the transition into the empty nest phase affects individual women.

The economic, structural, and cultural theories of motherhood and the labor force discussed earlier all led to expectations that motherhood status would be strongly associated with level of engagement in the labor force. Instead, childless women and empty nest mothers show no difference in likelihood of employment, hours worked, or earnings. Similarly, the only difference between empty nest mothers and those mothers with children still at home is that the empty nest mothers work slightly longer hours than the mothers of teenagers. This suggests that despite the well-documented negative effects of the transition into motherhood on women's labor force participation, the transition out of day-to-day mothering is associated with a much smaller effect on women's employment. The similarities between mothers at all stages and childless women in this analysis further suggest that the effects of the mothering young children on labor force participation are relatively short-lived.

It is important to consider selection into childlessness in the context of labor force outcomes. Having children was much more normative among the cohort of the NLS-YW sample than in subsequent generation. Only 13% of the women in this sample did not have children. Some of these women did not have children because they spent their young adult years investing in human capital; evidence for this can be seen in the 50 percent of childless women in this study who have at least an undergraduate degree. However, others wound up without children for other reasons. Some struggled with infertility. Some portion of this group never had children because they were unsuccessful in the marriage market. This last group may have had similar troubles in the labor market, and may therefore suppress average levels of labor force attachment for the larger group of childless women.

The findings on helping work are quite consistent with social network-based theories. Empty nest mothers and mothers with adult children living at home, with their lower levels of involvement in children's organizations and activities, are less likely to have formal volunteer commitments than mothers of adolescents, who are likely to perform much of their volunteer work at children's schools or other organizations. The informal ties developed during child-rearing are more persistent; empty nest mothers are almost twice as likely as childless women to do informal care work. These findings are also consistent with exchange theories of helping work. Mothers of teenagers may view their formal volunteer efforts as part of a collaborative child-rearing project, and empty nesters may view continued caring work after child-rearing as their part in a generalized exchange.

Theories and previous research indicated a complicated relationship between motherhood and psychological well-being, but that one of the negative influences on psychological well-being – the daily strains associated with parenting young children – recedes as children reach

adulthood. This is consistent with findings that empty nest mothers are happier and have lower levels of depressive symptoms than mothers of adolescents, and with the finding that empty nest mothers report being happier than childless women. Again, it may be necessary to consider selection into childlessness for this particular cohort. Women without children followed a non-normative path, which may have negative effects on well-being in and of itself. For those who desired children, childlessness itself may have negative consequences. And, those women prone to poor mental health may be less likely to have children in the first place. All of these considerations suggest a larger benefit of having children than if it were possible to control for those selections. On the opposite side is the likelihood that many women had children not because they especially wanted children, but because it was normative. For these women, having children might have had negative consequences for their psychological well-being.

The life course perspective, with its emphasis on long-term trajectories and the lasting consequences of early decisions, is a framework that lends itself to explaining differences in outcomes. Substantial differences in labor force outcomes, engagement in helping work, and psychological well-being outcomes by motherhood status were anticipated, but only moderate differences were found, especially after controlling for education and other covariates. Also, the differences that were found are difficult to assess together. If empty nest mothers were very similar to mothers with teenagers or young adult children still at home, but unlike childless women, I would suggest that there is a sort of inertia from the motherhood trajectory carried forward into the next stage of life. If, on the other hand, empty nest mothers were like childless women but dissimilar from mothers with children still at home, I would propose that we think of the trajectory of the active mothering years as a sort of detour that eventually returns to a similar path as that taken by childless women.

As it stands, however, empty nest mothers seem to be somewhere in between mothers with children still at home and childless women – with the important exception of psychological well-being. In life course analyses, it may be useful to consider how much change in routine activity is prompted by a given transition. For example, the transition into motherhood is accompanied by a substantial shift in mothers' behaviors, because infants demand a great deal from their caregivers. The transition out of day-to-day mothering, on the other hand, is accompanied by a gradual decrease in demand for care, but no new demand for a different type of behavior. Perhaps the relatively modest differences in behavior, if not psychological well-being, between mothers of teenagers and empty nest mothers can be attributed to inertia in behavior that maintains the status quo unless positively prompted to change. Alternatively, perhaps other similarly-timed transitions may be at odds with the transition out of day-to-day parenting in terms of effects on labor force and helping work outcomes. For example, women of an age to be launching adult children may also be winding down labor force commitment as they think forward to retirement.

Education deserves special consideration. It is strongly significant in many of the models; higher levels of education are associated with working longer hours, earning a higher wage, doing more formal volunteer work, reporting greater happiness, and scoring lower on the CES-D scale. These findings should be considered in light of the fact that empty nest mothers are substantially less educated than mothers with teens still at home and childless women; only 21% of empty nest mothers graduated from college, whereas 47% of mothers of teens and 51% of childless women have at least a bachelor's degree. The group of empty nest mothers consists largely of women who had their children at younger ages, foregoing higher levels of education,

while women with teenage children still at home typically delayed childbearing while completing their educations and establishing their careers.

This study compares four groups of women from the same cohort, but membership in these groups is not permanent. As the remaining children grow up and leave home, women currently in the group of mothers with teens still at home will become empty nest mothers. If this study could be replicated with a later wave, we would expect the results to be different. In particular, the average level of education of empty nest mothers would be higher. The strong association between education and many of the outcomes studied here suggests that differences between empty nest mothers and childless women would also grow. Perhaps empty nest mothers would actually have higher levels of labor force attachment than childless women. Similarly, perhaps the gap in volunteer rates between empty nest mothers and mothers with adolescents would be narrower when more educated mothers, with their greater tendency towards formal volunteer commitments, become empty nest mothers themselves.

The conclusions of this study are limited by the cross-sectional nature of the analysis. Ideally, future research can use longitudinal data on mothers to specify how the transition to the empty nest phase affects women's daily lives. The NLS-YW could be used to do this with regards to the labor force outcomes. However, the survey did not repeat the questions about helping work and psychological well-being across enough waves to measure changes in these outcomes for individual women across the transition into the empty nest stage.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The three papers presented here use very different sources of data and analysis techniques to describe the ways in which the empty nest phase differs from previous stages of motherhood. Each analysis has its limitations, but together they provide a comprehensive picture of this phase of life. This conclusion proceeds in several steps. First, I summarize the main findings of this dissertation, organized by outcome rather than by methodology. Next, I describe the limitations and strengths of this project. I then revisit the life course perspective discussed in earlier chapters, and suggest ways in which it could be strengthened. I discuss the ways in which the experiences of this cohort are specific to their time and space, and speculate about how future generations may experience this transition. Finally, I make several recommendations for future research.

Summary

The three substantive chapters used different sources of data and different methodologies, but there is substantial overlap in the outcomes examined in each. Labor force outcomes, involvement in helping and volunteer work, engagement in leisure activities, and psychological well-being are all addressed in at least two of the chapters. The main findings in each of these areas are discussed in turn.

The effects of children's transitions to adulthood on their mothers' labor force attachment are explored in all three chapters, but the findings are not consistent. In the time use analysis, mothers with teen and young adult children living at home work more hours each week than women in midlife without children at home. Conversely, mothers with adolescents still living at home in the NLS-YW analysis work fewer hours than empty nest mothers. No clear trends were

apparent in the in-depth interviews; while some mothers hoped to reduce their labor force commitments, others were planning to increase their hours. A third group was hoping to maintain the status quo. Overall, there is no clear relationship between the transition to the empty nest phase and mothers' level of participation in the labor force.

Helping work, such as volunteer work or informal care work for friends or relatives, was also examined in each chapter, although measures were quite different. In the time use chapter, there were no statistically significant differences in the number of minutes per day spent in volunteer work or the care of non-household children by motherhood status. Results from the NLS-YW, however, show that empty nest mothers are more likely to have done care work in the past year than childless women, but less likely to have volunteered in the past year than women with adolescent children still at home. Of the women interviewed for the qualitative chapter, several took on significant new volunteer commitments when their children left home, but these women had also had substantial volunteer commitments associated with their children's education or extracurricular activities when their children lived at home. There were few reported differences in care work. Overall, it is likely that mothers volunteer less frequently after their children reach adulthood and leave the parental home. Other types of helping work are probably more driven by demand for care than by women's available supply of time.

The time use chapter and the qualitative chapter both looked at women's participation in leisure time activities. Time use analysis shows that women in midlife without children at home spend slightly more time in cultural capital-enhancing leisure activities than mothers of adolescents, but substantially more time watching television. Interview respondents also reported watching more television, but also spending more time socializing and doing hobbies. What came through clearly in the interviews was not simply that the empty nest mothers had more free

time, but that they had much more discretion in how that free time was spent: during the empty nest phase, there is more freedom to choose the content of leisure activities, as well as freedom to choose partners for those activities.

Different aspects of women's psychological well-being were investigated in the qualitative chapter and the NLS-YW chapter. Respondents to the in-depth interviews reported mixed feelings in response to their children's departures from home. On the one hand, there was some sadness at their children's absences and a degree of *anomie* associated with uncertainty about social expectations for empty nest mothers. However, on the other hand, they reported a pervasive sense of freedom, satisfaction about their children's achievements and their own success as parents, and positive changes in relationships with spouses and children. In the NLS-YW, empty nest mothers were more likely to report being very happy than either mothers of adolescents or childless women, and also report lower levels of depressive symptoms than mothers of teens. It is clear that although the transition into the empty nest phase is emotional, this stage of life is associated with higher levels of psychological well-being.

Limitations and Strengths

The three analyses in this dissertation draw on three different sources of data and therefore have different strengths and limitations. The major flaw of the time use analysis in Chapter 2 is that the ATUS does not provide enough data to make it possible to distinguish women whose children have left home from women who never had children. In the models presented in that chapter, all women from age 41-60 without children currently living at home were grouped together. If the time use allocations of childless women and empty nest mothers differ substantially, the results will be hard to interpret. The rather minor differences between women without children and empty nest mothers in the NLS-YW chapter – at least in terms of

engagement in specific activities – are reassuring that these results are a reasonable representation of empty nest mothers' activities.

While time diaries offer the ability to examine a very wide range of activities, they lack detailed information on multi-tasking and contain no information on feelings about how time is spent. The ATUS, with a few exceptions, does not capture multi-tasking, but relies on respondents to choose the main activity that they were doing at the time. That is, a person who was folding laundry while watching television can report only one of those activities. Mothers of adolescents could face time pressures due to multi-tasking and accommodating others' schedules that the older women without children do not experience. The importance of the subjective experience of time pressures, regardless of how time is actually spent, could explain some of the differences in findings between the ATUS analysis, which showed little difference across the empty nest stage transition, and the qualitative interviews and psychological well-being findings of the NLS-YW, where there were substantial differences. This is similar to Milkie, et al's (2009) finding that *actual* time use does not match Arlie Hochschild's second shift hypothesis, but *perceived* time pressures do align with that theory.

One concern about the in-depth interviews analyzed in Chapter 3 is that the highly educated and otherwise privileged women that make up the sample may not reflect broader trends among empty nest mothers. These women have many resources available to them and can pursue an unusually wide variety of interests – most empty nest mothers are not able to take up bicycle-based European tourism. What is probably more important is that the women interviewed shared a common belief that their children's success is measured and facilitated by living away from the parental home. Other cultural and socioeconomic groups may have different expectations for their young adults. Mothers may report less positive feelings about

their newfound freedom if that freedom is not culturally desirable. However, the positive effect of the empty nest on psychological well-being within the NLS-YW analysis suggests that belief that young adults' independence is desirable is fairly wide-spread within the United States.

Finally, the NLS-YW analysis in Chapter 4 is based on a very rich dataset. Unlike the ATUS, the NLS-YW has enough detail to allow very accurate identification of empty nest mothers. The survey asks questions that cover a wide range of topic areas. The major weakness, however, is that the questions most relevant to the study of the transition into the empty nest are not repeated with sufficient regularity. Ideally, one could examine the change in outcome measures from either side of the transition into the empty nest. As it stands, all of the questions are only asked in the final wave, so the analysis must be performed on a cross-section. Given the demographic differences between empty nest mothers and mothers with teens still at home in this dataset, it is unclear how much of the differences in outcomes can be chalked up to motherhood status and how much is attributable to other causes.

While each of these individual data sources is imperfect, the strength of this dissertation lies in the way the different pieces can be synthesized to create a more nuanced picture of the transition to the empty nest stage. Several trends are clear. First, the mothers of the early Baby Boom generation do not seem to substantially change the types of activities that they do when their children become adults. Those who were active volunteers when their children were young find other types of organizations to become involved with when their children grow up. Those who were employed remain in the labor force, and those who stayed at home with their children do not seek employment in connection with the transition to the empty nest phase. There are more opportunities for leisure, but these opportunities are filled largely with more media leisure

– especially watching television. To a lesser extent, empty nest mothers take up new hobbies or leisure activities, or expand their involvement in things that they were already doing.

In contrast, the emotional consequences of the empty nest transition are substantial. While many mothers find the initial transition to the empty nest phase painful, evidence from both the NLS-YW and the interviews suggests that women who have settled into this stage may be happier than when they were actively parenting teenagers. The lessening of responsibility associated with moving out of day-to-day mothering brings a new sense of freedom to daily life. The transition is also frequently associated with positive changes in the nature of women's relationships with spouses and children.

The three analyses all point to the conclusion that there are not a lot of new demands on the time of empty nest mothers. While there is possibly a small increase in time spent in paid employment, the evidence for this is mixed at best. Rather, it seems that women tend to maintain their work schedules across their children's transitions to adulthood. Similarly, there are no increases in volunteer work or caring work associated with the empty nest stage. After many years of juggling family activities, this relative lack of demand on women's time can result not just in positive feelings of freedom, but also some feelings of aimlessness. Some women in the qualitative chapter reported difficulty in finding new directions. Overall, however, positive emotions seem to outweigh any *anomie* brought about by a lack of demand for women's time.

Theoretical Perspectives

This dissertation draws upon the life course perspective to provide a framework for the analysis of change in connection with the transition into the empty nest phase of life. The life course perspective provides a toolbox of very useful concepts for thinking about the ways in which lives are linked with one another, embedded in social and historical context, and

comprised of a set of trajectories. These concepts point to the transition into the empty nest as a likely point of change in the life course, especially for the current generation of mothers. However, a weakness of the life course perspective is that it does not offer predictions about what sorts of changes will result from a particular transition.

Throughout this dissertation, I drew on a range of other theories in order to develop hypotheses about what other areas of life might be affected by the transition into the empty nest, and in which ways those areas would be changed. For the time use analysis, I looked at the literature on work-family conflict and developed hypotheses based on the underlying assumption of time competition between the institutions of work and family. In the chapter on the NLS-YW analysis, I reviewed a wide range to theories on labor force participation, helping work, and psychological well-being, with an eye towards understanding how those theories might be applied to this transition.

This use of the life course perspective in combination with other strands of theory might be viewed as a benefit. Flexibility in application allows for creative synthesis of ideas and new insights. However, the life course perspective could be strengthened with some basic ideas about the type of effects a given change is likely to have. For example, we might consider the net change in demands placed upon the individual as a result of the change, the characteristics of the individual's other trajectories, and the relationships between trajectories.

Transitions are often accompanied by new demands placed upon the individual. These demands may be for time, energy, money, presence in a certain location, etc. Higher levels of new demands are likely to be met with more comprehensive change throughout all aspects of a person's life. The transition into parenthood is a good example of a change that is extremely demanding. The demands of the new child are reflected in changes not just within the family, but

in changes in labor force engagement, social networks and integration, and even leisure activities. Entrance into the labor force is another example of a demanding transition, as most jobs require adherence to a set schedule and presence in a particular location. The transition into the empty nest is one in which few new demands are placed on mothers. This is likely to be one reason why larger differences in women's behaviors are not evident in the analyses in this dissertation.

The life course perspective aids in identifying transition points that may introduce change into a person's life. The initial transition takes place in one trajectory – in the case of this dissertation, the parenthood trajectory. The extent to which this change affects other trajectories may depend on the characteristics of those other trajectories. For example, I hypothesized that the transition into the empty nest might be accompanied by changes in labor force participation. There is limited evidence that this is the case. It may because of the nature of the transition, or it might be because of the character of the labor force trajectory itself. Women of an age to be launching children into independence are also likely to be well-established in their careers and well past the age at which launching a new career is common; the labor force trajectory at this point would be relatively impervious to change. On the other hand, the transition into parenthood often occurs when women are relatively young and less professionally established, and this transition often affects labor force participation. In considering the likelihood that a transition in one area will influence another trajectory, one should take into account the stability of that trajectory.

Finally, it may be helpful to examine the particular relationship between two trajectories when considering the likelihood that a change in one area will affect another trajectory. Trajectories that are closely linked would be more likely to be affected by changes in one. To

take one example, parenting and marriage are distinguishable areas of life, but closely intertwined in practice. Changes in one area are likely to affect the other. In the case of the transition to the empty nest stage, one of the findings from the in-depth interviews is that the nature of the marital relationship changed qualitatively in response to the emptying of the nest. Other areas, such as leisure activities or performing care work for friends or relatives, are less closely linked to parenting, and show less change in response to the transition out of day-to-day parenting.

Social and Historical Context

Each of the three major analyses of this project included women from the same cohort. The empty nest mothers/middle-aged childless women of the ATUS study, the respondents to the in-depth interviews, and the cohort followed by the NLS-YW all belong to the Baby Boom generation. The qualitative analysis and the NLS-YW focus more precisely on the earlier half of this generation; the mean age of the empty nest mothers of the ATUS analysis also falls within this age range. The ATUS analysis also includes a wide range of women outside of the Baby Boom generation, of course – these women constitute the young childless women and the mothers of young children in this sample.

The Baby Boom women who have recently made the transition to the empty nest stage are unique in several ways. They came of age during the women's rights movement, when many women embraced efforts to "have it all" by combining career-type employment and family. The women I interviewed largely identified with these goals and described the ways in which they shaped their own work–family decisions in this context. Exploring the effects of the transition to the empty nest phase is especially interesting for this generation of women simply because they had so many more resources available to them than previous generations. As compared to their

mothers and grandmothers, the early Baby Boom women have higher levels of education, more experience in the labor force, lower levels of fertility, and, importantly, more years of healthy life expectancy left. The findings of this project do reflect these advantages, although not necessarily the ways originally anticipated. Rather than setting their sights on new accomplishments, the women of the early Baby Boom generation seem to be using the resources they have accrued to enjoy life.

It is difficult to determine how future cohorts of women will approach the empty nest phase. There are a number of broad social changes that are likely to affect how the daughters of the Baby Boom will experience this transition. Child care has become much more widely available and of much better quality. Employers have become much more accustomed to mothers in the labor force. On the other hand, intensive mothering – first described by Hays in 1996 – has continued to ratchet up.

Economic pressures are changing the process of the transition to adulthood for young adults, which in turn affects the transition into the empty nest stage for their parents. The costs of higher education are rising far faster than inflation, which makes it more necessary for college students to live with their parents or to borrow substantial amounts of money to pay for college. Further, the labor force seems to have a dwindling supply of entry level jobs that allow young adults to fully support themselves. All of these factors may prolong the transition to adulthood, leaving parents to support their children, in full or in part, until their children are well into their 20s.

On another front, marriage rates are creeping down, and many more women of future generations will be raising children alone and entering the empty nest stage without a romantic partner. Marital status is strongly associated with many of the outcomes examined in the ATUS

and NLS-YW analyses. The combination of increased intensive parenting, delayed transitions to adulthood, and higher levels of single parenting may lead to a different type of transition to the empty nest stage in future generations. This transition may be delayed somewhat, and empty nest mothers may have fewer resources available, but I expect that the current experiences of freedom, happiness, and overall psychological well-being in the empty nest phase will continue.

Directions for Future Research

There are three directions for future research that seem particularly useful in light of the findings of this project. First, longitudinal research that assesses change in outcome across the transition to the empty nest stage would allow thorough disentangling of the effects of the transition to the empty nest phase from selection effects into different motherhood status groups. Ideally, this should be done using a data source that has a variety of outcomes measured in the same manner across different waves. The NLS-YW has very consistent questions on the labor force, but all indications are that there are few changes in labor force activity across the transition to the empty nest stage. A repeated measure of general happiness or depression levels would be especially desirable, but consistent measures of activities other than labor force behavior would also be interesting, and a marital satisfaction measure would be interesting to compare to the qualitative results of this project.

A second direction that would be very intriguing is an expanded sample of empty nest mothers for in-depth interviews. Single mothers, women of color, and women with lower levels of education might have very different stories to tell about their transitions to the empty nest phase. The mothers I interviewed expressed that they were able to reconcile themselves to the loss of the proximity with their children because "this is the way it's supposed to be." Interviews with women from other cultural backgrounds, with different expectations for their children's

transitions to adulthood, might provide interesting insights into the ways in which the transition to the empty nest phase is culturally specific.

One additional possibility is use a dataset that follows adolescents and their mothers as the young adults transition into adulthood. This would allow examination of the reciprocal relationship between mother and child and to investigate the extent to which a child's success or failure affects the mother. The Panel Survey of Income Dynamics – Child Development Supplement and subsequent data collections could be used for such a purpose.

Table 2.1. Weighted Frequencies and Means of Control Variables, by Motherhood Status

		Age of Youngest Child										
	No Children, Age 20-40	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18-24	No Children under 24, Age 41-60
n (unweighted)	4984	4014	3314	2688	2566	2341	2141	1997	1638	1277	1570	10523
Race/Ethnicity												
White	67.4%	58.3%	58.9%	60.5%	61.5%	65.6%	65.4%	64.8%	68.0%	71.6%	68.5%	76.1%
Black	11.5%	11.6%	11.9%	12.4%	14.1%	12.7%	13.4%	13.5%	13.6%	13.5%	14.1%	13.3%
Hispanic	13.7%	23.7%	22.5%	21.3%	20.1%	17.7%	14.7%	16.3%	13.8%	11.0%	11.5%	6.9%
Other	7.4%	6.4%	6.7%	5.7%	4.3%	3.9%	6.5%	5.4%	4.7%	3.9%	5.9%	3.7%
Education												
Less Than HS	5.5%	14.2%	13.9%	13.7%	12.9%	12.1%	10.2%	11.6%	10.3%	10.4%	11.4%	9.0%
HS Diploma	18.4%	27.3%	27.9%	27.5%	27.8%	28.2%	30.8%	27.5%	33.4%	31.8%	35.5%	35.7%
Some College	37.1%	26.9%	25.0%	27.3%	30.7%	29.5%	28.1%	31.1%	29.2%	30.9%	28.3%	28.2%
BA Plus	38.9%	31.7%	33.3%	31.4%	28.6%	30.2%	30.9%	29.8%	27.1%	26.9%	24.8%	27.1%
Age (mean)	27.3	29.3	31.8	34.2	36.8	39.0	41.1	42.8	44.5	46.6	49.3	52.3
Presence of non-own child in HH	14.2%	7.5%	5.1%	5.9%	4.4%	4.0%	4.5%	5.8%	5.8%	8.3%	9.2%	6.4%
Marital Status												
Married	28.3%	75.3%	76.1%	72.6%	71.9%	73.2%	74.1%	71.1%	70.2%	73.1%	71.1%	60.4%
Cohabitating	9.5%	6.7%	4.1%	3.9%	3.3%	3.2%	2.5%	2.5%	2.6%	2.3%	1.4%	3.6%
Single	62.2%	18.0%	19.8%	23.5%	24.8%	23.6%	23.3%	26.4%	27.2%	24.6%	27.5%	36.0%
# of Own HH Children (mean)	0.0	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.4	0.1
Spouse Income												
$0 or First Quartile	74.1%	41.3%	40.7%	40.6%	41.7%	40.7%	40.3%	40.4%	40.1%	37.0%	41.7%	47.1%
Second Quartile	9.1%	16.7%	16.3%	14.3%	12.5%	15.4%	13.7%	13.3%	14.4%	14.8%	13.1%	10.1%
Third Quartile	5.5%	15.1%	13.6%	13.5%	13.1%	13.6%	14.1%	13.7%	12.9%	14.7%	12.2%	10.2%
Fourth Quartile	4.1%	11.9%	13.7%	13.9%	16.0%	14.5%	15.2%	14.4%	14.3%	13.0%	13.1%	8.5%
Not Reported	7.1%	14.9%	15.6%	17.7%	16.6%	15.8%	16.7%	18.2%	18.2%	20.4%	19.8%	24.1%
Spouse Employed	34.2%	75.5%	73.4%	69.3%	68.9%	70.2%	70.0%	65.7%	65.3%	66.6%	61.5%	48.4%
Diary Day												
Weekday	71.7%	71.3%	70.7%	70.5%	72.0%	72.1%	72.2%	71.6%	72.4%	69.5%	71.3%	71.4%
Winter	24.9%	25.7%	24.1%	25.6%	25.2%	25.2%	24.1%	24.8%	24.5%	22.6%	25.1%	24.7%
Spring	25.2%	24.0%	24.9%	23.8%	25.0%	24.8%	24.8%	26.2%	24.3%	28.2%	25.1%	24.4%
Summer	25.9%	25.4%	25.4%	25.9%	25.0%	24.3%	26.5%	25.5%	26.2%	26.3%	25.5%	25.2%
Fall	24.0%	25.0%	25.6%	24.7%	24.7%	25.6%	24.6%	23.5%	25.0%	22.9%	24.3%	25.7%

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.2. Weighted Frequencies and Means of Control Variables, New Mothers and Comparable Women without Children

	No Children, Age 23 to 34	One Child, Age 0-1
n (unweighted)	2972	1364
Race/Ethnicity		
White	67.4%	63.2%
Black	11.1%	11.3%
Hispanic	13.1%	18.8%
Other	8.4%	6.8%
Education		
Less Than HS	4.2%	8.7%
HS Diploma	16.1%	26.6%
Some College	27.8%	27.0%
BA Plus	51.9%	37.6%
Age (mean)	27.2	27.7
Presence of non-own child in HH	9.2%	10.0%
Marital Status		
Married	34.1%	70.9%
Cohab	10.9%	8.3%
Single	55.0%	20.8%
# of Own HH Children (mean)	0.0	1.0
Spouse Income		
$0 or First Quartile	69.6%	44.2%
Second Quartile	11.4%	14.9%
Third Quartile	6.5%	15.4%
Fourth Quartile	4.8%	12.2%
Not Reported	7.6%	13.3%
Spouse Employed	41.0%	73.8%
Diary Day		
Weekday	70.9%	72.8%
Winter	24.4%	25.9%
Spring	25.4%	21.7%
Summer	25.9%	25.0%
Fall	24.3%	27.4%

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.3. OLS Regressions Predicting Minutes per Day in Major Activity Categories, New Mothers and Comparable Women without Children

	Personal Care		Market Work		Non-Market Work		Free Time	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	801.7	***	56.9		61.3	*	511.7	***
Non-mothers, Ages 23-34 (omitted)								
Mother of One Child Age 0-1	-31.3	***	-114.4	***	201.0	***	-59.5	***
Race/Ethnicity								
White (omitted)								
Black	10.5		-4.0		-33.3	***	29.4	**
Hispanic	11.0		-29.9	**	12.6		9.4	
Other	15.9	*	-22.7		13.6		-4.3	
Education								
Less Than High School (omitted)								
High School Diploma	-9.7		50.5	**	-11.3		-27.0	
Some College	-24.6	*	51.0	**	-9.2		-17.2	
BA Plus	-32.7	**	88.1	***	-25.7	*	-31.9	*
Age	-1.5	**	-0.9		5.0	***	-2.6	***
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	-4.6		-5.7		40.8	***	-27.8	**
Marital Status								
Married (omitted)								
Cohabiting	-12.0		12.3		-13.2		15.8	
Single	-37.4	**	36.0		-5.0		7.2	
Spouse Income								
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)								
Second Quartile	-8.9		22.4		9.5		-21.3	
Third Quartile	0.7		4.4		12.9		-11.3	
Fourth Quartile	6.0		-4.8		22.7		-21.7	
Not Reported	-9.3		-9.5		9.5		8.5	
Spouse Employed	-19.3		9.8		30.2	*	-18.2	
Diary Day/Season								
Weekday	-77.0	***	252.3	***	-51.4	***	-123.3	***
Winter (omitted)								
Spring	3.8		0.8		-4.0		0.4	
Summer	-6.7		5.5		-1.8		-2.3	
Fall	4.4		-3.8		-2.8		4.9	
n	4336		4336		4336		4336	
R-squared	0.0700		0.2245		0.286		0.1145	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.4. OLS Regressions Predicting Minutes per Day in Major Activity Categories by Motherhood Status

	Personal Care		Market Work		Non-Market Work		Free Time	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	774.3	***	34.4	***	116.7	***	509.3	***
Age of Youngest Child								
Non-mothers, Age 20-40 (omitted)								
0-1	-17.8	***	-85.1	***	183.4	***	-81.5	***
2-3	-0.7		-49.4	***	126.1	***	-74.1	***
4-5	-1.7		-27.1	***	97.8	***	-67.3	***
6-7	-6.4		-5.6		78.1	***	-63.3	***
8-9	0.1		-0.6		50.7	***	-47.9	***
10-11	-1.7		8.8		41.9	***	-46.2	***
12-13	-3.8		32.4	***	18.1	**	-43.0	***
14-15	-7.5		27.4	***	12.8	*	-28.5	***
16-17	-2.8		52.7	***	-15.8	*	-29.2	***
18-24	0.8		30.8	***	-31.3	***	5.0	
Non-mothers, Age 41-60	6.5		16.0	*	-20.2	***	1.6	
Race/Ethnicity								
White (omitted)								
Black	15.2	***	3.7		-47.1	***	28.2	***
Hispanic	17.7	***	5.8		1.8		-25.4	***
Other	19.0	***	-3.7		4.3		-18.1	***
Education								
Less Than High School (omitted)								
High School Diploma	-21.1	***	56.6	***	-11.6	**	-23.2	***
Some College	-27.7	***	70.9	***	-16.0	***	-27.3	***
BA Plus	-37.8	***	120.3	***	-26.1	***	-55.7	***
Age	-1.1	***	-1.1	***	3.2	***	-1.2	***
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	1.6		-27.7	***	32.0	***	-6.3	
Marital Status								
Married (omitted)								
Cohabiting	-9.4	**	27.0	***	-12.6	**	-1.3	
Single	-8.0	*	39.5	***	-17.8	***	-13.3	**
# of Own Children in HH	-10.6	***	-11.5	***	23.9	***	-2.8	*
Spouse Income								
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)								
Second Quartile	-4.0		14.4	**	-5.6		-4.1	
Third Quartile	1.1		-9.2		15.5	***	-7.9	*
Fourth Quartile	8.4	**	-55.0	***	37.5	***	8.8	*
Not Reported	0.8		-11.3	*	16.5	***	-7.1	
Spouse Employed	-6.9	*	25.4	***	17.9	***	-35.5	***
Diary Day/Season								
Weekday	-74.7	***	215.8	***	-34.2	***	-106.3	***
Winter (omitted)								
Spring	-4.4	*	6.9	*	-0.1		-2.0	
Summer	-1.5		-4.9		-1.8		5.6	*
Fall	-6.4	**	4.9		-0.2		1.7	
n	39053		39053		39053		39053	
R-squared	0.08		0.18		0.2		0.11	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.5 - OLS Regressions Predicting Minutes Per Day in Personal Care Activities by Motherhood Status

	Sleep		Grooming		Eating and Drinking	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	660.5	***	40.8	***	62.3	***
Age of Youngest Child						
Non-mothers, Age 20-40 (omitted)						
0-1	2.2		-9.9	***	-6.4	***
2-3	12.1	***	-7.1	***	-2.9	*
4-5	9.9	**	-4.2	*	-5.1	***
6-7	5.9		-3.3		-7.3	***
8-9	12.6	**	-2.3		-8.8	***
10-11	8.2	*	0.9		-8.8	***
12-13	7.9		2.3		-11.5	***
14-15	5.2		0.8		-11.3	***
16-17	4.9		3.8		-9.7	***
18-24	7.0		1.9		-8.1	***
Non-mothers, Age 41-60	11.7	***	2.5		-6.2	***
Race/Ethnicity						
White (omitted)						
Black	14.7	***	15.8	***	-12.7	***
Hispanic	14.5	***	0.4		3.8	***
Other	11.0	***	0.2		7.8	***
Education						
Less Than High School (omitted)						
High School Diploma	-29.8	***	3.8	***	2.3	*
Some College	-41.5	***	3.9	***	6.5	***
BA Plus	-52.7	***	0.8		10.6	***
Age	-1.4	***	0.0		0.2	***
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	6.4	**	-1.7		-1.6	
Marital Status						
Married (omitted)						
Cohabiting	-3.0		-1.7		-5.7	***
Single	-11.6	***	9.7	***	-6.4	***
# of Own Children in HH	-7.0	***	-3.0	***	-0.3	
Spouse Income						
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)						
Second Quartile	-10.0	***	6.2	***	0.0	
Third Quartile	-7.8	**	6.2	***	1.7	
Fourth Quartile	-1.6		3.2	*	5.5	***
Not Reported	-8.3	***	5.3	***	3.1	***
Spouse Employed	-9.6	***	4.9	***	-2.3	*
Diary Day/Season						
Weekday	-63.6	***	2.5	***	-9.1	***
Winter (omitted)						
Spring	-4.0	*	-1.8	*	0.5	
Summer	-3.6	*	-0.7		0.9	
Fall	-6.6	***	-0.9		0.5	
n	39053		39053		39053	
R-squared	0.08		0.02		0.04	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.6. OLS and Logisitic Regressions Predicing Minutes and Episodes per Day in Labor Force Activity and Odds Ratios Associated with Working at Home and in the Evening

	Minutes per Day in Work		Number of Episodes of Work (if employed)		Likelihood of Working at Home on Diary Day (if employed)		Likelihood of Working after 6:00 on Diary Day (if employed)	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Intercept	31.1	**	0.6	***	-	-	-	-
Age of Youngest Child								
Non-mothers, Age 20-40 (omitted)								
0-1	-77.1	***	-0.18	***	1.2		0.8	*
2-3	-44.0	***	-0.04		1.1		0.8	*
4-5	-23.7	***	0.00		1.0		1.0	
6-7	-4.8		0.03		1.1		0.7	**
8-9	0.9		0.01		1.1		0.7	***
10-11	9.3		-0.02		1.1		0.8	*
12-13	31.3	***	0.07		1.0		0.9	
14-15	26.1	***	0.14	**	1.2		1.0	
16-17	50.2	***	0.10		1.0		1.1	
18-24	28.9	***	0.09		1.0		1.1	
Non-mothers, Age 41-60	14.7	*	0.12	**	1.0		1.2	
Race/Ethnicity								
White (omitted)								
Black	-0.1		0.0		0.6	***	0.9	*
Hispanic	1.9		0.0		0.7	***	0.9	
Other	-5.1		0.1	**	0.7	***	1.1	
Education								
Less Than High School (omitted)								
High School Diploma	52.9	***	-0.1		1.7	***	1.0	
Some College	66.3	***	-0.1		2.8	***	1.2	
BA Plus	110.6	***	0.0		5.9	***	1.7	***
Age	-1.0	***	0.0		1.0	***	1.0	*
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	-25.0	***	0.0		1.0		1.1	
Marital Status								
Married (omitted)								
Cohabiting	24.5	***	0.0		0.8	*	1.2	*
Single	36.5	***	0.1		1.4	***	1.3	**
# of Own Children in HH	-10.7	***	0.0		1.0		1.0	
Spouse Income								
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)								
Second Quartile	12.5	**	-0.1		1.0		0.9	
Third Quartile	-9.6	*	-0.1	*	1.2	*	0.9	
Fourth Quartile	-52.6	***	-0.1	**	1.6	***	1.1	
Not Reported	-10.7	*	0.0		1.8	***	1.2	*
Spouse Employed	24.3	***	0.0		1.3	***	1.1	
Diary Day/Season								
Weekday	200.4	***	1.5	***	1.3	***	2.0	***
Winter (omitted)								
Spring	7.0	*	0.0		1.1		1.1	
Summer	-3.6		0.0		1.0		1.0	
Fall	6.0		0.1	*	1.0		1.1	
n	39053		28343		28343		28343	
R-squared	0.18		0.23		-		-	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.7. OLS Regressions Predicting Minutes Per Day in Non-Market Work Activities

	Housework		Physical Care of HH Children		Education of HH Children		Playing with HH Children		Other Care of HH Children	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	130.7	***	-14.8	***	-7.4	***	-7.3	***	-7.3	***
Age of Youngest Child										
Non-mothers, Age 20-40 (omitted)										
0-1	3.9		112.1	***	4.0	***	59.4	***	3.4	***
2-3	9.3	*	57.3	***	7.7	***	41.6	***	7.0	***
4-5	2.9		41.5	***	10.9	***	28.6	***	8.0	***
6-7	3.2		29.0	***	14.6	***	18.1	***	8.8	***
8-9	-3.7		16.3	***	8.8	***	14.5	***	10.9	***
10-11	-2.0		8.3	***	9.4	***	14.0	***	7.6	***
12-13	-5.8		-1.1		3.2	***	11.4	***	7.1	***
14-15	3.0		-5.7	**	-0.9		8.9	***	3.6	***
16-17	-11.6	*	-9.1	***	-3.6	***	7.2	***	0.2	
18-24	-9.3	*	-10.4	***	-5.9	***	0.4		-4.7	***
Non-mothers, Age 41-60	-5.5		-6.1	***	-3.0	***	-4.4	***	-1.9	***
Race/Ethnicity										
White (omitted)										
Black	-35.0	***	-2.6	**	-0.6		-5.6	***	-1.7	***
Hispanic	17.2	***	-6.8	***	-1.3	***	-6.0	***	-0.8	*
Other	5.3		2.3	*	1.4	**	-0.9		-2.4	***
Education										
Less Than High School (omitted)										
High School Diploma	-20.2	***	1.4		0.1		0.4		1.1	**
Some College	-26.2	***	1.4		0.5		0.3		1.3	**
BA Plus	-37.8	***	3.4	**	1.2	**	1.6	*	2.6	***
Age	2.2	***	0.2	***	0.1	***	0.2	***	0.1	**
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	3.1		15.2	***	2.5	***	6.4	***	2.2	***
Marital Status										
Married (omitted)										
Cohabiting	-11.8	**	-0.2		-1.0		0.1		0.1	
Single	-25.3	***	2.1		1.3	*	2.6	**	2.5	***
# of Own Children in HH	16.2	***	4.7	***	2.3	***	-2.8	***	2.4	***
Spouse Income										
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)										
Second Quartile	-5.3		-1.0		-0.2		1.2		0.9	*
Third Quartile	5.6		0.5		1.5	***	1.8	*	2.1	***
Fourth Quartile	18.8	***	3.7	***	1.9	***	4.5	***	4.5	***
Not Reported	7.1	*	0.4		0.7		1.2		2.2	***
Spouse Employed	10.3	***	3.0	**	1.4	**	0.9		1.6	***
Diary Day/Season										
Weekday	-46.1	***	5.9	***	4.3	***	0.5		2.0	***
Winter (omitted)										
Spring	-4.2	*	1.9	**	-0.6		0.3		1.2	***
Summer	1.4		-1.3		-3.7	***	0.5		-0.6	
Fall	-5.7	**	2.2	**	1.2	***	-0.6		0.8	*
n	39053		39053		39053		39053		39053	
R-squared	0.10		0.36		0.11		0.18		0.09	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.7. OLS Regressions Predicting Minutes Per Day in Non-Market Work Activities

	Care of Adults		Care of Non-HH Children	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	6.3	***	4.2	**
Age of Youngest Child				
Non-mothers, Age 20-40 (omitted)				
0-1	-1.8		-2.5	**
2-3	-2.3	*	-3.2	***
4-5	-1.3		-2.6	*
6-7	-2.2		-3.2	**
8-9	-2.2		-3.6	**
10-11	-1.3		-3.4	**
12-13	-1.4		-3.0	**
14-15	-2.0		-2.3	
16-17	-0.5		1.0	
18-24	5.8	***	-2.0	
Non-mothers, Age 41-60	1.9		1.3	
Race/Ethnicity				
White (omitted)				
Black	-0.2		-0.9	
Hispanic	-2.1	**	-0.8	
Other	0.3		-0.5	
Education				
Less Than High School (omitted)				
High School Diploma	2.4	**	1.2	
Some College	1.9	*	-0.3	
BA Plus	0.3		-3.1	***
Age	0.1		0.1	***
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	1.0		-1.8	**
Marital Status				
Married (omitted)				
Cohabiting	-1.2		-0.6	
Single	-3.1	**	-1.6	
# of Own Children in HH	0.2		-0.9	***
Spouse Income				
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)				
Second Quartile	-0.9		-1.6	*
Third Quartile	0.2		0.5	
Fourth Quartile	-1.3		-0.5	
Not Reported	0.7		-0.2	
Spouse Employed	-2.2	*	-0.8	
Diary Day/Season				
Weekday	-0.9		-0.2	
Winter (omitted)				
Spring	0.4		0.4	
Summer	2.2	***	-0.3	
Fall	0.6		-0.1	
n	39053		39053	
R-squared	0.01		0.01	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 2.8. OLS Regressions Predicting Minutes per Day in Free Time Activities

	Cultural Leisure		Social Leisure		Media Leisure		Watching TV		Volunteer	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	78.5	***	103.0	***	237.3	***	228.6	***	-1.3	
Age of Youngest Child										
Non-mothers, Age 20-40 (omitted)										
0-1	-35.4	***	-2.5		-17.7	***	-9.7	**	-4.4	***
2-3	-27.7	***	-6.1	*	-18.1	***	-12.0	***	-2.5	*
4-5	-25.4	***	-4.9		-17.2	***	-12.8	**	-1.5	
6-7	-25.7	***	-7.2	**	-13.0	**	-8.0		2.2	
8-9	-20.3	***	-8.7	**	-3.9		-0.2		2.9	*
10-11	-20.3	***	-2.8		-7.6		-4.1		-0.3	
12-13	-19.9	***	-7.4	*	-3.1		-0.4		0.9	
14-15	-14.5	***	-9.0	**	6.0		5.3		-0.2	
16-17	-10.7	***	-1.5		-4.8		3.1		-1.1	
18-24	-9.8	***	3.4		19.5	***	22.6	***	-0.2	
Non-mothers, Age 41-60	-7.6	**	-5.4	*	18.8	***	19.4	***	-0.8	
Race/Ethnicity										
White (omitted)										
Black	-8.3	***	-3.1	*	21.2	***	31.2	***	-0.9	
Hispanic	-1.5		-5.1	***	-10.2	***	0.6		-1.4	
Other	6.1	**	-9.8	***	-15.5	***	-10.3	***	-3.3	***
Education										
Less Than High School (omitted)										
High School Diploma	3.9	*	-4.6	**	-24.1	***	-25.2	***	2.0	*
Some College	22.5	***	-4.9	**	-43.8	***	-50.8	***	3.7	***
BA Plus	16.2	***	-7.5	***	-63.2	***	-74.6	***	6.3	***
Age	-1.4	***	-0.3	***	0.4	**	-0.2		0.1	***
Presence of Non-Own Children in HH	-4.4	**	2.3		-1.1		-0.7		-0.1	
Marital Status										
Married (omitted)										
Cohabiting	-3.0		-5.0	*	11.2	**	12.2	***	-3.5	**
Single	5.0	*	-10.5	***	-12.7	***	-15.5	***	0.0	
Number of Own Children in HH	0.7		-1.2		-4.8	***	-3.4	***	1.4	***
Spouse Income										
$0 or First Quartile (omitted)										
Second Quartile	-5.6	**	0.8		-1.6		-0.5		0.9	
Third Quartile	-1.8		-0.2		-5.1		-4.5		0.8	
Fourth Quartile	5.4	**	1.0		-1.9		-5.6		4.9	***
Not Reported	2.2		-1.6		-11.1	***	-10.6	***	2.5	**
Spouse Employed	-2.2		-8.1	***	-26.2	***	-25.3	***	0.7	
Diary Day/Season										
Weekday	3.0	**	-36.7	***	-35.3	***	-29.3	***	-2.8	***
Winter (omitted)										
Spring	6.0	***	0.7		-11.7	***	-11.6	***	1.3	*
Summer	1.8		5.6	***	-9.2	***	-11.3	***	-0.4	
Fall	9.2	***	0.0		-11.8	***	-10.8	***	0.8	
n	39053		30953		39053		39053		39053	
R-squared	0.06		0.04		0.06		0.07		0.01	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: ATUS, 2003-2009

Table 3.1 – Respondent Details

"Name"	Age	Education	Number of Children	Labor Force Summary	Marital History
Career Track Employment					
Ellen	61	BA	1	Continuous full time, professional employment.	Long-term marriage. One step-child lived with them part time.
Hannah	53	BA, professional degree	2	Worked part time for a few years when children were very young, full time since.	Long-term marriage.
Naomi	59	BA, MS	1	Continuous full time, professional employment.	Long-term marriage.
Nora	58	BA	1	Took some time out of the labor force when son was young, otherwise full time.	Long-term marriage.
Rachel	56	BA	2	Continuous full time, professional employment.	Divorced when child was preschool aged, remarried when child was elementary school aged. Shared custody with child's father, and two step-children lived with them part time.
"Just a Job"					
Gwen	57	BS, MA	2	Has worked part time in a professional role since children were	Long-term marriage.

"Name"	Age	Education	Number of Children	Labor Force Summary	Marital History
				born.	
Janet	56	BA,MA	2	Took one year out of the labor force after each child was born, otherwise full time.	Long-term marriage.
Kathryn	49	One year of college, no degree.	2	Continuous full time employment.	Divorced when children were very young, remarried when they were teens.
Sherry	56	BA, MA	2	Has worked part time in a professional role since children were born.	Long-term marriage.
Long-term Withdrawal from the Labor Market					
Hope	54	BA	2	Out of the labor force until children were in middle school, part time since.	Long-term marriage.
Joanna	62	Community college classes, no degree	3	Stayed out of the labor force for several years when children were young, then worked part time during the school year for several years.	Long-term marriage.
Sally	56	BA	2	Self-employed in a creative capacity since children were born.	Long-term marriage.

Table 4.1. Unweighted Frequencies and Means of NLS-YW Control Variables, by Motherhood Status

	Empty Nest	Childless	Adult Children at Home	Teenagers at Home
N	1091	254	365	299
Education				
High School or Less	55.0%	28.4%	48.2%	32.4%
Some College	24.5%	20.9%	23.6%	20.4%
BA Plus	20.5%	50.8%	28.2%	47.2%
Marital History				
Currently Married	67.4%	34.7%	66.3%	72.9%
Ever Divorced	33.4%	19.7%	27.1%	29.4%
Husband's Income				
No income	58.9%	81.9%	55.1%	46.2%
1st Quartile	10.5%	6.7%	11.2%	8.4%
2nd Quartile	10.4%	4.7%	11.2%	9.4%
3rd Quartile	11.3%	2.0%	10.7%	17.7%
4th Quartile	9.1%	4.7%	11.8%	18.4%
Fertility History				
First Birth by Age 20	37.1%	0.0%	24.1%	14.4%
Three Plus Children	36.9%	0.0%	45.5%	51.5%
Race/Ethnicity				
White	78.2%	79.1%	71.2%	76.9%
Non-white	21.8%	20.9%	28.8%	23.1%
Poor Health	23.1%	24.0%	26.8%	18.2%
Age	55.52	54.18	54.66	52.77

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.2. Logistic Regressions Predicting Employment for NLS-Young Women in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	1.26		1.16		0.86	
Adult Children at Home	1.26		1.23		1.21	
Teenagers at Home	1.40	*	1.29		0.98	
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			1.44	**	1.14	
BA Plus			1.42	***	1.24	
Marital History						
Currently Married					0.56	***
Ever Divorced					1.49	**
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					0.66	*
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					1.24	
3rd Quartile					1.02	
4th Quartile					0.47	***
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					0.91	
Three Plus Children					0.77	*
Age					0.99	***
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					0.90	
Poor Health					0.25	***
N	2006		2006		2006	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.3. OLS Regressions Predicting Usual Weekly Hours Worked for Employed NLS-Young Women in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	38.56	***	37.81	***	49.92	
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	2.05	*	1.49		0.48	
Adult Children at Home	1.48		1.27		1.23	
Teenagers at Home	-1.72	*	-2.25	*	-2.35	*
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			0.85		0.55	
BA Plus			2.21	**	2.47	**
Marital History						
Currently Married					-2.87	***
Ever Divorced					0.36	
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					-1.04	
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					1.22	
3rd Quartile					0.09	
4th Quartile					-1.60	
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					0.48	
Three Plus Children					-1.00	
Age					-0.01	
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					1.06	
Poor Health					-2.29	*
N	1379		1379		1370	
R-squared	0.01		0.02		0.40	

***p<.001, **p<.01, p<.05

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.4. OLS Regressions Predicting Log of Hourly Wages for Employed NLS-Young Women in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	2.39	***	2.16	***	2.97	***
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	0.15	*	0.00		-0.05	
Adult Children at Home	0.02		-0.02		0.00	
Teenagers at Home	0.21	***	0.08		0.07	
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			0.33	***	0.29	***
BA Plus			0.57	***	0.51	***
Marital History						
Currently Married					-0.05	
Ever Divorced					0.06	
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					0.08	
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					0.05	
3rd Quartile					0.08	
4th Quartile					0.33	***
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					0.01	
Three Plus Children					-0.16	***
Age					0.00	*
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					-0.12	
Poor Health					-0.21	***
N	1170		1170		1169	
R-squared	0.013		0.123		0.152	

***p<.001, **p<.01, p<.05

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.5. Logistic Regressions Predicting Any Time Spent in Volunteer Commitments by NLS-Young Women in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	1.07		0.72	*	0.87	
Adult Children at Home	1.05		0.92		0.89	
Teenagers at Home	2.42	***	1.78	***	1.55	**
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			2.18	***	1.92	***
BA Plus			4.18	***	3.49	***
Marital History						
Currently Married					1.18	
Ever Divorced					1.30	*
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					0.83	
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					1.09	
3rd Quartile					1.50	
4th Quartile					1.28	
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					0.73	*
Three Plus Children					1.07	
Age					1.00	
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					0.86	
Poor Health					0.58	***
N	1970		1970		1970	

***p<.001, **p<.01, p<.05

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.6. Logistic Regressions Predicting Any Participation in Caring Work by NLS-Young Women in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	0.60	*	0.59	*	0.53	**
Adult Children at Home	0.78		0.78		0.76	
Teenagers at Home	1.05		1.03		1.08	
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			1.19		1.24	
BA Plus			1.12		1.14	
Marital History						
Currently Married					1.24	
Ever Divorced					0.83	
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					1.01	
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					0.73	
3rd Quartile					0.66	
4th Quartile					0.67	
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					0.79	
Three Plus Children					0.99	
Age					1.00	
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					0.91	
Poor Health					1.40	*
N	1984		1984		1984	

***p<.001, **p<.01, p<.05

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.7. Logistic Regressions Predicting NLS-Young Women Reporting Being "Very Happy" in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	0.58	***	0.48	***	0.72	*
Adult Children at Home	0.80		0.75	*	0.78	
Teenagers at Home	0.80		0.68	**	0.61	**
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			1.38	**	1.17	
BA Plus			1.88	***	1.39	**
Marital History						
Currently Married					2.25	***
Ever Divorced					1.15	
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					1.33	
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					1.04	
3rd Quartile					1.94	**
4th Quartile					2.14	***
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					1.00	
Three Plus Children					0.96	
Age					1.00	
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					0.82	
Poor Health					0.32	***
N	1972		1972		1972	

***p<.001, **p<.01, p<.05

Source: NLS-YW

Table 4.8. OLS Regressions Predicting Levels of Depressive Symptoms Among NLS-Young Women in 2003.

	Model 1.		Model 2.		Model 3.	
	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.	Est.	Sig.
Intercept	6.6801	***	7.95124	***	6.8686	*
Motherhood Status						
Empty Nest (omitted)						
Childless	0.94		1.96	**	0.91	
Adult Children at Home	0.24		0.55		0.37	
Teenagers at Home	0.17		1.13	*	1.22	*
Education						
High School or Less (omitted)						
Some College			-1.87	***	-0.84	
BA Plus			-3.65	***	-1.83	***
Marital History						
Currently Married					-1.68	***
Ever Divorced					0.31	
Spouse Income (2003)						
No income					-1.17	
1st Quartile (omitted)						
2nd Quartile					-1.22	
3rd Quartile					-1.06	
4th Quartile					-1.27	
Fertility History						
First Birth by Age 20					0.85	
Three Plus Children					-0.05	
Age					0.00	
Race						
White (omitted)						
Non-white					-0.42	
Poor Health					8.07	***
N	1959		1959		1959	

***p<.001, **p<.01, p<.05

Source: NLS-YW

Appendix 1 – Time Use Activity Definitions

Time Use Variables	Activities Included	Lexicon Codes (combined activity file)
Personal Care	sleeping, sleeplessness, washing, dressing, grooming, medical care, eating, drinking, related travel	01xxxx, 11xxxx, 1801xx, 1811xx
Sleeping	sleeping, sleeplessness	0101xx
Grooming	washing, dressing, and grooming oneself; medical care of self	010201-01999
Eating	eating and drinking	110101-119999
Labor Force Activities	work & work-related activities; related travel	05xxxx, 1805xx
Work and Work-Related Activities	work & work-related activities	05xxxx
Episodes of Work	work & work-related activities	05xxxx
Minutes Working at Home	work & work-related activities	05xxxx + at home
Episodes of Working after 6:00pm	work & work-related activities	05xxxx + tustoptime > 6:00pm
Non-Market Work	housework; caring for and helping household children, non-household children, household adults, non-household adults; shopping for goods and services; related travel	02xxxx, 03xxxx, 04xxxx, 07xxxx, 08xxxx, 09xxxx, 1802xx, 1803xx, 1804xx, 1807xx, 1808xx, 1809xx
Housework	housework, shopping for goods and services	02xxxx, 07xxxx, 08xxxx, 09xxxx
Physical Care of Children	physical care of hh children, looking after hh children, caring for & helping children nec, providing medical care to hh children, obtaining medical care for hh children, waiting associated with hh children's health, activities related to hh children's health nec.	030101, 030109, 030199, 030301, 030302, 030303, 030399

Time Use Variables	Activities Included	Lexicon Codes (combined activity file)
Children's Education	reading to/with hh children, homework, meetings & school conferences, homeschooling hh children, activities related to hh children's education nec	030102, 030201, 030202, 030203, 030204, 030399
Playing with Children	playing with hh children (not sports), arts & crafts with hh children, playing sports with hh children, talking with/listening to hh children	030103, 030104, 030105, 030186
Other Child Care - Planning/Organizing on behalf of Children	organization & planning for hh children, attending hh children's events, waiting for/with hh children, picking up/dropping off household children	030108, 030110, 030111, 030112
Caring for and Helping Adults	caring for and helping household adults, caring for and helping household members n.e.c, caring for and helping non-household adults, caring for and helping non-household members n.e.c.	0304xx, 0305xx, 0399xx, 0404xx, 0405xx, 0499xx
Caring for and Helping Non-Household Children	caring for and helping non-household children, activities related to non-household children's education, activities related to non-household children's health.	0401xx, 0402xx, 0403xx
Free Time Activities	education; government & civic obligations; socializing, relaxing, and leisure; sports, exercise, and recreation; religious and spiritual activity; volunteer activities; telephone calls; related travel; data codes	06xxxx, 10xxxx, 12xxxx, 13xxxx, 14xxxx, 15xxxx, 16xxxx, 50xxxx, 1806xx, 1810xx, 1812xx, 1813xx, 1814xx, 1815xx, 1816xx, 1818xx, 1819xx, 1850xx,

Time Use Variables	Activities Included	Lexicon Codes (combined activity file)
Cultural Leisure	education, arts & crafts as a hobby, hobbies, writing for personal interest, attending performing arts, attending museums, doing sports/exercise	06xxxx, 120309, 120311, 120313, 120401, 120402, 1301xx
Social Leisure	socializing/communicating with others, attending or hosting parties/receptions/ceremonies, attending meetings for personal interest, attending/hosting social events nec	1201xx, 1202xx
Media Leisure	TV and movies (not religious), TV and movies (religious), listening to the radio, listening to/playing music, computer use for leisure, reading for personal interest, attending movies/films	120303, 120304, 120305, 120306, 120308, 120312, 120403
TV	TV and movies (not religious), TV and movies (religious)	120303, 120304
Volunteering	volunteer activities	15xxxx

Appendix 2 – Interview Schedule

Background Information

- When were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- When did you graduate from HS?
- Did you go to college right after high school?
- What did you major in?
- When did you graduate?
- Any education past college?
- When did you get married?
- Only marriage?
- When were your children born?
- Did any of your kids have health or developmental problems?
- Work history.

General Work-Family Information during Child-Rearing:

- When you were in college, what sort of thoughts did you have about working? Did you have plans for a career?
- When you were in college, what sort of hopes/expectations of family life did you have? Did you expect to have children? Stay home with them?
- Work history between education and having children. Jobs, approx hrs per week. Enjoy job?
- Were you working when pregnant with your first child?
    - Did you plan to continue working after your child was born?
    - Same job and same schedule?
    - How did you decide what to do?
    - Explore any leads here – DOL at home, childcare issues, workplace demands, ideologies of motherhood.
- What did you like about having a young child?
- What was frustrating about having a young child?
- How did you and your husband divide the responsibilities of bread-winning, home-making, and taking care of the kids? How did that change over time?
- Raising children takes a lot of time and energy. What did you cut back on or give up when you became a mother?
- How did additional children change work-family balance or how you and your husband divided responsibilities?

Transition out of Child-Rearing

- I'm interested in the milestones or turning points as your children grew up. Are there specific times that you remember thinking that your kids were growing up and needed less time or attention? For instance, maybe going to school full time? Or getting to be old enough to stay home alone? How did you feel about those milestones? How did you adjust your own activities in response to those milestones?
- What about your milestones or transitions as your kids were growing up?

The Empty Nest

- How has your life changed since your child(ren) left home?
- What is day to day life like right now?
- Has your employment changed?
- Have you taken on new care-giving responsibilities? (Parents, grandkids, pets, etc.)
- Developed new hobbies or interests?
- Enjoying more opportunities for leisure?
- Doing more volunteer work?
- What do you miss about having children at home?
- What do you enjoy about having an empty nest?
- How has your children leaving home affected your relationship with your husband?
- How much contact do you have with your children?
- Do you worry about your children's ability to support themselves? Think they'll boomerang back? How would you feel about that?
- What are your long-term goals?
- What do you think it's important for me to know about being an empty nester?
- Do you think the decisions you made earlier about work and family influenced what you're doing now? How so?

Retrospective/Big Picture

- As you look back at your life, how happy are you with the way things turned out?
- Are there things you would do differently if you could do it all again?
- What advice would you give to a daughter or another young woman planning careers and families today?

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