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Mothers' experiences of their adult child's interethnic relationship

This thesis is presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Nikki Rajakaruna

Edith Cowan University

School of Arts and Humanities

2019

Abstract

The number of interethnic relationships is increasing in many countries around the world. Research regarding the experiences of interethnic couples indicates considerable variation in the reactions of parents towards such relationship types (as reported by those within the relationship). In some studies, significant and sometimes violent opposition has been reported, resulting in negative consequences for the adult child, the couple and presumably the parents. Despite such reports, no research has considered the experiences of parents from the perspective of parents themselves. As such, I explored mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship with the aim of determining the nature of their experiences and the factors that influenced their experiences.

I approached the research from a developmental psychology perspective, considering the meaning that mothers ascribed to their experiences, and the implications of their experience for their relationships, their role as a parent, and their development as an individual. I applied social constructionist, grounded theory methodology to develop an understanding of mothers' experiences. Interviews were conducted with 30 mothers from various ethnic backgrounds, aged 43 to 78 years, all of whom resided in Australia.

I found that mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship were varied. Concern regarding ethnic difference, the possibility of relocation and/or the possibility that their child's relationship was driven by insincere motives (on the partners' part), characterised the experience of some mothers. Mothers experienced concern about these issues because each was perceived as a threat to their parenting-related, developmental goals of 1) wanting the best for their child and 2) wanting to stay

involved in the life of their child. Both goals were important to mothers in satisfying generative concern.

Experiences were varied in the sense that concern was not experienced by all mothers. Instead, concern was moderated by mothers' experience of difference; that being the extent of difference that mothers' perceived between themselves/their child and their child's partner, and their acceptance of any perceived differences. Concern was also moderated by mothers' progress with the parenting task associated with middle adulthood; letting go. The experiences of mothers were also varied in that some mothers described change over the course of their child's relationship. Specifically, a number of mothers experienced personal growth in the context of their child's interethnic relationship which not only influenced experiences of the relationship but also moved them closer towards the developmental goals of generativity and wisdom. Growth was, however, dependent on a number of factors relating to the nature of their child's relationship and their own personality. In this way, growth can be understood as resulting from the interaction between contextual and individual factors; consistent with systems theory of development.

The findings of my research provide new understanding of the relevance of a child's life decision (their choice of intimate partner) to the developmental progression of mothers. This brings new insight to existing theory and research regarding parent experiences of their child's interethnic relationship, parenting an adult child, and adult development in middle to later adulthood.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- contain any defamatory material.

09.04.2019

Nikki Rajakaruna Date

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I acknowledge my husband. You have been with me, every step of the way, for the highs and lows of this ride. You made sure our baby girl had lovely weekends while I was working, you shopped, cooked, cleaned, washed and you picked me up every time I was down. Your love, unwavering support and belief in me have kept me going and made this possible. There are no words for the love I have for you.

To my beautiful baby girl who yelled "Smash it Mummy!" every weekend when I drove off the driveway, heading to work. Mummy has finally finished her 'BFG' baby girl- I am all yours!

To my supervisors, Associate Professor Justine Dandy and Dr Deidre Drake. I thank you sincerely for your on-going support and guidance throughout my long, and not entirely linear, journey (ok, not at all linear!). I did all the things a student is not supposed to do when completing a PhD and yet you were always there and always supportive, declaring 'Onwards Nikki!' as I walked from our meetings. I will remain forever grateful for the opportunity to learn from both of you.

To my dear friend Pam. You are a very precious person to me. You are always there, offering support, encouragement and an unwavering belief in my ability to complete this. You have a heart of gold.

To my family and friends, who I'm sure have no idea why it has taken me so long to finish this work but who love, and support, and celebrate with me regardless.

To my wonderful work family, thank you for encouraging me, supporting me, listening to my whinges and helping me celebrate my wins.

Finally, my participants. You welcomed me in and shared intimate details about your hopes, fears and experiences as a mother. I have learnt so much more from you than is captured in these pages and I thank each one of you sincerely.

I finish this research with a profound appreciation of the love of mothers, and with that, I dedicate this to my mum. I love you so much.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

> *"Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And, but for the interference with his arrangement, there would be no cause for such marriage. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix"*
>
> (Judge Bazile, 1959, cited in Loving v. Virginia, 1967)

The above opinion was expressed by Judge Bazile at the indictment of Mildred Loving, a Black American woman and Richard Loving, a White American man, for violating the US State of Virginia's anti-miscegenation legislation (*Loving v. Virginia, 1967*). The couple pleaded guilty to the charge and were sentenced to one year in prison (*Loving v. Virginia, 1967*). The sentence was wholly suspended for 25 years on the condition that the couple not return to Virginia during that time (*Loving v. Virginia, 1967*). Four years later the couple began the process of appealing the decision, however it took a further four years of legal contest before the United States Supreme Court ruled Judge Bazile's original decision as unconstitutional (*Loving v. Virginia, 1967*); a decision which effectively invalidated anti-miscegenation legislation in the Unites States (Sollors, 2000). Since around this time, the rate of interracial marriage has risen steadily, not only in the United States, but in many places around the world (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008). Data now indicate that 'races'[1] do indeed mix and that interethnic/interracial marriages now make up a substantial proportion of marriage types in many countries (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008).

Opposition towards interracial unions, such as that articulated by Judge Bazile, has historically been directed not only at marriage, but towards interethnic/interracial intimate relationships in general (e.g., intimate sexual relations, cohabitation and

[1] The contested nature of the term 'race' is discussed shortly. The term is used here for consistency with the opening quote.

marriage; Moran, 2001; Romano, 2003). Despite this, marriage has been easier to regulate compared to less formal intimate relations given the legal and historically, sacred (religious) nature of marriage (McGrath, 2005). Thus whilst interracial/interethnic relationships have occurred, religious traditions as well as anti-miscegenation laws and policies have legitimised opposition towards the formalisation of such relationships types. For this reason, interracial and/or interethnic marriage is, and has always been less common than intimate, interethnic relationships.[2]

Opposition to intimate, interethnic/interracial partnerships can be understood because such relationships violate the long, enduring social norm of endogamy; that is, the tendency of an individual to choose a marriage partner from within their group; whether that group be defined by race, ethnicity, region, religion or class[3] (Hollingshead, 1950; Kalmijn, 1998; van Leeuwen & Maas, 2010). The norm of endogamy is influenced by various factors such as; individual preferences for an intimate partner, access to potential marriage partners and the value systems that are present within a given society (Kalmijn, 1998; Marcson, 1950). With regard to value systems, Kalmijn (1998) emphasises the role of the State, the Church and the family in shaping values and norms regarding marital choices. Thus, dependent on the norms endorsed by each, violation of the norm of homogamy may result not only in opposition towards interethnic relationships within the broader social context, but from within the intimate sphere of the family. Given that the family is a place within which

[2] For example, Qian and Lichter (2007) discuss that cohabitation is particularly prevalent amongst interracial couples in the United States. They suggest that cohabitation might represent "a new and highly-adapted alternative to traditional marriage, one that is less highly stigmatized, more easily entered into, and perhaps more acceptable to others" (p. 72).

[3] Homogamy, a related term, refers to the tendency to marry someone of similar status. Whilst there is an intersection between social status and race it is important to delineate the two constructs to avoid the risk of suggesting that ethnic groups are always different to one another in relation to status and that people from different ethnic backgrounds always perceive major differences with those outside of the group as this will not always be the case.

individuals derive love, support and a sense of self, opposition from within the family is likely to have significant implications for all family members involved.

My research focusses on the intimate sphere of the family, and more specifically, the experiences of mothers when their child enters an interethnic relationship. I chose to focus on interethnic *relationships* rather than marriage, in recognition that such relationships not only occur, but occur more frequently than interethnic marriage. In considering the experiences of mothers, I adopt a developmental perspective. We understand from relevant research,[4] that normative life course transitions which typically occur during the middle years of parenthood (e.g., a child leaving home), promote developmental change for both children and parents. Yet historically, little research has considered the experience of these transitions from the parents' point of view. Research is particularly scant in relation to parent experiences when a child partners, and no known research has considered this transition when a child chooses to partner with someone of a different racial or ethnic background. I conceptualise the development of a child's intimate, interethnic relationship as a significant event that occurs in the life of mothers and consider how mothers experience this event, and the implications of this experience for their psychological development.

Terminology

The disparity between the opening quote to this chapter, which refers to 'race', and the focus of my research; ethnicity, highlights variation in the terminology that is used to describe relationships between people of different racial/ethnic/cultural background. It is important that I address this before continuing with the chapter.

[4] Research regarding the nature of intergenerational relations provides insight, as does; research regarding the empty nest experience, a small number of studies regarding parental role change during middle adulthood and recent research regarding parent experiences of 'boomerang' children. This literature is reviewed in Chapter Two.

Within the literature, romantic relationships that involve two people from different racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds have been defined as interracial, interethnic, intercultural or simply inter- relationships. Differences in terminology often reflect differences in the time and/or place of the research, however, at times the terms are used interchangeably within the same study (for example, see Ang, Brand, Noble & Wilding, 2002). In conducting my research, I chose to use the term 'interethnic' to define relationships of interest. The definition of ethnicity provided by Nagel (1994) enabled interethnic relationships to be defined by boundaries of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry and/or regionality. This term was preferred due to the limitations of other commonly used terms.

Use of the term 'interracial' was problematic as 'race' is a highly contested, socially defined term which categorises individuals based on supposed biological differences (Donald & Rattansi, 1992; Omi, 2001). The term is also restrictive; referring to broad categories of people (e.g., White, Asian), which fails to capture variation within these categories. Thus, defining relationships of interest as 'interracial' would restrict the type of relationships that could be considered within my study (e.g., this would preclude the inclusion of a relationship between an Italian and an Australian), and so was not the term of choice. Defining the relationship as 'intercultural' was considered problematic as the term 'culture' is somewhat ambiguous, referring to a "system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collectives lives" (Parekh, 2006 p. 143). The term 'inter' (i.e., inter-relationship or inter-marriage) was considered problematic as it is broad and could be taken to mean a relationship that differed on any factor such as religion, social status, race, culture and/or ethnic origin (Baptiste, 1984; Marcson, 1950). Due to these limitations, I adopted the term

'interethnic'. This term is used throughout my thesis unless specific reference is made to prior research, in which case the term used by the original author is maintained.

Interethnic Relationships: Challenging the Norm

> *"In about 300 years from now, do you realise that…. there's not going to be any more white people, not going to be any more black people, everybody's gonna be beige…it's true, the whole world's mixing. …"*
>
> *(Peters, 2005)*

It has long been demonstrated that people tend to marry a person who is similar to themselves, whether that be similarity of race, religion, age, socioeconomic background or, similarity on all of the aforementioned factors (Hollingshead, 1950; Kalmijn, 1998; van Leeuwen & Maas, 2010). As stated previously, this practice known as endogamy (Kalmijn, 1998), is influenced by factors within both the broader, and immediate contexts of an individual's life. In terms of broader social context, endogamy is a longstanding custom within certain cultural and religious groups (e.g., the caste system of India, Orthodox Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses; Davis, 1941), whilst in some countries, endogamy has been formally mandated by the state (e.g., anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, Germany and South Africa; Caestecker & Fraser, 2008; Jacobson, Amoateng & Heaton, 2004; Kalimijn, 1998; Menchaca, 2008).

In terms of an individual's more immediate context, the family, and parents in particular, are key sources of social influence with regard to marriage choice. This is because it is within the family environment that an individual is socialised; learning the norms, values and traditions of society and their ethnic group (Khoo, Birrell & Heard, 2009; Lieberson & Waters, 1988; Marcson, 1950). Finally, at an individual level, homogamy has been shown to occur because individuals are attracted to and/or

prefer to marry individuals that share similar characteristics to themselves (Kalmijn, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2008).

Despite the enduring norm of homogamy, data reveal an increase in the rate of interethnic marriage across a number of countries (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008; Lieberson & Waters, 1988). Problems with longitudinal data, such as changes to racial classifications in census data, mean that trend analysis of interracial marriage generally occurs across age cohorts. An increase in the rate of interethnic marriage within younger generations is used as an indicator of increasing rates over time. Using this form of analysis, Jacobson and Heaton (2008) found that rates of interracial marriage were higher amongst younger cohorts in five of the six locations considered in the study; the United States, Hawaii, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand[5]. Across the five countries combined, the rate of interracial marriage had increased by an average of 3% per year. In the United Kingdom, census data revealed that in 2011, 9% of the population were involved in an interethnic relationship, an increase from 7% of the population in 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2014).

Rates and trends in interethnic relationships and marriage attract significant research attention because change, particularly that which violates the norm of endogamy, often reflects change within broader society (Kalmijn, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2008). At the most basic level, interethnic relationships can only occur where there is access to individuals from other ethnic groups. Therefore, change in the rates and trends of interracial/interethnic relationships often reflects change more broadly. For example, changes in geographic and social mobility, group segregation/integration and/or the nature of intergroup relations provide opportunity for contact between

[5] Rates of interracial marriage did not increase in the Xinjiang Province in the People's Republic of China.

members of different ethnic groups (Kalmijn, 1998; Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005). Indeed, despite a general increase in rates of interracial/interethnic marriage in many places, proportions and trends vary across place, ethnicity and time (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008; Lieberson & Waters, 1988). Variation can be explained by a complex interaction of factors that influence the development of interracial/interethnic relationships including; the racial and ethnic composition of the population, government policy relating to contact between ethnic groups (e.g., immigration policies and policies of social segregation), the degree of social contact between groups, intergroup history and attitudes towards ethnic groups (Gullickson, 2006; Hwang, Saenz & Aguirre, 1997; Jacobsen & Heaton, 2008; Joyner & Kao, 2005; Kuo & Hassen, 1976; Lewis, Yancey & Bletzer, 1997; Qian, Blair & Ruf, 2001; Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005; Tucker & Mitchell- Kernan, 1990; Yancey, 2007). For example, rates are substantially lower in the Xinjiang Province, China due to third party opposition to interethnic marriage (i.e. religious groups), a history of intense interethnic conflict and geographical segregation; factors which limit the opportunity for contact between ethnic group members (Jacobsen & Heaton, 2008). As such, rates and trends of interracial/interethnic marriage can reveal much about the structure and socio-historical context of a given society (e.g., whether the population is ethnically homogenous or heterogeneous, whether divisions exist between ethnic groups (historical and/or current) and whether social norms and values are conservative or more liberal).

Research Regarding Interethnic Marriage/Relationships

As rates of interracial/interethnic marriage have increased, so too has the volume of research investigating the development and nature of, and experience within, interracial/interethnic relationships. Researchers from the fields of psychology and

sociology, in particular, have explored issues such as the socio-structural conditions under which interracial/interethnic relationships develop (e.g., opportunity for contact, see Heaton & Jacobson, 2000; Jacobson & Heaton, 2008; Qian & Lichter, 2007), individual preferences for marriage partners (e.g., Caspri & Herbener, 1990; Kalmijn, 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001) and social attitudes towards interracial/interethnic relationships and marriage (e.g., Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald, 2004; Golebiowska, 2007; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005; Zebroski, 1999). Research has also explored the experiences of those involved in interethnic relationships, considering factors such as relationship quality and satisfaction (e.g., Forry, Leslie & Letiecq, 2007; Gaines, 1997; Negy & Snyder, 2000). This research reveals mixed findings. For example, Troy, Lewis-Smith and Laurenceau (2006) found that those in interethnic relationships reported greater relationship satisfaction compared to those in intra-ethnic relationships, and further, found no difference between individuals in interethnic relationship and intra-ethnic relationships in terms of relationship quality. Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008), however, found that men and women in interethnic unions reported lower relationship satisfaction, more conflict and a greater perceived likelihood that the relationship would end compared to those in intra-ethnic relationships. The authors determined that lower relationship quality could be explained by additional challenges that characterise interethnic partnerships, specifically; more complex relationship histories (e.g. previously married, children from prior relationship), greater heterogamy on factors in addition to ethnicity (e.g. age, education, religion), fewer shared values and less social support (i.e. poor relationships with parents and fewer sources of assistance).

Research has also explored the development of couple and family identity within interethnic partnerships (e.g., Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Foeman & Nance, 1999; Hill &

Thomas 2000; Killian, 2001, 2002; Luke & Luke, 1998; O'Donoghue, 2004; Owen, 2002; Yancey, 2007). This research describes processes of negotiation and the importance of communication in developing a shared identity. Byrd and Garwick (2006) described that Black-White interracial couples/families were required to resolve issues with families of origin, overcome Black-White racial histories, integrate racial worldviews and explain race to their bi-racial children, in order to 'come together' as a family. Luke and Luke (1998) described shifts in gender-typed values and gendered divisions of labour resulting from blended cultural practices and beliefs. The authors assert that "interrace seems to make a difference by opening an array of possibilities for transformed and hybridized cultural, religious and gendered practices, and reconfigured power relations" (p, 749).

Parent reactions to interethnic relationships.

An issue that is evident within the aforementioned research; particularly that which considers the experiences of interethnic couples, is parent reactions to the news of a child's interethnic relationship. As stated earlier, family, and parents in particular, are a key source of influence on an individual's choice of partner and understandably, have some vested interest in the marital choice of their child. Therefore, when a child makes their choice, it is understandable that this decision is likely to impact parents in some way. The reactions of parents to a child's interethnic relationship, as described by interracial/interethnic couples, vary considerably (Baptiste, 1984; Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Fernandez, 1996; Katz, 1996; Killian, 2001, 2002; Luke & Luke, 1998; Owen, 2002). For example, ten interracial couples in the United States, interviewed in Killian's (2001) study, reported reactions from family members that ranged from immediate and a high degree of support through to outright resistance. Varied reactions were also reported in Katz's (1996) study; some couples reported no

opposition, others reported initial opposition which progressed to acceptance over time, whilst others described continued difficulty in family relationships as a result of their interracial relationship.

At times, when opposition has been reported by an interethnic couple, it is described as significant and sometimes violent. For example, a Black Cuban male, interviewed by Fernandez (1996) in a study of interracial relationships in Cuba, recalled the violence expressed by the father of his White Cuban girlfriend upon learning that she had gone to spend the weekend at his (her boyfriend's) house. The participant recalled that the father hit his daughter, giving her a black eye, and later threatened him with a gun. He recounted: "He [the father] ran into another room and came back with a .38 revolver to threaten me. He said, 'Not with my daughter, because I'll kill you. I don't understand this [relationship], you black shit [negro de mierda]'" (Fernandez, 1996, p. 105). In Owen's (2002) research regarding interracial marriage in Australia, an Australian-born male recalled that his mother placed his death notice in the newspaper upon learning that he was dating a woman of Chinese heritage. More commonly, opposition is expressed through refusal to acknowledge the relationship. According to interethnic couples, this is achieved in a number of ways, such as refusal to attend the wedding and failure to invite partners to family gatherings (Baptiste, 1984; Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Fernandez, 1996; Killian, 2001; Luke & Luke, 1998).

Such reports, from adult children, prompt the question as to why parents react in such ways to their child's interethnic relationship. Although no research has specifically investigated this question from the perspective of parents, adult children have provided some insight (within the research detailed above) as to what they perceive underlies parent concern. According to these reports, parent reactions appear

to differ depending on group membership and group status.[6] For example, individuals from dominant groups, such as White Americans in the United States (Byrd & Garwick, 2006) and Anglo- Australians in Australia (i.e., those of British ancestry; Luke & Luke, 1998), report that their parents were concerned about social acceptance of their relationship and of any future children. For example, an Anglo participant in Luke and Luke's study, stated that '[My parents] were worried about the children and how the children would be accepted and how we would be accepted as a couple…" (1998, p. 744).

Alternatively, the concerns of parents from non-dominant groups have been perceived by interethnic couples to be based on a desire for ethnic unity as opposed to fears of social discrimination. For example, in Byrd and Garwick's (2006) study, one African American participant described that his mother was "not a racist, but she's an advocate of minorities sticking together…. My mother was like - you gotta stick to your own - you know, Black" (p. 27). Research supports the idea that parental preference for ethnic homogamy relates to ethnic group membership, a desire to maintain group boundaries and "to pass on to offspring the ethnic feelings, identification, culture, and values that will help perpetuate the group" (Lieberson & Waters, 1988, p.165). Support for this was provided in a dated study conducted by

[6] I discuss group status with reference to dominant vs. non-dominant groups. Dominant groups are those which hold social, political and economic power, whilst groups which lack such power are defined as non-dominant (Berry, 1997; Sam, 2006). Delineation in group status is often the result of differences between social groups (e.g., racial and ethnic differences), inequality between social groups (e.g., socio economic status) and the degree to which these two factors are related (Blau, 1977). In many societies, race or ethnicity and social inequality are closely related, resulting in the concentration of certain racial/ethnic groups at certain levels of social status (Fu, 2007; Gordon, 1964; Jones & Luijkx, 1996; Lieberson & Waters, 1988). Generally, immigrant and indigenous groups hold less social power and status because they are fewer in number and because socio-historical factors limit social mobility and integration. In the US, where the majority of research originates, the dominant group is White American and non-dominant groups are other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Hispanic, African American and Asian Americans). Similarly, in Australia, the dominant group is White Australian, and non-dominant groups are other racial/ethnic groups.

Chimbos (1971)[7] who examined immigrant attitudes towards the potential interethnic marriage of an adult child amongst a sample of Dutch, Greek and Slovak immigrants residing in Canada. Those who opposed the interethnic marriage of a child were asked to provide a reason for their opposition. In providing a response, the majority of Dutch respondents indicated that families are more stable when spouses have the same values, whilst the large majority of Greek and Slovak immigrants indicated a desire to maintain immigrant culture.

The historic oppression of non-dominant groups by dominant group members has also been implicated in explanations of minority group opposition to interracial marriage. For example, Fernandez (1996) offered the following interpretation of opposition from black parents; "…some black families see mixed couples as a kind of betrayal of family loyalty and an affront to individual dignity" (p.104). Dr Maya Angelou (1984) provides support for this interpretation, stating that opposition from African Americans towards interracial relationships can be seen as a consequence of the history of oppression and discrimination experienced by the group at the hands of White Americans. She explained that interracial relationships are considered shameful within the African American community as the union represents a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed (Angelou, 1984). It is possible that the same view is held by Aboriginal Australians; given the history of oppression experienced by this group at the hands of Anglo- Australians (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Heard, Birrell & Khoo, 2009). Taken together, the insights provided by adult-children regarding their parents' reactions to their interethnic relationships, along with supporting commentary (e.g., Angelou), suggest that parent

[7] Although dated, I refer to this study as it is the only one that could be found which asked parents to explain opposition towards the hypothetical interethnic relationship of their child.

reactions are shaped by a complex array of factors such as perceived social acceptance, intergroup history and group status.

As stated earlier, these accounts and explanations of parent reactions were provided by adult children who were themselves involved in an interethnic relationship. Although the accounts provide some insight into the issue of parent reactions it is problematic to rely on these reports given that they represent a subjective interpretation of reactions from a third person perspective. There is a potential for these reports to be biased, given that they have been provided by the individual who is in the relationship and so may be motivated to hear, interpret and/or represent the situation in a particular way. The need to consider the reactions and experiences of parents, from the perspective of parents themselves, was apparent. Given that this perspective had not previously been investigated, I decided to investigate parent perspectives of their adult child's interethnic relationship.

Aim, Research Questions and Approach

I made the decision early in my research to narrow the scope of my project and focus only on the experiences of mothers (the rationale for this decision is outlined in the Methodology chapter). Therefore, the aim of my research was to explore the experiences of mothers whose adult child was, or had been, involved in a committed, intimate interethnic relationship. I chose to focus on intimate interethnic *relationships* as oppose to interethnic *marriage*, given that interethnic relationships occur at a higher rate than interethnic marriage, and given the possibility that marriage may have led to some degree of acceptance amongst mothers. The criteria of a defacto relationship was also deemed inappropriate as this would require that the couple reside together; an arrangement that may not be possible for a proportion of interethnic couples due to adherence to cultural and/or religious norms (i.e. not living together prior to marriage).

I incorporated the term ‘committed’, to ensure that relationships were more than a casual affair. I focused only on heterosexual intimate relationships in order to limit the scope of my inquiry and I included mothers whose adult child had been, but were no longer involved in an interethnic relationship to ensure that the full range of potential experiences were considered. To focus only on those relationships that were on-going would likely limit the experience of mothers to those in which the relationship was successful (in the sense of on-going), rather than also considering mother’s experiences of a child’s ‘unsuccessful’ interethnic relationship.

My research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of mothers whose adult child is, or has been, involved in a committed, intimate interethnic relationship?
2. What factors influence the experience of mothers whose adult child is, or has been, involved in a committed, intimate interethnic relationship?

Experiences were broadly defined as the thoughts, feelings and actions of mothers relating to their adult child’s interethnic relationship.

I approached this research from a developmental perspective. That is, I considered the meaning that mothers ascribed to their experience within the context of their developmental progression through middle adulthood. I considered the implications of their experience for their relationships, their role as a parent and their development as an individual. I adopted the position that development occurs over a lifetime in response to various age-related, normative and non-normative events and challenges (Baltes, 1987; Franz, 1997). I conceptualised the development of a child’s intimate relationship as a normative life event that brings about change in the life of mothers (Baltes, 1987). I further conceptualised that the way that mothers respond to this change, shapes their development (Lang & Heckhausen, 2006; Valsiner, 1997).

More specifically I explored the implications of this normative life event for mothers when a child chooses to develop an intimate relationship with a person from an ethnic background that differs to their own.

Significance of the Research

In adopting a developmental perspective, my research provides theoretical contribution to understandings of the parenting role and adult development in middle adulthood, as well as practical insight into the experiences of mothers whose child enters an interethnic relationship. Placing a death notice for a child in the newspaper upon learning of their interethnic relationship (Owen, 2002) is a significant act, and suggests that news of the relationship had a profound impact on that particular mother. But why? What significance does a child's decision to partner with an individual from a different ethnic background hold for mothers? What factors influence a mother's experience of her child's interethnic relationship? Is her role as a mother relevant to her experience, and if so- why? Is the experience relevant to mother's development, and if so- how? None of these questions had been considered in previous research, and limited research was available to draw from, to understand mothers' experiences. The middle years of parenting, when an adult child is likely to establish an intimate relationship, is a period which receives comparatively less research attention relative to other periods of parenting (i.e., the early years of child rearing, and the later years when parents become increasingly dependent on their children for care). Consequently, this research provides contribution to an area that has traditionally received limited research focus. Additionally, I investigate how the decisions of an adult child impact the parent, challenging the traditional approach of parenting research and theory which generally focuses on the impact that parents have on their children. Investigation of these issues with a diverse sample of mothers, within a

culturally plural context provides a unique contribution to understandings of parenting and development across diverse groups.

The findings of this research will also be of practical benefit for family therapists and counsellors working with interethnic couples and their families. I became aware of variation in parent reactions to interracial/interethnic relationships through research which considered the experiences of interracial couples (e.g., Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Killian, 2001; 2002). This literature highlighted that family reactions were a significant issue for interracial couples and that working through these reactions was important to the development of couple and family identity and as a consequence, family cohesion. In order to promote positive, therapeutic outcomes for interracial couples, research has discussed the importance that therapists be aware of, and able to discuss sensitive issues related to family reactions to, and acceptance (or lack thereof) of their relationship (Byrd & Garwick, 2006). My research will contribute to the understanding of therapists who work with interethnic couples seeking to deal with issues relating to family reactions to their relationship.

The aforementioned literature (focused on couple experiences) also highlights the possibility that parents, too, may seek professional assistance in dealing with their reactions to their child's interethnic relationship. The literature describes conflict and estrangement within families, which, although not specifically discussed within any known research to date, suggests that parents too, may struggle to work through their reactions. The resolution of parent-child conflict is important for both the parent and the child given the demonstrated relationship between relational conflict and wellbeing (Merz, Consedine, Schulze & Schuengel, 2009). Parent-child conflict has been found to be particularly difficult for parents, due to their vested interest in the maintenance of positive family bonds (Koropeckyj-Cox, 2002; Pruchno, Peters, &

Burant, 1996). For the parent, understanding the nature of, and reason for, their reactions and experiences will undoubtedly assist them in working through any concerns and/or conflict. My research will contribute to this understanding, which is likely to be of practical benefit for therapists working with parents who seek therapy in relation to this issue.

Context of the Research

This research was conducted in Australia, a country with one of the highest proportions of interethnic marriages in the world (Ang et al., 2002). In 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that 31.6% of marriages in Australia involved two individuals born in different countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017a), a figure which had increased from 27.0% of marriages in 1996 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997). In presenting this statistic, the problems in estimating the number of marriages based on country of birth must be acknowledged. Using country of birth as a measure of interethnic marriage may provide an overestimation of the true rate of interethnic marriage (e.g., by counting marriages of first generation and second generation migrants), or an underestimation of interethnic marriage through failure to acknowledge whether cultural and/or ethnic differences exist within a country (e.g., the marriage of a Singaporean Malay and a Singaporean Indian would not be counted as interethnic based on an analysis on country of birth). Such analysis also fails to take into account marriages between second or subsequent generation migrants born in Australia but from different ethnic backgrounds. In addressing one aspect of this problem, Ang et al. (2002) provide a figure of interethnic marriage that includes both first and second generation migrants, stating that 52% of all marriages in Australia between the years 1996 and 1998 were interethnic in nature.

The diverse ethnic composition of the Australian population, relatively low levels of social segregation and generally positive community attitudes towards interethnic marriage each contribute to the rate of interethnic marriage in Australia. This is because these contextual factors provide opportunity for contact between members of different ethnic groups. Here, I provide some detail of these three factors, to enable consideration of how my findings might 'fit', and so be used to understand the experiences of mothers in other settings. With regard to ethnic composition, whilst the majority of the Australian population in 2016 was born in Australia (66.7%), 33.3% of the population was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). The most common countries of birth were England (3.9%), followed by New Zealand (2.2%), China (2.2%), India (1.9%) and the Philippines (1.0%; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). A further 34.4% of the Australian population in 2016 were second generation immigrants; with both parents born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). Consequently, over half of the Australian population in 2016 was comprised of first or second generation immigrants. In Western Australia, the state in which the research was conducted, 39.7% of the population in 2016 was born overseas, with the majority born in England, followed by New Zealand, India, South Africa and the Philippines (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017b). The diverse, ethnic composition of the Australian population[8] increases the likelihood that interethnic relationships will develop due to the increased possibility of contact with members of other ethnic groups. The fact that many immigrant groups within Australia are small in size compared to the Anglo-Australian majority (except those from the United Kingdom), also increases the likelihood that interethnic relationships will develop, due to a lack of available partners from within the ethnic in-group (Kalmijn, 1998).

[8] Over 300 ancestries were reported by Australians in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

The composition of Australia's population has been heavily influenced by patterns of immigration which, for much of Australian history, have been strictly controlled by government policy. Early immigration to Australia was influenced by the quest for wealth, with a large influx of Chinese immigrants entering Australia in the mid-1800s to work on the goldfields (Taylor, 2013). Afghan cameleers also sought fortune, arriving in Australia in the late-1800's to early-1900s to assist in the exploration of the Australian continent (Kabir, 2009). The turn of the 20th century saw a dramatic shift in immigration policy with the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*. The Act was part of a series of laws and policies commonly referred to as 'the White Australia Policy' which prioritised immigration from the United Kingdom and essentially banned non-White immigration to Australia (Day, 2000; Jupp, 2003; Ngan & Kwok-bun, 2012). Following World War Two, immigration from Europe was encouraged in order to build Australia's population and economy (Grimes, 1993; Ngan & Kwok-bun, 2012). Although Northern and Western Europeans were preferred, many Italian, Greek and Maltese immigrants entered the country (Grimes, 1993; Ngan & Kwok-bun, 2012). It was not until the 1970s with the abolition of 'the White Australia Policy' and increasing pressure to provide humanitarian assistance to those seeking refuge following the Vietnam War that Australia saw an increase in the number of migrants from more diverse ethnic backgrounds (Glavac & Waldorf, 1998; Khoo, 2002; Markus, Jupp & McDonald, 2009).

Since the Vietnam War, Australia has continued to accept a modest yearly intake[9] of refugees from the various humanitarian crises across the globe (Refugee

[9] Approximately 13,000 refugee and humanitarian visas are granted annually under Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program (Refugee Council of Australia, 2016a). Since Federation (1901) to 2012, at least 750,000 refugees had settled in Australia (Refugee Council of Australia, 2016b).

Council of Australia, 2016a). A notable proportion of Australia's refugee population originate from Indo-China (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), following the Vietnam War (Hugo, 2001; Jupp, 2002). During the 1990s Australia experienced an increase in the number of refugees from Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia and Poland), however, numbers from this region have since reduced (Hugo, 2001; Jupp, 2002). Since the 1980's the number of refugees from the Middle East has increased, initially from Lebanon and more recently from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan (Hugo, 2001; Jupp, 2002; Refugee Council of Australia, 2013). In more recent years, Australia has witnessed an increase in the number of refugees from African countries; specifically, Ethiopia, Sudan and Sierra Leone (Hugo, 2001; Refugee Council of Australia, 2013), as well as Myanmar and Syria (Karlsen, 2016). Australia also grants a number of visas to individuals living overseas who wish to enter the country to study[10], many of whom go on to receive a further substantive visa (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017a). I highlight these points as refugee intake and international study are relevant to a number of mothers in my research.

The second factor that explains high rates of interethnic marriage within Australia is the relatively low social segregation experienced by ethnic groups. In terms of the social segregation of immigrant groups, Johnston, Poulsen and Forrest (2007) suggest that the "relative prosperity in Australia ... over recent decades has enabled economic success and spatial assimilation for many immigrants, who have encountered relatively few social and cultural barriers to their desires" (p. 733). Nonetheless, an analysis of immigrant groups living in Sydney determined that certain groups are more disadvantaged than others (Burnley, 1999). Specifically, those born in the Middle East, Vietnam/Indo-China and to a lesser degree Yugoslavia

[10] 343, 035 student visas were granted in 2016-2017.

(specifically Serbia) were found to experience lower levels of family income and higher levels of unemployment relative to those born in the United Kingdom, Italy and Greece. The authors attributed this disadvantage to the recent arrival of these groups to Australia and lower levels of English proficiency which, in turn, limited employment opportunities for members of these groups. Similar findings are reported by Forrest and Johnston (2000), Hague and Hague (2008) and Miller and Neo (1997).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have experienced a long history of oppression and continue to experience severe social disadvantage within Australian society. The majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, which comprised just 3.3% of the total population of Australia in 2016, experience poor access to education, employment, healthcare and housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Heard, Birrell & Khoo, 2009; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2010). The significant disadvantage experienced by this group is a consequence to a long history of oppressive government policies which first aimed to 'protect' and later assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders into dominant, white European culture (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986). These policies included the segregation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on reserves and the removal of mixed-race Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from their families and subsequent placement in Church missions (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Wolfe, 1994). These policies continue to have a strong influence on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and social policy within Australia (e.g., a national government campaign aims to 'close the gap' of social disadvantage between Australian Aboriginals and the remainder of the Australian population; Heard, Birrell & Khoo, 2009).

Together, these findings suggest that certain ethnic groups in Australian society are likely to experience higher levels of social segregation and inequality compared to others. Given this, and with reference to Blau's (1977; 1982) macrosociological theory of social structure, we would expect certain groups (i.e., those who experience less social segregation) to be more likely to partner with someone from outside their ethnic group compared to other ethnic groups (i.e., those who experience greater segregation). This however is complicated by group size, as small group numbers mean less potential marital partners to choose from within the group, resulting in a higher likelihood of interethnic marriage (Kalmijn, 1998).

The final factor that explains the high rate of interethnic marriage in Australia is social acceptance of interethnic relationships. Whilst very few studies have examined attitudes towards interethnic marriage in Australia, one study, conducted by Dunn, Forrest, Burnley and McDonald (2004) provides some insight. Data were collected from 5056 residents of New South Wales and Queensland via a telephone survey in 2001. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of concern regarding the marriage of a close relative to a series of out-group members including; a person of Muslim heritage, a person of Aboriginal ancestry, a person of Asian ancestry, a person of Jewish faith, a person of Italian ancestry, a person of Christian faith and a person of British ancestry. The majority of the sample was born in Australia (76.5%) however the ethnic composition of the sample was not provided, therefore it is not clear how group membership was determined in order to suggest that the aforementioned groups were, in fact, out-groups of survey respondents.

Findings of Dunn et al.'s research revealed that community attitudes towards interethnic marriage were generally positive, however, respondents indicated hierarchical preferences for out- group marital partners. Specifically, 91.8% of

respondents were ‘not at all’ concerned by the possibility of a close relative marrying a person of British heritage, 87.3% of respondents were ‘not at all’ concerned about marriage to a person of Italian heritage, 74.9% of respondents were ‘not at all’ concerned about marriage to a person of Jewish heritage, 71.8% of respondents were ‘not at all’ concerned about marriage to a person of Asian heritage and 70.5% of respondents were ‘not at all’ concerned about marriage to a person of Aboriginal heritage. In contrast, only 46% of respondents were ‘not at all’ concerned by the possibility of a close relative marrying a person of Muslim heritage. Differing levels of concern regarding marriage to a person of Jewish heritage and marriage to a person of Muslim heritage (both of which are broad ethno-religious groups), suggests that it is not concern about religious endogamy that explains concern about marriage to a Muslim. Instead, it is important to consider the context within which this research was conducted. Data was collected in October and December of 2001, only months after an Islamic terrorist group took responsibility for attacks that occurred in the United States on September 11 2001. This highlights the importance of considering context when interpreting how people respond to interethnic relationships which involve particular ethnic groups. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. The discussion here seeks to highlight that the attitudes of Australian respondents towards interethnic marriage are generally favourable but vary dependent on the ethnic background of the hypothetical partner and the timing and historical context of the research. This detail is relevant to highlight as it may offer some insight into the experiences of mothers (i.e., some mothers may be more accepting of their child’s interethnic relationship than others due to the ethnic background of their child’s partner, and/or reported experiences may be impacted by broader contextual factors).

To conclude this section, I provide some discussion of the nature of interethnic relationships in Australia; specifically, pairings that are common and those that are less common. This discussion provides further context to the experiences of mothers who took part in my research. In their analysis of census data, Khoo, Birrell and Heard (2009) found that rates of intermarriage were highest between those born in Australia and those born in Canada and the United States, followed by those born in the United Kingdom, then the Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria, New Zealand and Ireland. This is likely explained by the long history of immigration from these countries, the degree of cultural similarity between these countries and Australia and the consequent lack of social segregation of these immigrant groups in Australia. In comparison, rates of marriage between those born in Australia and those born in Afghanistan, Sudan, Bangladesh, and Cambodia were found to be very low. As discussed earlier, a number of these countries have been the source of refugee/humanitarian migration to Australia. Refugee status, greater cultural distance, a short period of residence in Australia and the consequent increased social segregation of these groups are likely to contribute to low rates of intermarriage with Australian-born residents.

Context of the Researcher

Just as contextual detail about the location in which this research was conducted aids understanding of my research, so too does contextual detail about myself, as the person who undertook the research. I approached this research from a constructionist paradigm of inquiry which strongly emphasises the importance of reflexivity during the research process, in acknowledgement of the collaborative nature of research enquiry (Mruck & Mey, 2007). Reflexivity is a process of self-awareness; of considering and acknowledging my position in the research and critically evaluating the influence that I have on the research process and outcome due

to the values, preconceptions and personal experiences that I bring to the enquiry (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002; Mruck & Mey, 2007). Engaging in reflexive practice and providing these reflections alongside my work is a critical tool in ensuring rigour in the research process and trustworthiness of research findings (Charmaz, 2006; Finlay, 2002).

To encourage reflexivity in the initial stages of a research venture, Mruck and Mey (2007) recommend that researchers reflect on why they chose the research topic and what they hoped to gain from conducting the research. The authors highlight the importance of this process given that the choice of research topic is often influenced by personal interest and/or involvement in the topic. Mruck and Mey (2007) assert that personal involvement in the research issue can be valuable, enabling unique insight into the topic. However, the authors also warn that personal experience can be problematic if not acknowledged because motives, personal agendas and biases cannot be identified and challenged; either by the researcher or by their supervision team. A declaration of the personal relevance of the research topic to the researcher is also beneficial for consumers of the research as it allows them to consider the research process and outcome in light of the position of the researcher.

I was born in England, to English-born parents (both Anglo-Saxon). My parents immigrated to Australia, with me, when I was three years old in pursuit of better life opportunities which they felt could be found in Australia. In 1987 we left the large majority of our extended family in England and journeyed to start a new life in Australia. I have lived the rest of my life in Australia and identify as Australian, however when asked where I come from, I acknowledge my British origins. I think this is in part because England was my birthplace and in part because the majority of my extended family still reside there.

I chose this research topic because I am personally involved in an interethnic relationship. My husband of 8 years was born and raised in Sri Lanka. He moved to Australia as a young adult to study, leaving his family behind in Sri Lanka. At the time I started my PhD we had been dating for two and a half years. As I searched for a topic to study for my PhD I was advised to choose something that would sustain my interest. Given my involvement in an interethnic relationship I started to read about interethnic couples. As I read research on interethnic couples I came across an issue that struck a chord with me; parent reactions to interethnic relationships. The issue was discussed by a number of interethnic couples as a factor that influenced the development of, and their experiences within, their relationship. It struck a chord with me because at that time of our relationship, my now husband had not told his parents about me. He was the first member of his family to date a non- Sri Lankan and he feared how they would react to the news. Over the course of my PhD, we married and had our first child. I acknowledge that my experience and my relationships with my own parents, my husband's parents, my husband, and my daughter have influenced the process of my PhD, my discussions with participants and my analysis and write up of the data. I conducted this research to better understand my own experience as well as the experiences of other interethnic couples and their parents who I had read about in the early stages of my PhD.

Thesis Structure

My thesis consists of a further six chapters. In Chapter Two, I provide a review of two areas of theory and research that are relevant to the experiences of my participants; 1) parenting during the middle years of adulthood, and 2) social attitudes towards interethnic/interracial relationships. This review not only provides context to the experiences of mothers but also provides insight into key issues that may be

relevant in explaining mothers' experiences, which I draw upon later in my discussion of findings. In Chapter Three I describe the theoretical framework and methodology that I applied in undertaking my research; social constructionist, grounded theory; detailing the rationale for my approach and the process of my enquiry.

My analysis of data is presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six. In Chapter Four I describe mothers' experiences, highlighting issues of concern arising from the interethnic nature of their child's intimate relationship and detailing the variability in mothers' experiences. I outline two key factors that account for variability; 1) mothers' experience of difference and 2) the degree to which mothers had progressed with the developmental task specific to parenting in middle adulthood; 'letting go'. In Chapter Five I explain mothers' experiences with reference to the developmental goals that were relevant to them during the middle years of parenting, as their children transitioned to adulthood. I outline what was important to mothers from a developmental perspective, and the implications of a child's interethnic relationship for mothers' parenting- related developmental goals. In Chapter Six I explain that the experience of a child's interethnic relationship was, for some mothers, associated with developmental growth. I explore factors that enabled and inhibited development and growth, highlighting the relevance of context as well as individual differences, providing support of the systems perspective of development.

In Chapter Seven I position my findings within the context of existing research regarding parenting in middle adulthood, and within broader developmental theory. I reflect that development is life long and, as expressed by Valsiner (1997), "deterministically indeterministic". I conclude Chapter Seven with a discussion of strengths, limitations and areas which I feel are deserving of further research enquiry.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide relevant context to the experience of mothers whose adult child develops an interethnic relationship. I provide this context by reviewing literature from two areas; parenting during middle adulthood and attitudes towards interethnic/interracial marriage. I begin the chapter with a review of theory and research regarding the experience of parenting an adult child during middle (and into later) adulthood. I review this literature in order to position the experience of mothers (of their child's interethnic relationship), in the broader context of their experience as a parent and their development as an individual. I continue the chapter with a review of theory and research regarding attitudes towards interethnic/interracial relationships. The purpose of this discussion is to provide insight into the broader social context that mothers may draw upon to understand, and respond to their child's interethnic relationship. I conclude the chapter with an overview of key themes that emerge from the review and a discussion of the relevance of these themes to my research.

In terms of process, I undertook a brief review of published literature in the early stages of this project in order to develop my research proposal. Hence, I approached my research with some rudimentary knowledge of relevant literature; an approach consistent with the grounded theory methodology outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998; discussed in more detail in Chapter Three). Also consistent with this approach, I undertook a thorough review of relevant literature during the later stages of data analysis. As I began to identify emerging themes and constructs from the data I returned to the literature to assist the development of my analysis. This approach contrasts significantly to traditional Glaserian grounded theory, which emphasises the discovery of knowledge based only on data, completely quarantined from any

influence of existing knowledge. As a process, reviewing the literature during the later stages of data analysis was exciting and beneficial; exciting as I discovered literature that was consistent with aspects of my findings, and beneficial as this served to validate and add depth to my analysis. It also enabled me to refine my analysis and situate my findings in the broader context of existing knowledge regarding the experience of parenting and adult development during middle adulthood. Although the literature review was written, in parts, before undertaking the research and, in parts, during data analysis I present a comprehensive review of relevant literature here to situate the experiences of mothers in the broader literature relating to parenting, adult development and social attitudes towards interethnic relationships. This literature is then revisited during findings chapters, when integrating existing literature into theory building.

Parenting in Middle Adulthood: Relationships, Roles and Developmental Goals

In considering the experiences of mothers whose adult child develops an interethnic relationship, it is necessary to situate the event within the broader context of their life course. This includes their developmental progression during middle adulthood, and more specifically, the role of parenting as a part of that developmental progression. Historically, little theory and research considered the period of middle adulthood, compared to the volume that considered other stages of life. The lack of clarity as to what is expected during this period of life, relative to other periods, was captured by Jung when he wrote “thoroughly unprepared we take the step into the afternoon of life” (1976, p. 17). We understand from broad developmental theorising that middle adulthood continues to be characterised by change, as adults experience certain stage-related conflicts, and aim to achieve certain developmental goals (Erikson, 1980; Levinson, 1978; Valliant, 1977). In particular, we understand the

achievement of generativity to be a key task of middle adulthood and we understand that parenting is one way of achieving that task. Since this early theorising, the body of research which investigates development throughout middle adulthood has advanced considerably.

Parenting is a role which continues, in some form, throughout middle, and into later adulthood (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Eisenhandler, 1992; Levitzki, 2009; Nydegger, 1991). Research that investigates the period of parenting when children themselves enter adulthood, has historically been lacking in comparison to the volume of research that investigates other periods of parenting. Specifically, much research considered the early years of childrearing, examining issues such as attachment and parenting styles, and the impact that parents have on the development of their children. Similarly, a large volume of research investigated later years of parenting, when parents become increasingly dependent on their adult children and issues such as care giving, death and dying become relevant to the ageing parent. Much less research attention was devoted to parenting during middle adulthood however this too has changed in recent times. In the following section I review research which has focussed on this period of parenting. I begin with a discussion of parent adult-child relationships (commonly referred to as intergenerational relationships), reviewing research which describes, and that which seeks to explain the nature of these relationships. I then discuss research which considers the parent as an individual; investigating how they experience the transition of their child into adulthood in terms of changes to their role and identity, and their own individual development. This body of research demonstrates that the experience of parenting an adult child provides continued opportunity for development. Discussion is also provided about the culturally bounded nature of parenting.

Intergenerational relationships throughout middle adulthood.

Early research in the area of intergenerational relations was largely descriptive, focussing on the degree to which certain relationship dimensions (e.g., contact, closeness, conflict), differed across demographic characteristics of parent and child; such as gender, age and marital status. More recently, the focus of research has moved towards theoretical explanations as to why relationship dimensions differ dependent on demographic characteristics. In reviewing the body of literature, I will follow the same trajectory, first providing an overview of descriptive research findings before moving to a discussion of more theoretically-oriented research. I have chosen to present the review in this way to highlight the progression of knowledge in the area. Before reviewing research findings, I provide an overview of the core themes which have been considered within intergenerational relations research; solidarity, conflict and ambivalence.

Themes in intergenerational relationship research.

A concept that has long dominated research in the area of intergenerational relations is solidarity. Solidarity refers broadly to the degree of closeness between parent and child (Parrot & Bengtson, 1999). In early research relating to solidarity, single item measures of the construct were used (i.e., the number of times a parent saw their adult child, or the degree of emotional closeness reported by parent and/or child). Later, typologies were developed, based on different interactions among six dimensions of solidarity; structural, associative, affective, consensual, functional and normative (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). This representation of intergenerational relationships, known as the intergenerational solidarity model (Bengtson, Giarrusoo, Mabry & Silverstein, 2002; Silverstein &

Bengtson, 1997), allowed for interaction between multiple relationship dimensions, thus capturing the complexity of intergenerational relationships.

Another body of research in the area of intergenerational relations has focussed on the nature of conflict in parent-child relationships (Birditt, Miller, Fingerman & Lefkowitz, 2009; Clarke, Preston, Raksin & Bengtson, 1999; Suitor & Pillemer, 1988; van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Although conflict was initially explored independent of solidarity within the intergenerational relations literature, the concepts have increasingly been considered concurrently (Parrott & Bengtson, 1999; Silverstein et al, 2010; Szydlik, 2008; van Gallen & Dykstra, 2006). Consideration of conflict alongside solidarity occurred in response to criticism that the solidarity model portrayed intergenerational relationships in an overly positive light, ignoring negative aspects of parent-child relationships (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Parrott & Bengtson, 1999; Silverstein, Gans, Lowenstein, Giarrusso & Bengston, 2010).

The third theme within intergenerational relations research is that of ambivalence. The construct was proposed by researchers who argued that solidarity and conflict could co-occur within a relationship and so a relationship could be both close and conflicted (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Szydlik, 2008). Ongoing debate continues as to whether ambivalence exists within, or separate to, the intergenerational solidarity model proposed by Bengtson and colleagues. Proponents of the solidarity model, Bengtson et al. (2002), argue that "an operational definition of ambivalence can be derived from the core dimensions of the solidarity paradigm" (p. 573) as ambivalence arises "at the intersection of solidarity and conflict" (p. 572). Connidis and McMullin (2002) dispute this claim. They argue that solidarity is a descriptive model which aims only to *describe* the nature of intergenerational relationships whereas ambivalence is a higher order, theoretical concept which aims to *explain* the

nature of intergenerational relationships. Consequently, a distinction is made in the subsequent review between ambivalence research that describes intergenerational relations and ambivalence research that seeks to develop theoretical understanding of intergenerational relationships. Next I provide an overview of descriptive research findings regarding the nature of intergenerational relations (solidarity, conflict and ambivalence) before then moving to a review of more theoretically-oriented research.

Describing the nature of intergenerational relationships.

Within descriptive research regarding intergenerational relations, the nature of parent adult-child relationships have been found to differ across a number of demographic factors. In providing an overview of this research I focus on the factors of most relevance to my research; gender, ethnicity, age and child marital status.

Gender.

It has been found that mothers have more contact and better relationships with their children than do fathers (Birditt, Miller, Fingerman & Lefkowitz, 2009; Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Dharmalingam, & Baxendine, 2006; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Silverstein & Bengston, 1997; Umberson, 1992; van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Researchers have also found that daughters maintain more regular contact with their parents than do sons (Ferring, Michels, Boll & Filipp, 2009; Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Dharmalingam, & Baxendine, 2006; Silverstein & Bengston, 1997; Szydlik, 2008). This finding, that both mothers and daughters report increased contact with family relative to fathers and sons, is indicative of the role that women typically assume within their families; of maintaining family relationships (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). This provides justification for my decision to focus on mothers (as opposed to fathers) in my research, given that mothers report greater contact and engagement with their adult children. Research indicates, however, that mothers also experience greater

relationship tensions with their adult children than do fathers (Birditt et al, 2009; Ferring, et al. 2009), and that daughters experience greater levels of tension and ambivalence in their relationship with their parents than do sons (Birditt et al., 2009; Szydlik, 2008; van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006), particularly with their mothers (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). This might, in part, be explained by the increased engagement that mothers have with their adult children and that daughters have with their parents. Based on these findings, it could be that the experience of mothers may differ dependent on the gender of their child.

Ethnicity.

Findings in relation to ethnicity are often specific to ethnic groups in the United States as this is where the majority of research originates. Within this research, stronger family relationships; in terms of reported contact and support, have been found within minority families (Black and Hispanic) relative to White American families (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Silverstein & Bengston, 1997). Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) suggest that this reflects the strong family cohesion that is typically associated with Black and Hispanic cultures. Despite this, relationships within Black and Hispanic families, as reported by mothers, appear to be characterised by greater ambivalence (Pillemer, Suitor, Mock, Sabir, Pardo & Sechrist, 2007; Umberson, 1992). For example, Umberson (1992) found in her study of intergenerational relations in America that Black adult children reported more social support from their mothers compared to White adult children. Black mothers however reported receiving less social support from their adult children and lower levels of parental satisfaction than White and Hispanic parents. This pattern of findings suggests a non-reciprocal exchange of social support between Black mothers and their children (as perceived by

mothers). Based on these findings is it possible that mothers' reported experiences of their relationship with their adult child may differ according to ethnic background.

Age.

Cross-sectional research has revealed that the nature of intergenerational relationships varies dependent on age of the parent/child, with older age typically associated with better intergenerational relationships (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). For example, Umberson (1992) found that older parents reported more frequent contact, greater support, less relationship strain and less parental dissatisfaction compared to younger parents. The changing nature of parent-child relationships over time (and with increasing age) was also demonstrated in research conducted by Silverstein and Bengston (1997) in the US. It was found that whilst younger children typically had 'tight-knit' relationships with their parents, older children were more likely to have 'sociable' or 'detached' relationships. The authors suggest that the changing nature of intergenerational relationships is likely to result from the demands experienced by adult children (e.g., work and their own family) which reduce the amount of time and attention that adult children can devote to relationships with parents. Equally however, the change in demands experienced by adult children is also likely to reduce parent expectations regarding the amount of contact and support that an adult child is able to provide. In a study conducted by van Gaalen and Dykstra (2006) in the Netherlands, it was found that relationships between adult children and their parents were most likely to be 'ambivalent' in early adulthood (child aged 18- 30 years) and 'obligatory' later in adulthood (child aged 31- 50 years). This is indicative of the sense of duty, or filial responsibility, to care for and support ageing parents (a sense which is stronger in some cultures than others), that is well evidenced in research

which focuses on the later years of intergenerational relations (Blieszner, 2006; Kobayashi & Funk, 2010).

The changing nature of intergenerational relations evident from cross-sectional research is confirmed with the findings of longitudinal research which considers change to parent-child relations in response to life events and transitions (e.g., changes in marital status of parent and/or child, changes to employment, change to health, birth of grandchild; see Aquilino, 1997; Hogerbrugge & Silverstein, 2014 and Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). Next I consider the life transition most relevant to my research, the partnering of a child, and how this impacts intergenerational relationships.

Child marital status.

In describing their findings regarding the impact of a child's marriage on intergenerational relations, Sarkisian and Gerstel (2008) describe marriage as a "greedy institution" (p. 361). Specifically, their analysis revealed that married adult children in the US were less likely to contact their parents, less likely to give or receive emotional care, and less likely to give or receive financial or practical assistance than those who had never been married or were divorced. This finding was consistent for both daughters and sons and indicates that adult children who are married have less time to devote to their relationships with their parents due to investment in multiple relationships. In terms of the *nature* of parent-adult child relationships however, Kaufman and Uhlenberg (1998) found that married adult children (in the US) indicated better relationship quality with their parents compared to adult daughters who had never been married, and adult sons and daughters who were divorced or separated. Aquilino (1997) reported similar findings; that parents of married children (in the US) reported higher levels of emotional closeness and shared activities, lower levels of conflict and fewer control issues than parents of never-married adult children. Taken

together, research suggests that whilst contact, instrumental support and exchange may reduce once a child marries, parents feel closer to, and more satisfied in their relationships with, married, adult children.

This pattern of findings, however, does not apply across all cultures. In research conducted by Yahirun and Hamplova (2014), marriage was found to influence mother-child relations in varied ways across different countries. The authors found that across all countries, married and single children had more contact with their mothers compared to children who resided with their partner (in a defacto relationship). Differences existed however, in terms of the amount of contact that married and single children had with their mother. In Northern and Central European countries, France and Belgium, married children were found to have less contact with their mothers compared to single children, whereas in Southern European countries, Poland, Ireland, Switzerland and the United States married children were found to have more contact with their mothers than single children. The authors explained this variation with reference to cultural differences in intergenerational norms (e.g., weak vs. strong family systems) as well as differing levels of state assistance for the elderly across different countries; again highlighting the importance of the broader socio-cultural context of family relationships.

In discussing the relevance of child marital status to the nature of intergenerational relationships, it is important to note the finding of Suitor and Pillemer (1988), who found that similarity in parent-child marital status, rather than marital status itself, influenced the nature of relationships between parents and their adult children. Specifically, if both parent and child were single, conflict in the relationship was low, however, if the parent was single and the adult child was in a relationship, conflict in the relationship was higher. This suggests that demands and

expectations may differ between parent and adult child when one is invested in another significant relationship and the other is not. Although this result provides an interesting perspective on the effect of marital status on the nature of intergenerational relations, it must be interpreted with caution as the sample of parents and adult children in Suitor and Pillemer's (1988) study resided together which may intensify differences in the demands and expectations that parents and their adult children have of their relationship.

Differences in the nature of intergenerational relations across marital status (e.g., single, defacto, married and divorced) suggest change to relationships over time; that as a child moves from single, to partnered, to married, the progression of their relationship impacts the nature of their relationship with their parents. This can be inferred from, but not confirmed with cross-sectional data because some third variable could explain apparent relationships between marital status and relationship quality (e.g., the nature of the child or the parent). Instead, longitudinal research provides more valid insight into the nature of change over time. Research of this nature, such as that conducted by Kaufman and Uhlenberg (1998), confirms that change to child marital status was related to significant changes in the parent-child relationship. Specifically, daughters who married within the five-year period of the study were more likely to report improvement in their relationships with both parents compared to daughters who remained happily married across the five-year period (who served as the reference group). Daughters who experienced the end of their marriage were more likely to report that their relationship with both parents had worsened over the five-year period. Sons who married within the five-year period of the study reported that their relationship with their parents was no better or worse compared to sons who remained happily married across the timeframe (the reference group). However, sons

who experienced the end of their marriage reported that their relationship with only their father had worsened. It could be that intergenerational relationships were influenced by parent expectations and/or concern for their child (i.e., marriage is likely to be associated with a sense of joy and/or relief whilst divorce may be associated with disappointment and/or concern). Alternatively, a child's divorce may be associated with greater dependence on parents, impacting negatively on the nature of the relationship.

The findings of the aforementioned research suggest that the development of a child's intimate relationship is a life transition that is associated with change to intergenerational relationships. What is key then, in the present research, is my ability to consider the issues specific to the interethnic nature of a child's intimate relationship, separate to those that might ordinarily be expected at the time of this life transition.

Understanding the nature of intergenerational relations.

From the previous research it is clear that the nature of intergenerational relations vary dependent on demographic factors such as gender, age and marital status. Less research has sought to explain *why* relationships vary in closeness, conflict and ambivalence dependent on these demographic factors. Next, I consider two areas of research that explore theoretical explanations of the nature of intergenerational relationships; research which considers the impact of child individuation, and research which considers the experience of parental ambivalence.

The impact of child individuation.

Theory and research, in which a child's move towards independence is considered, demonstrates that this transition influences the nature of parent - child relationships. Individuation theory, which explains a child's journey from childhood

to adolescence, proposes that parent-child relationships are characterised by a consistent and high degree of connectedness along with increasing levels of individuality as the child seeks to establish their independence (Buhl, 2008a; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). In describing the parent-child relationship over the course of the child's journey, Youniss and Smollar (1985) assert "as their movement towards individuality progresses, the old relationship becomes less suitable and the need for its revision becomes greater. The solution lies in transforming the relationship so that a balance is achieved between the two movements [individuality and connection]" (p. 13). In terms of balance it is suggested that moderate to high connectedness along with moderate to high individuality ensures the most beneficial relationship (Buhl, 2008b). Although typically applied to the period of adolescence (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), the theory has more recently been applied to parent adult-child relationships (Buhl 2008a/2008b), given the delay that has been noted in transitions to adulthood within Western societies over recent years (Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer & O'Brien, 2011).

Researchers who have applied individuation theory to the study of parent adult-child relationships have found that constructs relevant to individuation theory (i.e., emotional connectedness, cognitive connectedness and individuality) were significant, independent predictors of parent adult-child relationship quality (Buhl, 2008b). The research from Germany, which considered the parent-child relationship as reported by the adult child, revealed that within the mother-child relationship, greater emotional connectedness was associated with more satisfaction and intimacy, greater cognitive connectedness was associated with more satisfaction, more intimacy and less conflict, and greater individuality was associated with less intimacy and less conflict (Buhl, 2008b). Adult children reported that within the father-child relationship, greater emotional connectedness was associated with more satisfaction,

greater cognitive connectedness was associated with more satisfaction, more intimacy and less conflict, and greater individuality was associated with less conflict. The *interaction* between individuality and connectedness measures however, did not influence relationship quality, a finding that is inconsistent with individuation theory.

Mendonca and Fontaine (2013) also demonstrated the relevance of constructs central to individuation theory as significant predictors of parent- adult child relationships (as reported by adult children) in their research conducted in Portugal, but in a way opposite to that found by Buhl (2008b). Specifically, higher functional independence (used as a measure of individuality) was associated with less satisfaction in the parent- adult child relationship, whilst greater financial independence (also used as a measure of individuality) was associated with more criticism from parents (as perceived by the adult child). The contradictory findings of Buhl (2008b) and Mendonca and Fontaine (2013) might be explained by the use of different measures of individuality, however it is likely that the cultural context of each research study also accounts for the difference in findings. Mendonca and Fontaine's research was conducted in a collectivist, family-oriented culture (Portugal) whilst Buhl's research was conducted in Germany, a more individualist culture. In Portuguese culture, independent behaviours (such as functional and financial independence) are not as highly valued as they are in more individualist cultures. This poses an interesting question as to the validity of individuation/independence as a developmental goal of adolescence/early adulthood across various cultures. Evidently, the process of an adult child growing up, and (potentially) away from the family influences the nature of intergenerational relations, however the nature of this association is likely to vary dependent on cultural context.

Insights from ambivalence research.

The findings of research in which the experience of parental ambivalence is investigated, further illustrate how a child's negotiation of autonomy influences parent-adult child relationships and more specifically, the experience of parenting an adult child. Whilst individuation research considers the impact of the child's growing independence on the nature of the parent-child relationship from the perspective of the child, ambivalence research considers the transition from the perspective of the parent. This body of research indicates that the parent-child relationship and the experience of parents during a child's transition to adulthood are affected by 1) developmental expectations, 2) role expectations and 3) value congruence. I discuss each in turn.

With regard to developmental expectations, long history of empirical work demonstrates normative age-based expectations in terms of the timing of major life events or developmental milestones (e.g., the age at which a man should marry, the age at which a woman should have children etc.; see Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976 for an early review of this work; Neugarten, Moore & Lowe 1965). These norms have been found to vary both within cohorts; based on factors such as sex, ethnicity and social class (e.g., those from a higher social class typically report that certain life events are achieved at an older age), and across cohorts; due to social, economic and demographic change. This highlights the importance of considering contextual factors when discussing developmental norms. Despite variation in norms within and across cohorts, and despite inconsistency between what norms stipulate and trends of actual behaviour, the developmental expectations literature provides valuable insight into the factors that drive parent expectations.

It has been found that parents experience greater ambivalence when a child fails or is delayed in achieving normative milestones of adulthood, relative to those

whose adult child successfully achieves these milestones. For example, lower levels of ambivalence are experienced by parents whose adult child is married (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002; Pillemer et al., 2007; Pillemer et al., 2012), or has experienced success in romantic relationships (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit, 2010) in comparison to parents whose adult child has not achieved/experienced these successes. Aquilino (1997), who conducted longitudinal research in the US, also found that a child's successful achievement of certain adult milestones impacted positively on parent – adult child relationships. For example, parents of children who were married reported higher emotional closeness, more shared activities, lower conflict and fewer control issues than those reported by parents of never-married children. Furthermore, parents of adult children who were employed full-time reported less conflict and fewer parental control issues compared to parents of children not in the workforce. Parents of adult children enrolled in college reported closer relationships, higher levels of support, lower conflict and fewer control issues than parents of children who were not enrolled in any study. Leaving home, gaining employment and enrolling in college also resulted in a significant reduction in conflict.

A child's achievement of normative adult milestones fulfils the normative expectations that parents have for their child and symbolises their successful adjustment to adulthood (Aquilino, 1997; Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). Conversely, the non-achievement of these milestones is suggested to cause ambivalence as it violates the norms and expectations that parents have regarding the maturity of their children. As will be discussed in a later section of the review, this has important implications for parents in terms of self- perceived success as a parent and thus, parent identity in middle adulthood. Aquilino (1997) further suggests that a child's achievement of adult milestones impacts positively on the parent-child relationship because the relationship

moves towards mutuality; that is, the relationship is characterised by equality, cooperation and reciprocity as oppose to unilaterality which typifies the parent-child relationship in earlier years (Buhl, 2008a). Alternatively, it could be that some other variable explains a child's failure to achieve certain milestones, such as temperament, social adjustment, or mental health issues, which similarly affects their relationship with their parent.

A child's non-achievement of adulthood milestones (i.e., independence) also impacts on the parent role in middle adulthood. This is because normative expectations regarding a child's independence in early adulthood are accompanied by the parallel, normative expectation of a change to parent role; specifically, a reduction in primary caregiving and responsibility for their child (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). When a child does not move towards independence and the parent continues to provide a primary caregiving role, parents experience a sense of obligation to help or care for their child along with an expectation that responsibility for their child (i.e., financial responsibility, primary care) is no longer a core requirement of their role at this stage of parenting (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002). Hence, conflict and feelings of ambivalence are understood to result from the violation of expectations regarding the parent role in middle adulthood. This is supported by research findings which indicate that parent-adult child relationships are characterised by higher levels of conflict and ambivalence when an adult child is in debt (Szydlik, 2008), when the parent continues to provide financial assistance to their adult child (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002), and when the adult child experiences physical health and emotional problems, and remains dependent on their parent for support (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit, 2010; Pillemer et al., 2007; Szydlik, 2008). Indeed, the work of Kiecolt, Blieszner and Savla (2011) suggests that

a child's continued dependence on a parent is a stronger source of parental ambivalence than is the child's non-achievement of adult statuses.

Role expectations were also implicated in the experience of parental ambivalence in research conducted by Peters, Hooker and Zvonkovic (2006) who sought to identify the sources of ambivalence in parent relationships with their adult children. Interviews with 17 older parents, with an average age of 75, revealed two key sources of ambivalence. First, parents experienced ambivalence due to their child's busyness; they were happy that their child was living a successful life but wanted to spend more time with their child. Second, parents experienced ambivalence about their child's life choices; they wanted to guide and advise their children about certain matters in their lives (e.g., financial matters, romantic relationships, and parenting) but were aware that they should limit their involvement in these matters as it was no longer perceived to be their role to actively involve themselves in their adult child's lives. Hence, adjustment to the changing nature of the parent role in later adulthood, in order to fit role expectations, was a source of ambivalence for parents in their later adulthood.

A final factor found within ambivalence research to influence the nature of intergenerational relations is value congruence. It has been found in research which assesses value congruence (by asking about similarity in general views and opinions about life), that if mothers perceive their child's values to be consistent with theirs, they are more likely to indicate a greater degree of closeness (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002) and less ambivalence in their relationship with their child (Pillemer et al., 2007). Pillemer et al. (2012) replicated these results with a sample of mothers and fathers but found that value similarity was more important in explaining ambivalence experienced by mothers compared to fathers. The importance of value congruence demonstrated in

these studies indicates the relevance of a key developmental task for parents at this stage of life, that being generativity, in that congruence in values increases the likelihood that values will be maintained and transmitted from one generation to the next.

Taken together, explanations of intergenerational relations provided by theory and research relating to individuation and ambivalence, highlight three key areas of literature relevant to the experience of parents in middle adulthood that warrant further exploration. These are; parent role in middle adulthood, parent identity in middle adulthood and the developmental tasks of midlife. Research relevant to these topics will now be reviewed.

Parent role in middle adulthood.

The parenting role has been conceptualised in various ways; as a developmental stage (Rossi, 1968), and as a lifelong role (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Eisenhandler, 1992; Nydegger, 1991). The lack of research regarding parenting in middle adulthood means that knowledge regarding the parent role during midlife remains relatively unchartered territory. A scant body of literature focusses specifically on the parent role during middle adulthood (e.g., Blieszner & Mancini, 1987 and Eisenhandler, 1992). Insight can also be drawn from isolated pockets of research such as the theoretically-based intergenerational research canvassed in the preceding section (i.e., the experience of parental ambivalence), and research regarding the 'empty nest' experience. Drawing on these areas of research I provide an overview of what is known about the parenting role in middle adulthood; that the parent role continues but that the nature of the role changes and these changes have an impact on parent identity and continued development. I first discuss continuity and change in the parent role over time (i.e. generations), before moving to a discussion of

continuity and change in the role across the lifespan. I then discuss the relevance of the role to parent identity, before discussing developmental tasks associated with the role. I conclude the section with an acknowledgement of cultural variation in parenting, which, although mentioned throughout the review, is a point deserving of focussed discussion.

Continuity and change in the parenting role.

Whilst the practice of human parenting has a long history, the nature of the role has changed considerably over time; shaped by social, cultural and historical factors (The Social Issues Research Centre, 2011). Changing conditions experienced from generation to generation impact on the role that is assumed by parents. Of particular relevance to the present research is the dramatic change to the role of mothers over time. In particular, mothers in Western societies (e.g., Australia, where my research was conducted), now spend more time in paid employment and less time completing home duties than ever before (PEW Research Centre, 2013). These changes have occurred due to increased rights, industrial development, changes to family structure (e.g., higher rates of separation), and fluctuating economic pressures. Change has increased the opportunity for, the need for and the likelihood that women will participate in paid employment, often in addition to their role as mother (Adelmann, Antonuci, Crohan & Coleman, 1989; PEW Research Centre, 2013; The Social Issues Research Centre, 2011). The changing nature of the role of mothers is important to acknowledge when reviewing research that is conducted generations apart, and particularly when considering the importance of parenting to the identity of mothers during the middle years of parenting.

Just as the parenting role has changed over generations, the nature of the role changes over an individual's lifespan. Empirical understanding of the continued and

changing nature of the parent role has developed over time. In an early paper, Rossi (1968) described four stages of the parent role; anticipation, honeymoon, plateau and disengagement/termination, and proposed that for many parents the marriage of their adult child symbolises the "psychological termination of the active parental role" (p. 30); an assertion that has particular relevance to the present research. Subsequent research has since demonstrated that the parent role does not in fact terminate in the manner proposed by Rossi but is a role which continues throughout middle and later adulthood (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Eisenhandler, 1992; Levitzki, 2009; Nydegger, 1991). In conceptualising the on-going nature of the parent role, Nydegger (1991) uses the phrase 'role course' in reference to the life course of the parent role. This reference not only depicts the on-going nature of the role, but the changing nature of the role; just as change is inherent to the life course, so too is it inherent to the role of parenting.

The most common change described in literature regarding the parenting role over time is a reduction in the active involvement and influence of parents in the lives of adult children (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Eisenhandler, 1992). Accompanying this, parents have described a reduction in feelings of responsibility for their adult children (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987). Whilst parents acknowledge a reduction in these aspects of their parenting role, they have also described that their role is characterised by an increased sense of friendship (Nydegger & Mittness, 1996) and equality (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987); consistent with the concept of mutuality described by Aquilino (1997). These changes represent adjustment to a child's growing autonomy, as a child becomes more independent, the parent withdraws from (or is pushed out of) an active parenting role. Despite these changes, parents have reported a continued sense of love for their child, interest in the life and wellbeing of

their child (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987) and the on-going provision of assistance and emotional support (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Nydegger & Mittness, 1996).

The nature of this transition, from an active to a less active parenting role, was considered in longitudinal research conducted by Swartz and colleagues (2011) in the US. The research, which was focussed on the period that children typically advance towards adulthood (age 24-32), highlighted the responsive nature of the parenting role during this transitional phase. Specifically, it was found that parents provided scaffolds for their children, in the form of economic and housing support (i.e., co-residence), leading up to their child's transition to adulthood. These supports continued if children pursued education (i.e., scaffolds remained) to enable the further development of their child however, support decreased (i.e., scaffolds were taken away) as adult children aged and started to achieve certain milestones of adulthood and develop independence (e.g., an intimate relationship, employment). Parents, however, reinstated support, that is, acted as a safety net, in times of need (e.g., during relationship break-ups, serious injury/illness, loss of employment) during this specific age period during which their child was attempting to (and expected to) transition to adulthood (Swartz et al., 2011). Based on earlier discussions, there is little doubt that ambivalence is likely to be experienced by parents when scaffolds and/or safety nets are required beyond the age at which children are expected to achieve independence (that being, based on Swartz's study, in a child's early to mid-30's).

Parenting as a source of identity.

Changes to the parenting role impact on a parent's sense of identity. Evidence of this originates from research regarding the 'empty-nest' period of adulthood, once all children have left the family home. Early research regarding this period suggested that parents, particularly mothers, experience significant difficulty in dealing with the

independence of their child/ren and the change in parent role that accompanies this transition. This research evidenced experiences of grief, sadness and depression (Borland, 1982; Lippert, 1997; Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009; Raup & Myers, 1989); the experience of which was labelled, 'empty nest syndrome'. The syndrome is suggested to be a consequence of a crisis of identity resulting from the loss of the active role of parent and a lack of alternative roles from which a sense of identity can be derived (Borland, 1982). Role theory provides an explanation as to why a crisis of identity may arise from the loss of (or rather the change to) the parent role; a sense of identity is derived from the roles that an individual assumes throughout life and therefore, any change to or loss of role will impact one's sense of identity (Davis, 1966).

More recently, greater complexity and variability in parent experiences of the empty nest period have been evidenced; influenced by factors such as engagement in other roles (e.g., occupational status), ethnicity (discussed later in this review), cohort/generation (due to changes in parenting roles over time), number of children, age of parent, health of parent and the nature of the relationship between parent and child, to name a few (Adelmann, Antonucci, Crohan & Coleman, 1989; Bouchard, 2014; Mitchell & Lovegreen, 2009; Mitchell & Wister, 2015). More recent research relating to the 'empty nest' experience also demonstrates positive consequences for parents resulting from their child's independence. For example, the majority of parents in Mitchell and Lovegreen's (2009) research reported positive outcomes following the departure of children from the family home, including; increased personal growth, improved marital relations, improved leisure time and feelings of mastery in successfully raising and launching their children. The concept of role strain relief provides some explanation of these findings in that parenting is a role characterised

by strain so, when the intensity of the role reduces (i.e., when children leave), the strain of the role is lessened, leading to positive outcomes for parents (Bouchard, 2014).

The relevance of parent age in explaining variation in the experience of 'empty nest' is provided by research findings which suggest that over time the parent role becomes less important to parent identity. For example, although a majority of parents in Blieszner and Mancini's (1987) study (aged 55 – 94; mode 65-74) indicated a continuation of the parenting role, they also indicated that the role was no longer needed or important to their construction of self-identity or their day to day activities. Eisenhandler (1992) asserts that "the assumption that the lifelong status and role of parent is paramount in the self-identity of older adults is one that deserves scrutiny rather than complacent acceptance" (p. 254). She concludes that in later life, parenting takes the form of "cameo appearances while new and emerging roles and statuses are given more attention" (p. 255); replacing parenting as a dominant source of identity for older adults (Eisenhandler, 1992). The importance of investment in alterative roles is demonstrated by research findings which show that this investment is critical to parent well-being (Silverberg, 1996), parent- child relationships (Fingerman, Chen, Hay, Cichy & Leftowitz, 2006) and development (Nydegger, 1991) in later life. For example, Fingerman, Chen, Hay, Cichy and Leftowitz (2006) found that parental ambivalence towards their adult child was lower when the parent was invested in multiple roles, such that the parent was not wholly defined by their role as a parent. The authors stated that "these [additional] roles may represent arenas in which they [the parent] manifest autonomy" (p. 158). Taken together, research suggests that whilst changes to the parenting role might impact on identity during a brief transitional phase, in most cases, parents adjust to the change in their role. For most, the parenting role becomes less important to their identity in later life as they establish themselves

in other roles that become central, and thus more meaningful, in later adulthood. For others, adjustment post the active period of parenting is more difficult, which impacts negatively on wellbeing and development (evident from those who report experiences symptomatic of 'empty-nest syndrome').

Just as the role of parent is important to identity in middle adulthood, so too are the outcomes and successes of adult children. Parents spend much of their adult life nurturing and developing their children, and so, it is understandable that the decisions and outcomes of children serve as an important lens through which parents assess themselves and their success in what has been a major role in their life. Ryff, Lee, Essex and Schmutte (1994) assert that a central issue of parenting in middle adulthood is evaluating how children have "turned out" (p. 195). In research conducted with parents during middle adulthood (a mean age of 53.7 years), Ryff et al. demonstrated a relationship between parent evaluations of their child's outcomes and their own evaluation of self. Parents who perceived their child as well-adjusted (personally and socially) demonstrated higher levels of self-acceptance, a greater sense of purpose in life, a greater sense of environmental mastery, greater personal growth (feelings of continued development and self-realization), lower levels of depression and more positive relations with others compared to parents who perceived that their child was less well adjusted. Parents who indicated their child's success in attaining education and employment demonstrated higher self-acceptance, a greater sense of purpose in life, greater personal growth and more positive relations with others compared to parents who indicated less success in their child's attainments (education and employment; Ryff et al., 1994). Of course, the correlational nature of this research means it is not possible to infer causation as it could be that the successes

of an adult child reflect the psychological wellbeing and adjustment of parents (i.e., well-adjusted parents may be more likely to have successful children).

Mitchell (2010) further demonstrated how the achievements and outcomes of adult children are related to parent happiness and self-evaluations. Parents aged 40 to 86 (mean age = 56.9 years) indicated happiness in their role as a parent when their child 1) achieves developmental success (discussed as the achievement of milestones in accordance with normative timetables, discussed earlier) and 2) when their child is perceived to be a 'good person' (e.g., "'good kids' who 'do not cause trouble'" (p. 334) and contribute to society in a positive way). Consistent with the findings of Ryff et al. (1994), the successes of adult children served as a reflection of parent effort, for example one parent indicated "I am happy that my children are happy, functioning adults who are successful. I look at them and think I've done something right" (Mitchell, 2010, p. 334). Another stated "my children are good people. We did well, they are good and successful" (p. 334). The importance of raising good children who contribute to society in a positive way reflects the importance of child outcomes to parent development via the goal of generativity (i.e., contribution to future generations). This will be discussed in further detail shortly.

Together, Ryff et al. (1994) and Mitchell (2010) demonstrate the relevance of adult child outcomes for parents in terms of self-evaluation and psychological wellbeing. It must be noted however, in light of research regarding the relevance of parent identity throughout middle to late adulthood, that these findings are derived from samples of midlife parents. Just as the role of parent becomes progressively less important to parent identity over time, it is possible that the achievements of adult children also become less important, as parents move into later adulthood and invest more time and focus on other roles and interests. This was evident from research

conducted by Eisenhandler who noted that whilst elderly parents spoke with pride about the achievements of their adult children, "this pride was not accompanied by a vicarious overidentification that is often associated with younger and middle-aged parents" (p. 248).

Letting go: A key developmental task for parents.

As described above, a key aspect of parenting in middle adulthood is the transition from an active role of parenting to a less active role. To make this transition parents must let go of their existing role and negotiate a new role and new relationship with their child. Hence, a key developmental task for parents, which corresponds with their child's task of establishing autonomy, is to 'let go'. Although much has been written about this concept in popular literature (e.g., online forums, self-help books for parents), less has been written from an academic perspective. That which has been written asserts that 'letting go' is not a rejection or severance of ties with a child. Instead, as described by De Vaus (1994, p. 186):

> "Letting go involves the differentiation of two people. It involves the capacity to see the other person as a person in one's own right. It is not the denial of a relationship with the other person but the assertion of a particular type of relationship, one in which the other person is valued for his or her own sake and in which one is able to act independently of the other person's approval or expectations."

Research regarding 'letting go' indicates that the task is experienced by parents in different ways. For example, qualitative research conducted by Kloep and Hendry (2010) with 59 mid-life parents (aged 34-62) in Britain revealed that whilst the theme of 'letting go' was common to all participants, four main styles of letting go were evident. Some parents were happy to let go, others reluctantly let go, the majority

made active attempts to hold on to their child and delay their independence, whilst for a minority, the experience was characterised by conflict, as parents engaged in power fights with their child in attempts to maintain parental authority. In explaining this variation, the authors state that the experience of letting go was related to parent approval of the choices of their child. If the parent approved of their child's decisions, they enjoyed the experience of letting go and felt no need to interfere or maintain parental authority. If, however, the parent did not approve of their child's decisions, the task of letting go was more likely to be characterised by conflict and feelings of hostility. This assertion highlights discrepancy in the conceptualisation of 'letting go' as discussed by De Vaus (1994) and Kloep and Hendry (2010). Specifically, letting go, as defined by De Vaus, does not require approval of the life choices of a child, only an acceptance and respect that a child's decisions are theirs to make. Yet according to Kloep and Hendry, the process of letting go was hindered when parents did not approve of their child's decision. These inconsistencies, as to whether approval of a child's decision is required in order to let go (as asserted by Kloep & Hendry), or whether letting go means that approval of a child's decisions is no longer relevant to the parent (as asserted DeVaus) creates ambiguity regarding the process of 'letting go'.

The need to maintain the parental role, evident from a proportion of parents in Kloep and Hendry's research who were reluctant to let go and attempted to hold on to the parenting role, could be explained by a lack of involvement in other roles. Consequently, the parent role continued to provide a sense of purpose and identity, which parents may have found hard to relinquish. As discussed earlier with regard to the 'empty nest' experience, difficulty in 'letting go' not only impacts negatively on parent wellbeing and relationships with adult children, it also impacts on parent

development. Nydegger (1991) asserts that 'letting go' is critical to achieving maturity in the parent role. Drawing on research conducted with fathers, Nydegger developed the concept of paternal maturity to refer to the change that occurs within the paternal role over the course of parenting, which ultimately leads to personal growth. Nydegger proposed two elements that enable the development of paternal maturity; distancing and comprehending. Distancing involves acceptance and encouragement of a child's efforts to distance themselves from the family, as well as a father's efforts to distance himself from his children and from the role of father "for his life is not defined solely by the parental role; he must look forward to an altered relationship and reduced involvement" (p. 105). Comprehending requires that a father understand the social world within which their child lives. Nydegger, whose work relates only to fathers, suggests that mothers' experience of parental maturity is likely to differ with regard to "pace and substance" (p. 104; i.e. what parental maturity looks like and how it develops in terms of timing and rate) relative to the experience she has documented for fathers. Nonetheless, 'letting go' and 'distancing' in the role of parent, represent key tasks or challenges in the midlife of parents.

Parenting and generativity.

Tasks and challenges are inherent to most theories of adult development; the successful resolution of which are said to promote developmental growth. Indeed, Eisenhandler (1992; with reference to Gutmann), suggests "an important task of later life may be to embrace this paradoxical role and status of 'emeritus parent' (Gutmann, 1987) in a way that promotes growth in individual lives and in intergenerational relationships" (p. 255). Hence the task of 'letting go' and developing maturity in the

parent role can be regarded as a critical developmental task[11] specific to the parenting role, which promotes the continued development of the parent as an individual.

During middle adulthood, when parents would normally experience the task of 'letting go', the developmental task discussed by a number of key adult developmental theorists is the achievement of generativity. Erikson (1950), founder of one of the most renowned theories of individual development; the theory of psychosocial development, describes generativity as an adult's desire to establish and guide the next generation (Erikson, 1980). Vaillant (1977; 2012) defines generativity as "the wish and the capacity to foster and guide the next generations (not only one's own adolescents) to independence" (p. 154). Levinson (1978) proposes that middle adulthood (40-65) is characterised by a sense of mortality and a desire for immortality. This desire for immortality manifests as a desire to leave a legacy (Levinson, 1978), a concept that aligns with Erikson's concept of generativity.

Since these early theoretical discussions, the concept of generativity has been the subject of much empirical investigation and further theoretical development. In terms of empirical investigation, numerous authors have demonstrated the relevance of generativity to positive psychological outcomes in middle adulthood (e.g., psychological functioning, life satisfaction and wellbeing; James & Zarrett, 2006; McAdams, de St. Aubin & Logan, 1993; Peterson & Klohnen, 1995). In terms of theoretical development, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) extended the concept to include sources of generative motivation, plans to achieve generativity and specific actions that enable the achievement of generativity. Generative actions include 1) creating a legacy (e.g., developing a product, producing a child), 2) maintaining a

[11] Developmental tasks are defined as "age-graded, normative tasks based on societal expectations about the developmental milestones that should be reached in specific life phases" (Hutteman et al., 2014, p. 267).

legacy (e.g., preserving traditions, nurturing younger generations) and 3) offering that which has been created or maintained to others (e.g., passing traditions to future generations, granting autonomy to children). This theoretical extension of the concept demonstrates that generativity is a complex and multifaceted construct that is able to be achieved in a variety of ways.

The experience most commonly associated with the achievement of generativity, and that which is at the heart of the present research, is parenting. In discussing the experience of a father, Levinson states;

> "His offspring take their place in the adult world. He experiences their self-development and attainments as the fruits of his early adult labors. Their lives, their personal satisfactions, accomplishments and contributions are an essential part of his legacy. He will live on partly through them" (1978, p. 219).

Children provide a means through which a legacy can be established (both biological and in the form of values, traditions and beliefs), nurtured, and then offered to others, as contributing members of society. Hence, parenting incorporates each of the generative actions described by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992), hence why parenting is considered a highly generative act.

It is the third generative act, of 'offering' which is of most relevance to the middle years of parenthood, as a child moves towards adulthood, and parents face the task of 'letting go'. The act of 'offering', as described by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) involves the "offering up of that which has been created or maintained, passing something or someone on to the next generation as a gift, granting the gift its own autonomy and freedom" (p.1006). The authors provide the following example to illustrate their point;

> "The truly generative father is both a self-aggrandizing creator and a self-sacrificing giver. Biologically and socially, he creates a child in his own image, working hard and long to promote the development of that child and to nurture all that is good and desirable in the child. But he must eventually grant the child his or her own autonomy, letting go when the time is right, letting the child develop his or her own identity, make his or her own decisions and commitments, and ultimately create those offerings of generativity that will distinguish that child as someone who was "given birth to" in order to "give birth to." (p. 1006).

Although the above quote, and the earlier quote provided by Levinson, is written with a focus on fathers, both capture the generative nature of the parenting role which, presumably, also applies to mothers.

Evident from this passage are clear parallels between the concept of 'offering up' as discussed by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) and 'letting go' as discussed by De Vaus (1994). In fact, McAdams and de St. Aubin, use the phrase 'letting go' to explain the act of 'offering'. In a sense, 'letting go' is described as the process that is required to fulfil the generative act of 'offering', in the context of parenting; a process of differentiation and adjustment in roles, perceptions and relationships. McAdams and de St. Aubin's extension of the concept of generativity supports the idea that the task of 'letting go' is an important means through which a parent is able to progress their own individual development.

In discussing the task of 'letting go' in the role of parent in order to achieve generativity, it is pertinent to mention the role of grand-parenting. The role of grandparent has become increasingly relevant to parents in middle to later adulthood due to changes in social demography (e.g. increased life expectancy) and changes in

family forms and structure (e.g. increased single-parent households, which encourage increased assistance from extended family members; Bengston, 2001). In this context, although parents may understand the importance of letting go in the parent role, they may still hold strong to the idea of mediated types of parenting via the role of grandparent. Whilst research regarding the nature of the grandparent role indicates a wide range of grand-parenting roles/relationships, ranging from highly involved and influential through to detached and uninvolved (Baydar & Brookes-Gunn, 1998; Mueller, Wilhelm & Elder Jr, 2002; Spence, Black & Adams, 2001), research regarding expectations of the grandparent role indicates that most grandparents see their role as an extension of the parenting role (Kemp, 2004). Grandparents in Kemp's (2004) research, for example, reported a sense of responsibility for their grandchildren and expected to provide social, emotional and/or instrumental support to their family. This expectation for continued involvement in the life of adult children and grandchildren can be associated with the developmental task of achieving generativity. The role of grand-parenting is considered a highly generative role, with research demonstrating the importance of the role to achieving developmental needs in later life (Thiele & Whelan, 2008).

Cultural variation in the experience of parenting adult children.

In discussing the parent role, concepts of 'normative' expectations, 'normative' change and the developmental task of letting go, attention must be directed to the cultural context of the parenting experience. This is necessary given widespread acknowledgment that the roles parents assume, the norms that guide parenting, the goals and expectations that parents have for their children and the way in which parents parent are strongly influenced by social norms and cultural values (Crippen & Brew, 2007; Levitzki, 2009). Much of the research regarding parenting in

middle adulthood that indicates the need for separation, the value of independence and the task of 'letting go', originates from North America and most has been conducted with White or American-born parents. Endorsement of values such as independence and autonomy has long been suggested to be culturally influenced, such that individualist cultures are more likely to endorse such values, whilst collectivist cultures are more likely to support the values of dependence and relatedness (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008).

It is now understood that the values of independence/autonomy and dependence/relatedness are not specific to particular cultural groups (Bekker, Arends-Toth & Croon, 2011; Schwartz, 1990) and instead are likely to co-exist (Ozdikmenli-Demir & Sayil, 2009; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Despite this, it is important to acknowledge that the experience and expectations of White parents in North America may not translate to other contexts. This was evident in research discussed earlier in the review, conducted by Mendonca and Fontaine (2013) in Portugal who found that continued co-residence (i.e., child living with parents) did not impact negatively on parent-child relationships in contrast to what has been found in Western-based research. This suggests that prolonged co-residence is a cultural norm in Southern European countries, and provides an example of how the findings of research regarding parenting cannot necessarily be applied from one cultural context to another.

Further evidence of cultural variation in expectations and experiences of parenting an adult child was provided in research conducted by Mitchell and Lovegreen (2004). The authors examined the 'nest leaving' experiences of parents from four cultural groups living in Canada; British, Southern European, Indo/East Indians and Chinese. Results indicated that Indo/East Indian parents were more likely to report difficulty with the transition compared to parents belonging to other cultural

groups. Specifically, Indo/East Indian parents reported greater emotional, social and physical loss as a result of their child's move from the family home, describing their previous relationship with their child as "severed" (p. 1662).

Difficulty in adjustment amongst Indo/East Indian parents was explained with reference to cultural variation in normative expectations regarding leaving the family home (i.e., if, when and how children should leave). The greater difficulty experienced by Indo/East Indian parents was explained by the fact that as an immigrant group, Indo/East Indians are less acculturated to Canadian society and maintain more traditional views about departure from the family home. For example, daughters are expected to leave the family home in order to marry and so the act of leaving home to seek independence makes for a more difficult transition for parents. Also, in traditional Indo- East Indian culture, the eldest son remains in the family home with his wife after marriage. In the Canadian context however, due to acculturation to Canadian cultural norms, sons of Indo-Eastern Indian heritage increasingly live independently of their family, causing difficulty for the parents they leave behind. This comparison of cultural groups, provided by Mitchell and Lovegreen (2004), offers valuable insight into cultural aspects of parenting; that the experience of parenting and the expectations that are held by parents are influenced by cultural traditions, culturally defined normative timetables and expectations and, for immigrant families, the process of acculturation.

Given that cultural context is an important determinant of parenting values and expectations (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009), a body of theory and research has considered how migration impacts the values that are endorsed by parents. This literature discusses the difficulties experienced by immigrant parents who must negotiate the maintenance of their heritage culture, whilst incorporating elements of

their host culture (Berry et al., 2002). Research indicates that following migration, the maintenance of cultural values is impacted by strength of affiliation with the culture-of-origin as well as exposure to, and the potential adoption of values that are dominant within the host culture (Kwak, 2003; Huang & Lamb, 2015; Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Research demonstrates that the degree to which culture-of-origin values are maintained and/or cultural values of the host culture are adopted depends on the acculturation attitude adopted by the parent (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Those who adopt an 'integration' orientation are less likely to endorse values associated with their culture of origin and more likely to endorse the values of their host culture whilst those who adopt a 'separation' orientation are more likely to endorse values associated with their culture of origin and less likely to endorse the values of their host culture (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Research also indicates that parents actively choose the values they wish to pass on to their children from their culture-of-origin, as well as the values which they perceive as endorsed within and important to their child's adaptation and success in the host culture (Tam & Lee, 2010; Tam, Lee, Kim, Li & Chao, 2012; Vedder, Berry, Sabatier & Sam, 2009).These findings have important implications in terms of intergenerational transmission of values given that, following migration, and in the absence of horizontal and orthogonal influences on value transmission, the transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next is largely dependent on vertical transmission, from parent to child (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002; Phalet & Schönpflug, 2001). Consequently, the act of migration and the process of parent acculturation represent potential threats to the intergenerational transmission of values.

In the preceding review I have considered the experience of parenting an adult child and highlighted issues relevant to individual adult development that may be of

significance in explaining mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. The focus of this research has been on the parent, as an individual, and development across the middle years of parenting. In the next section of this chapter I take a step back and review research which considers social attitudes towards interethnic/interracial marriage. I review this literature as it will likely provide some additional insight into the experiences of mothers; for example, are women generally supportive of interracial marriage compared to me? Does age account for variation in attitude? and how might the broader social content influence mothers' experiences of their adult child's interethnic relationship? I explore these issues next.

Social Attitudes Towards Interethnic/Interracial Relationships

Research which examines social attitudes towards interethnic/interracial marriage is conducted, primarily, to provide an indication of social tolerance and intergroup relations (Herman & Campbell, 2012); that is, how members of one group feel about members of out-groups (groups to which the individual does not belong). If members of one ethnic group are willing to marry members of another ethnic group, it is suggested that the group is tolerated and that intergroup relations are positive. My review of this research has identified that demographic factors, contact with ethnic out-groups, perceptions of threat and history of intergroup relations influence social attitudes towards interracial marriage. Many of these factors also influence attitudes towards ethnic out-groups more broadly.

In reviewing this body of research I acknowledge that the experience of mothers whose child is (or has been) involved in an interethnic relationship differs to the experience of social survey respondents who are asked about hypothetical interracial marriages. Firstly, for mothers, the relationship has occurred rather than is proposed. Secondly, the relationship involves their immediate offspring rather than an

abstract other, or an unidentified close relative or family member (commonly used survey items when assessing interracial attitudes). These differences must be considered when reflecting on the relevance of research findings to the experience of mothers at the focus of this research.[12] I also acknowledge that a large majority of the research in this review was conducted in the United States. The ethnic/racial composition of the population and the history of race relations in the United States differ substantially to the population and history of race relations in Australia. Despite these acknowledgements it is useful to review what is known about the factors that influence social attitudes towards interethnic marriage, particularly given the influence of social context and social attitudes on individual attitudes (see Prislin & Wood, 2005).

Before continuing with the review, I wish to acknowledge two methodological issues that became evident through my review of research regarding social attitudes towards interracial/interethnic unions. The first methodological issue is that the large majority of research is focussed on attitudes towards interethnic/interracial *marriage*; much less considers attitudes towards other forms of intimate relationships (e.g., dating, cohabiting couples). This is relevant because attitudes may differ dependent on relationship type. Marriage represents a socially and legally sanctioned partnership and generally signifies a long term commitment. The institution of marriage is strongly associated with religious ideals and has legal implications, which differs to less serious relationships such as dating (Yancey, 2007). Despite this, it was found in one US study in which White attitudes towards various types of interracial relationships were considered (dating, cohabiting, marriage and childrearing with an African American

[12] This, in part, provides the rationale for my research; as there is a dearth of research which considers the experiences of parents whose child has, in fact, partnered with an individual from an ethnic background that differs to their own.

or an Asian American person), that for the majority of respondents, attitudes were consistent across different relationship types (Herman & Campbell, 2012). That is, a person who was supportive of interracial marriage was also likely to be supportive of interracial dating, cohabitation and child-rearing. This is not surprising given that intimate relationships progress along a continuum; therefore, it is likely that opposition to more serious relationship types (e.g., marriage) will be strongly related to opposition to less serious relationships (e.g., dating) and vice versa. Herman and Campbell (2012) also found that the factors associated with support or opposition to interracial relationships (e.g., age, gender, political conservatism) influenced attitudes in similar ways across relationship types. Therefore, what we learn from the research reviewed below, most of which is focused on interethnic/interracial *marriage,* can be generalised to other relationship types, and possibly to the experiences of mothers who participated in the present research (albeit with some caution), whose children were involved in various types of intimate, interethnic relationships (e.g., dating, defacto and married).

The second methodological issue that is relevant to note is that attitudes towards interethnic/interracial marriage/relationships are not measured consistently. Some survey questions ask about support for legislation prohibiting interracial marriage, whilst others assess support for interracial marriage as a general concept (e.g., "Do you support interracial marriage?"). Some survey questions assess attitudes in a more specific sense, in which the person involved in the relationship is close in proximity to the respondent (e.g., "How would you feel if a close relative/family member was to marry a/an [insert racial/ethnic group here]"). Finally, some surveys assess personal willingness to engage in an interracial/interethnic relationship. Researchers have found that when the same respondents are asked about their support

for interracial marriage across multiple questions, respondent support varies dependent on the nature of the question (i.e., specific vs. general, abstract vs. concrete, support for interracial marriage vs. support for law which prohibits interracial marriage). People tend to be more supportive of the concept of interracial marriage when measured as opposition to laws which prohibit interracial marriage (which may in fact reflect opposition to government interference in marriage choices), than they are when asked about a family member marrying interracially (Campbell & Herman, 2015). Research also demonstrates that whilst support for the general concept of interracial marriage might be high, respondents often express an unwillingness to engage in an interracial relationship themselves (Herman & Campbell, 2012).[13] In essence, the more abstract the concept of interracial marriage, and the further the hypothesised relationship is from the respondent, the more accepting they are of the concept of interracial marriage. As the concept becomes closer, more concrete and more relevant to them personally, respondents become more opposed to the concept. This finding is relevant when considering the experiences of mothers whose child establishes an interracial marriage. Specifically, mothers may be accepting of interethnic relationships in general, but struggle with the idea that their child is involved in an interethnic relationship. That is, mothers may experience some cognitive dissonance when faced with their child's interethnic relationship. Alternatively, mothers may be able to reconcile their personal experience of their child's interethnic relationship through consideration of their acceptance of interethnic relationships in principle and when it involves others.

[13] This may go some way to explaining the disparity between support for interracial marriage and actual prevalence of interracial marriage. Whilst 83% of Whites and 96% of Blacks approved of Black/White marriage in 2011 (Jones & Saad, 2013), only 11.9% of all new marriages in the United States were Black/White partnerships during the year 2010 (Wang, 2012). Other explanations of the disparity in attitude toward interracial marriage and rates of interracial marriage may be opportunity; specifically, significant differences in relative group size and/or limited access to out-group members.

Comparison of question types also reveals that just as attitudes differ dependent on the nature of the question, so too do the factors that explain attitudes towards interracial relationships. For example, Herman and Campbell (2012) found no gender difference in support for the concept of interracial relationships when asked in a general sense, but did find a gender difference in willingness to personally engage in various interracial relationships (with women less willing than men). Such disparities demonstrate the need to carefully consider the methodology employed when comparing findings across studies.

Factors that influence attitudes towards interracial marriage.

Large scale, social trend surveys (e.g., the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Gallup Poll, both conducted in the US), in addition to smaller scale studies involving community or student samples, reveal a number of factors that influence attitudes towards interracial marriage. I discuss the influence of various individual and group-level factors below. I begin with an overview of individual, demographic factors because this discussion highlights the relevance of social/group-level factors which are considered later in the review.

Demographic factors and attitudes towards interracial marriage.

Analyses that focus on the influence of demographic characteristics on attitudes towards interracial marriage demonstrate that support for interracial marriage tends to be higher amongst younger age cohorts (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald, 2004; Garcia, Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2015; Golebiowska, 2007; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005), those with a higher level of education (Garcia, Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2015; Golebiowska, 2007; Jacobson & Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005; Yancey & Emerson, 2001) and those with a higher level of income (Garcia, Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2015; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005). A finding

specific to the United States is region, with those living in the South less likely to support interracial marriage relative to those who live in the West (Golebiowska, 2007; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005). This finding is suggested to reflect the history of intergroup relations between Blacks and Whites in the South which is characterised by tension, conflict and oppression. This highlights the relevance of intergroup history in explaining attitudes toward interracial marriage and thus will be discussed later in the review. Another finding related to location is that those who reside in urban areas are more likely to be supportive of interracial marriage compared to those who reside in rural areas (Golebiowska, 2007). This finding suggests the importance of intergroup contact as relevant to attitudes (as the likelihood of intergroup contact increases in urban locations), which again will be discussed in more detail, later in the review.

With regard to political party identification, those who support conservative parties (e.g., the Republican party in the United States) are less likely to support interracial marriage relative to those who support more liberal parties (e.g., the Democrat party in the United States; Golebiowska, 2007; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005). This finding demonstrates the relevance of underlying values and personality traits which are typically associated with political conservatism. Those who support more conservative political views typically demonstrate personality characteristics of right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996). An underlying principle of right-wing authoritarianism is opposition to any threat to social convention (e.g., interracial marriage as a threat to homogamy; Altemeyer, 1996). Hence, the significance of political conservatism in predicting attitudes towards interracial marriage highlights the relevance of personality-based constructs as well as perceived threat (discussed later in the review).

Taken together, this literature suggests that I may find differences across mothers in their experience of their child's interethnic relationship dependent on demographic and personality/individual difference characteristics. Age, place of birth/up-bringing (i.e., whether it was ethnically diverse or not), level of conservatism and level of education are likely to influence mothers' experiences in complex ways. This complexity in experience will add diversity and depth to my research and highlights the value of adopting a qualitative, constructionist methodology, as I will be able to explore these issues in detail and consider how they influence mothers' experiences.

The influence of gender on attitudes towards interracial marriage.

My research focusses on mothers only, hence it is important to consider if attitudes towards interethnic marriage differ between women and men. The research demonstrates mixed findings. Some studies find that females hold more negative attitudes towards interracial relationships compared to males (e.g., Jacobson & Johnson, 2006; Mills, Daly, Longmore & Kilbride, 1995), some studies find the opposite (Garcia, et al. 2012) whilst others find no gender difference (Field, Kimuna & Straus, 2013; Golebiowska, 2007; Johnson & Jacobson, 2005). Interaction effects have been observed in some studies, for example Jacobson and Johnson (2006), found that African American men were more likely to support interracial marriage compared to African American women, but found that gender became non-significant when education was also considered in the analysis. Instead there was a significant interaction effect of gender and education such that educated black women were more supportive of interracial marriage than less educated Black women. The authors proposed that this finding reflects the lack of suitable marriage partners for educated Black women within their ethnic group, leading them to hold more positive attitudes

towards interracial marriage (in order to find a suitably educated partner; Jacobson & Johnson, 2006).

Research undertaken in Australia by Dunn et al. (2004) demonstrated that acceptance by gender was dependent on ethnicity in that women were less likely to support the marriage of a close relative to a Muslim person, whilst men were less likely to support the marriage of a close relative to an Aboriginal, Asian or Jewish person. The lack of support expressed by females for the marriage of a close relative to a Muslim person could possibly be explained by perceptions regarding the role of women in the Islamic religion as restricted, and the threat that interracial marriage might pose for female family members in terms of gender equality (highlighting the relevance of perceived threat, discussed later in the review). Thus, whilst inconsistent research findings regarding the influence of gender on acceptance of interracial marriage may reflect sample and/or methodological differences, findings are also likely to be influenced by more complex, socio-structural and/or contextual factors (e.g. the time and place of the research, gender equality and gender roles within the research context and the nature of intergroup relations in the research context). This highlights the importance of considering these factors in any examination of attitudes towards, or experiences of interethnic relationships; present research included.

Group membership and attitudes towards interracial marriage.

Research demonstrates that attitudes towards interracial marriage vary depending on group membership. For example, Black respondents in the US are typically found to be the most supportive of interracial marriage, and White respondents the least supportive (Garcia, Lewis & Ford-Robertson, 2015; Mills, Daly, Longmore & Kilbride; 1995; Passel, Taylor & Wang, 2010). Put another way; given that race cannot easily be separated from group status, support for interracial marriage

tends to be higher when a non- dominant group member is asked about marrying a dominant group member as opposed to when a dominant group member is asked about marrying a non-dominant group member. This finding might reflect the role of marriage as a conduit for social mobility (Kalmijn, 1993), and the desire of non-dominant group members to 'marry up' the social status order and the desire of dominant group members to resist 'marrying down'.

An alternative explanation for the relevance of group membership to attitudes towards interethnic marriage relates to group size and the consequent nature of the 'marriage market' (Kalmijn, 1998). The relevance of group size as an influential factor in support for interracial marriage is explained by Blau's (1977) macrostructural theory of social structure which asserts that the likelihood of intermarriage increases when the size of the in-group is small, relative to other groups in society. Blau asserts that the lack of available partners within a small in-group, increases the likelihood that members of the group will marry members of the larger out-group. The relevance of this in explaining *attitudes* towards interracial marriage is that recognition, amongst non-dominant groups (which are typically smaller in size), of the likely need to marry interracially (due to the lack of available partners within the in-group) may result in more positive attitudes towards interracial marriage. This is relevant to Jacobson and Johnson's (2006) finding regarding support for interracial marriage amongst educated, Black American women discussed earlier.

The influence of group membership on attitudes towards interracial marriage is also demonstrated in research findings which reveal a hierarchy of acceptability based on ethnicity. For example, GSS data from the US (which requires respondents to indicate their level of support for the potential marriage of a close family relative to various racial groups), reveals that Whites more strongly oppose the marriage of a

close relative to a Black person compared to an Asian or Latino person (Campbell & Herman, 2015). Weaver (2008), who also used GSS data, demonstrated that all groups ranked members of their own group as preferred martial partners for a close family member, irrespective of their group's social status, demonstrating a preference for homogamy. All groups then indicated preference for a non-Hispanic, White marital partner (for their close relative), demonstrating the relevance of group status. Hierarchies then varied across respondent racial group in a manner that appeared to be influenced by both group status (discussed above) and perceived similarity.

The concept of social distance explains the evident preference to marry a member of an out-group perceived to be most similar to the in-group. Social distance refers to the degree to which members of a group accept or approve of association with members of out-groups (Williams, 1964) and is a concept that has been used extensively to explain attitudes towards a wide variety of social out-groups (e.g., see Parrillo & Donoghue, 2013). The construct is based on the premise that the possibility of interacting with a member of an out-group is typically associated with feelings of difference, dislike, inappropriateness and fear because that person represents the unknown (Williams, 1964). Hence, there is a tendency for group members to express a preference for interaction, or association with those who are perceived to be most similar to themselves.

Research findings which demonstrate the influence of group membership on attitudes towards interracial marriage indicate a number of factors that may influence mothers' experiences of a child's interethnic relationship. For example, mothers may be more accepting of an interethnic relationship if they perceive little distance between her family's ethnic background and the ethnic background of her child's partner. Alternatively, if a mother perceives significant distance between her family's ethnic

group and that of her child's partner, she may experience negative feelings (e.g., fear, anxiety, and dislike) which will undoubtedly influence her experience of her child's relationship in a negative way. Mothers from dominant groups may be concerned about maintaining dominant status, whereas mothers from non- dominant groups may be more accepting if it is perceived that their child is 'marrying up' the social status order. It is also possible that mothers from non-dominant groups might be more accepting of (or possibly resigned to) the possibility of their child partnering with someone from an ethnic background different to their own, due to the nature of their in-group, marriage market within Australia. Specifically, mothers may recognise the likelihood or need for their child to date/marry outside their group due to the size of their ethnic in-group in the Australia and a lack of available partners from within the group and so be more accepting of their child's interethnic relationship. It is possible that first generation immigrant mothers considered the prospect of interethnic marriage when making the decision to immigrate to Australia and may have been accepting of this as it represents a way to integrate with, or assimilate into, the dominant group culture. Openness to the idea of interethnic/interracial marriage as a consequence of anticipated contact with other ethnic groups highlights the relevance intergroup contact, which will be discussed next.

Intergroup contact and attitudes towards interracial marriage.

Over the years, social change such as the removal of divisive social policy and legislation, changing rates and trends of immigration, and changes to the social mobility of various groups within society have increased the possibility of contact with other ethnic groups. The intergroup contact hypothesis, originally proposed by Allport (1958), asserts that under certain conditions, increased contact between groups that differ will reduce prejudice. The hypothesis has been tested extensively, with the

findings of a meta-analytic review of 515 research studies demonstrating support of the hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

The relevance of Allport's (1958) intergroup contact hypothesis, in particular the importance of optimal conditions in explaining attitudes towards interracial marriage, was demonstrated in a study conducted by Johnson and Jacobson (2005). The authors found that those who reported interracial contact within a church setting reported more positive attitudes towards interracial marriage than those who reported interracial contact in a work place or neighbourhood.[14] The authors asserted that interracial contact in an integrated church setting meets three of Allport's optimal conditions; members are likely to be considered of relatively equal status, members are likely to cooperate and work together to fulfil church-based duties, and contact occurs with the support of authority (Johnson & Jacobson, 2005). These conditions are not likely to exist in the other two settings, work and the neighbourhood, particularly work, where perceptions of threat and competition are likely to exist.

The importance of optimal conditions in fostering positive attitudes is further highlighted by the findings of research which demonstrate the negative consequences of intergroup contact when contact occurs in the context of threat and is forced rather than voluntary (e.g., at work; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner & Christ, 2011). Under these negative conditions, intergroup contact is likely to exacerbate conflict, tension and/or negative attitudes. This was evidenced in research conducted by Barlow and colleagues (2012) who demonstrated the potential for detrimental effects resulting from contact in a study that considered contact valence. Importantly, the detrimental

[14] Positive attitudes only occurred in racially integrated churches; and not in churches that were attended primarily by White members. Thus, it was interracial contact that occurred within the church setting, rather than religiosity, that was associated with more positive attitudes towards interracial marriage.

effect of negative contact was stronger and more consistent than the beneficial effect of positive contact.

It is evident from the aforementioned literature that mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship may be influenced by their contact with out-group members. Importantly, it is not only the amount, but also the nature of intergroup contact that determines the outcomes of that contact. This includes contact that has occurred with out-group members prior to, as well as, contact which occurs as a result of their child's interethnic relationship. If contact is positive and occurs under optimal conditions, we would assume that this will have a positive influence on mothers' experiences. If, however, the nature of contact is negative; characterised by threat, competition and/or loss, then this will likely have a negative influence on mothers' experiences of their child's relationship. The relevance of threat to attitudes towards interracial attitudes will now be explored in more detail.

Perceptions of threat and attitudes towards interracial marriage.

The concept of threat, as it relates to attitudes towards out-groups, is described in the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) proposed by Stephan and Stephan (2000). These researchers explain that perceptions of realistic threat (e.g., physical or personal threat, threat to jobs, income, resources) as well as symbolic threat (e.g., threat to values, norms and beliefs), anxiety about intergroup relations and negative stereotypes about out-group members are associated with negative attitudes towards out-groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Integrated Threat Theory suggests that the more threat an individual perceives, the less positive their attitudes towards out-groups and members of out-groups will be (Stephan & Stephan, 1996, 2000). The value of threat theory in explaining attitudes towards social out-groups was demonstrated in a meta-analysis of 95 studies completed by Riek, Mania and Gaertner (2006).

The concept of threat helps to understand historic opposition towards interracial marriage. In fact, perceptions of threat underlie the introduction and long history of anti-miscegenation laws in the US (and elsewhere). Thompson (2009) discusses the importance of such laws in protecting threats to White male hegemony, in protecting White women from the "sexual danger" (p. 362) posed by black men and in controlling "sexual anxieties about relationships between Asian men and white women" (p. 362). Thompson explains that anti-miscegenation laws "were designed to prohibit transgressions of sexual space, which were really transgressions of and challenges to social, political, and economic positions on racial hierarchies" (Thompson, 2009, p. 362).

Perceived threat explains the opposition expressed by female respondents in Dunn et al.'s (2004) study (conducted in Australia and discussed earlier), towards the possible marriage of a close relative to a Muslim. A later paper, written by Dunn, Klocker and Salabay (2007), drew on three public opinion surveys to describe the sense of threat perceived by Australians in relation to Muslims. Of particular relevance to this discussion, Dunn, Klocker and Salaby (2007) suggest that "the stereotype of misogyny is one of the core means by which Islam is constructed as a nefarious culture" (p. 574). This finding provides a potential explanation for why females in Dunn et al.'s (2004) research were opposed to the possible inter-marriage of a close relative to a person of Muslim heritage.

The relevance of threat was also evident in research conducted by Perry (2014) who sought to consider how desire for religious heritage influenced attitudes towards interracial marriage. In Perry's research, White respondents, drawn from a national (US) sample, were asked to indicate their desire for religious heritage (desire for their child to follow the same religion and to marry someone from the same religion as

themselves) as well as their comfort with the thought of their daughter marrying a Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Asian partner. Perry found that parents who expressed a stronger desire for religious heritage also expressed less comfort with the idea of their daughter marrying someone from a different racial group, irrespective of theological conservatism. Only those not affiliated with a religion were consistently more comfortable with the idea of their daughter's interracial marriage. The authors asserted that because difference in racial background represents different theological beliefs, interracial marriage represented symbolic threat via the introduction of alternative theological beliefs into the family system, threatening the ability to successfully pass on a religious heritage to future generations. Of course, the correlational nature of this relationship means that those who were opposed to interracial marriage may have justified their opposition on the grounds of religious heritage.

The relevance of threat in explaining attitudes towards interracial marriage at a social/intergroup level highlights the need to consider if and how the concept of threat relates to mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship at an individual level. If a mother perceives that her child's choice of partner is a threat in some way, this will no doubt affect her experience. The concept of threat may be particularly relevant to the experience of mothers given their assumed role as protector and nurturer of her children. Psychodynamic theory, particularly, that which relates to individual responses to negative emotions is of particular relevance here. Cramer (2008) asserts that responses to negative emotional states (e.g. threat) vary in terms of the "maturity" of the cognitive operation. Cramer (2008) provides evidence that responses change across age cohorts, indicative of developmental change; an assertion that has particular relevance to the present research which adopts a lifespan

developmental perspective. Thus, it is possible that response to perceived threat may differ across mothers dependent on individual progress with personal development.

History of intergroup relations.

A factor that cannot be separated from, and has been alluded to in discussion of the aforementioned constructs, is that of intergroup history. Intergroup history dictates group status, creates a sense of ease or tension between groups, and influences the likelihood of contact between groups. Specifically, where intergroup history has been characterised by formal segregation and/or oppression, this often manifests in the present day as informal segregation in terms of social power and status (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008). Furthermore, individuals who have experienced or perceive a history of conflict between their group and another group are likely to hold more negative attitudes towards the out-group due to greater perceived threat from the group (Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan et al., 2002). Under such circumstances, contact is unlikely to occur between group members, highlighting the bi-directional relationship between contact and attitudes towards/perceptions of out-groups. If contact does occur under these circumstances it is likely to result in negative outcomes. If, however, intergroup history is positive, attitudes are more likely to be positive, and intergroup contact is more likely to take place.

The influence of intergroup history on attitudes towards interracial marriage is evident from lower levels of support for interracial marriage in areas that have experienced oppressive/conflicted intergroup history (e.g., the southern states of the US) and towards the marriage of group members that share a history of conflict and/or formal segregation within society (e.g., Black/White marriage in the United States).

In considering the experiences of mothers then, it is critical to consider the history of relations between her ethnic group(s)[15] and the ethnic group(s) of her child's partner.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed two bodies of research that provide context for and potential insight into the experiences of mothers whose adult child develops an interethnic relationship. I reviewed research regarding social attitudes toward interethnic relationships to identify key concepts that may be relevant in considering mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. It is clear from this review that mothers' demographic factors (e.g., age, education), the group to which their child's partner belongs, the status and perceived similarity of that group relative to the child/mother's group, the degree and nature of contact that the mother has had with members of that particular group and the degree to which the partner or relationship represents a threat to the mother may be relevant when considering experiences of a child's interethnic relationship.

Earlier in the chapter I reviewed research regarding the experience of parenting adult children during middle and later adulthood. This review highlighted that the middle years of parenting, as adult children establish their independence, represent a significant time for parents. It represents a time when parent effort eases and the outcomes of many years of effort in the role are realised. These outcomes; specifically, a child's decisions and achievements (or lack thereof), have important implications for parents in terms of their sense of achievement and thus their sense of identity. As such, a child's progression to adulthood has important implications for parents; for their role, their identity and their continued development throughout middle adulthood. As an adult child negotiates entrance to adulthood, parents must negotiate their own

[15] It is acknowledged that some individuals will identify with more than one ethnic group.

developmental task of ‘letting go’. They must transition from the active role of parent and establish a new parental role that is appropriate to later stages of adulthood. It is suggested that the ability to achieve this task, of ‘letting go’, is a key aspect of achieving generativity.

A key decision in the life of a child, which typically occurs during this time, is their choice of intimate partner. My research considered the nature of this experience when a child decides to establish a relationship with someone from an ethnic background that differed to their own. The research bridges the gap between what is known about social attitudes towards interethnic relationships and what is known about parenting an adult child. The aim of my research was to explore how the event of a child’s interethnic relationship was experienced by mothers and the implications of this experience for their development. The next chapter of the thesis discusses the approach that I took to achieve this aim.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology that I applied to investigate my research questions (stated in Chapter One). I explain, and provide a rationale for the theoretical framework, methodology and methods that I adopted in this project. I also provide an overview of the process and major decisions that were made during data collection and analysis; decisions which enabled the development of my grounded theory of mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. This description is critical in demonstrating the grounded theory nature of my research (i.e., how data collection was driven by analysis). A key emphasis of this chapter is reflexivity. I provide detail about the experiences that I brought to the research enquiry and I explain how I used these experiences to assist the process of theory development. Discussion is provided about the processes I applied to ensure rigour (in addition to reflexivity), and ethical considerations relevant to the research are detailed.

Research Design

In conducting my research I adopted a social constructionist, grounded theory approach. A brief overview of the chosen theoretical framework and methodology are provided below, along with justification for their selection.

Theoretical framework.

My research was guided by a constructionist paradigm of inquiry. The underlying premise of constructionist epistemology is that knowledge is constructed and exists only as a consequence of human consciousness and interpretation (Crotty, 1998). According to constructionist epistemology, the construction of knowledge is influenced by the unique interactions that people have with their environment (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). Consequently, constructionist epistemology does not

advocate the presence of one universal truth, but rather multiple variations of truth, given that each individual's construction of reality will differ depending on the context of their interactions (Crotty, 1998). As a consequence, the aim of constructionist research is to reflect a common construction or consensus of reality (Crotty, 1998; Guba, 1990). In conducting this research my aim was to generate a common understanding of mothers' experiences. I acknowledge that individual experiences are unique and that the understandings formed from this research have been influenced not only by the values and experiences of those who contributed to the research but also by my own values, experiences and approach to conducting the research (Crotty, 1998; Guba, 1990; Schwandt, 2007). Consistent with constructionist paradigms, I acknowledge that my experiences as a daughter, a mother and an individual who is personally involved in an interethnic relationship have influenced the construction of participant experiences, as has my active participation in data collection and analysis. In acknowledgment of this I engaged in a number of reflexive practices throughout the research process to ensure rigour. The inclusion of this acknowledgement is one such practice.

More specifically, I approached the research from a *social constructionist* framework. Social constructionism acknowledges that individual experience is created through social interaction which occurs within a particular social context (Creswell, 2013). Hence, the meaning that an individual ascribes to his/her experience in constructing his/her reality will be informed and influenced by the social and historical context within which that individual exists (Creswell, 2013). A social constructionist approach was appropriate given that experiences are unique to each participant and occur within, and are influenced by, socio-historical context. Hence, experiences are

constructed through unique interactions with particular people at a particular time in a particular place.

In adopting a constructionist approach, I acknowledge that the individual experiences described by participants are unique to those involved in the study. I also acknowledge that the context and nature of the research process have impacted on the knowledge that has been derived, for example; the place the research was conducted, the type of people who agreed to participate in the research and the interactions that occurred between myself and participants. Any change to the context of the research may alter research findings. This raises the issue of whether the findings derived from this research can be used to explain the experiences of other mothers whose adult child enters an interethnic relationship.

The concept of generalising understanding that is obtained through research to experiences outside the research context is traditionally associated with quantitative methodology (Schofield, 2002). The relevance of this concept to qualitative work remains contested, with some authors strongly rejecting the idea that the concept should, or indeed can be, applied to work which celebrates intricacy and variability in experience, and emphasises the importance of context in understanding this intricacy and variability (e.g., see Denzin, 1983). Others acknowledge the value of using research findings as a starting point from which other experiences can be understood (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schofield, 2002). I adopt this view. Consistent with Lincoln and Guba (1985; who refer to the work of Cronbach, 1975), I assert that whilst it is impossible to generalise the descriptive findings of my research to another context with certainty (due to the unique context of my research and process of my constructionist, qualitative inquiry), my conceptual findings provide an initial, "working hypothesis" (p. 123) of the experience of other mothers who experience a

child's interethnic relationship. My hypothesis can be taken and consideration can be given as to the degree to which my theoretical understanding of mothers' experiences might apply to another context. To facilitate this judgement, I must provide a rich description of the research setting, which has been provided in Chapter One, and research procedure, which is provided in this chapter. In determining the 'fit' of my findings to a different context, the reader/researcher will require an equally detailed description of the context to which my 'hypothesis' is to be applied.

Methodology

Given the aims and theoretical framework of the research, a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate means by which to conduct this research (Crotty, 1998; Henwood, 1996). Qualitative methodology allowed for in-depth exploration of mothers' experiences; acknowledging the influence of context on experiences and the impact of experiences on various aspects of mothers' lives (e.g., relationships with children, interactions with their child's partner; Crotty, 1998). More specifically, a grounded theory methodology was adopted. Grounded theory was an appropriate methodology given the lack of prior research regarding mothers' experiences of a child's interethnic relationship and due to the specific aim of identifying the factors that influenced mothers' experiences.

Grounded theory is a unique approach to qualitative research as the principal aim is not only to describe and reflect reality, but to explain reality through the generation of theory that is developed from data obtained from the field (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Pidgeon, 1996). The approach was born from rejection of the traditional, deductive approach to research which took generic, abstract theory and tested whether it applied to a specific research issue (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Pidgeon, 1996). The founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), asserted

that this deductive approach was problematic due to the risk that theory be forced to explain an issue rather than found to be readily applicable. Consequently, grounded theory adopts a more inductive approach[16], working with data obtained from those who experience the issue directly in order to generate understanding from their applied perspective (Creswell, 2013; Pidgeon, 1996). The aim of grounded theory is to produce understanding that is both relevant and applicable to the reality of those who experience the issue; a theory that 'fits' and 'works' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). This makes grounded theory a useful approach when there has been little research conducted in a given area and where research from other areas cannot be applied to a research issue with certainty.

Despite variations in the approach of grounded theory a common, key attribute of the methodology is the emergent nature of theory development. Specifically, theory is developed and refined through sustained collection of data from the field (Pidgeon, 1996). To achieve this, the researcher must engage in a unique approach to data collection and analysis. Unlike other approaches to research, in which data are generally collected in one block and then analysed, data analysis in grounded theory begins soon after initial data is collected and continues, alongside data collection, throughout the entirety of the research project (Pidgeon, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process is iterative, in which the researcher collects data, analyses data to identify relevant concepts, asks questions of the data and returns to the field to collect new data to further develop emerging concepts and/or identify new questions (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). New data are then compared and contrasted with existing data, new questions or areas for investigation are identified and the researcher again returns

[16] There is contention within the field as to the use of deductive methods in conducting grounded theory research (e.g., the review and use of existing literature prior to the collection of data and the use of deductive interpretation during stages of data analysis; see Glaser, 1992 and Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

to the field to explore these concepts and/or questions (Pidgeon, 1996). In this way, data analysis informs data collection. Ideally the process continues until an in-depth, exhaustive understanding of the research issue is gained; a point in the research process known as theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The process of simultaneous data collection and analysis and the constant comparison of data, categories and emerging theoretical propositions are key characteristics of grounded theory methodology that enable the researcher to explore, develop, test and refine categories and relationships within the emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Pidgeon, 1996).

Since the pioneering work of Glaser and Strauss, various approaches to grounded theory have developed that each reflect different theoretical orientations and worldviews/paradigms.[17] My work was guided largely by the approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), given compatibility between their approach and my own epistemological views. Firstly, reflecting a constructionist orientation, Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognise the importance of context in shaping participant understandings of their experiences. Secondly, the authors acknowledge that researchers will inevitably draw on past experiences and existing literature in approaching the research issue and support the use of published literature to assist in the process of data analysis. Thirdly, Strauss and Corbin acknowledge the active role of the researcher in influencing the research process, particularly during stages of data analysis and so discuss the importance of reflexive practice throughout the research project (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Finally, the authors acknowledge that whilst it is important that the researcher remain connected and sensitive to the data, there is a need

[17] See Charmaz (2015) for a brief overview or Charmaz (2000) for a more detailed discussion of the emergence, development and variations of grounded theory methodology.

to remain vigilant and guard against researcher bias and subjectivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To achieve this, they assert the importance of verifying emerging theoretical categories with data collected from participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of participant experiences truly reflects their reality.

Method

Participants.

Participants for this research were the mothers of adult children who were, or had been, involved in a committed, intimate interethnic relationship for at least 12 months. A period of twelve months was chosen to ensure the relationship was of a longer-term, committed nature (i.e. the relationship had not developed recently). Participants self-identified whether their child was involved in an interethnic relationship. In some cases, a person who self-identified as being involved in an interethnic relationship encouraged their mother and/or mother-in law to participate in the research.

In the initial stages of data collection, purposive sampling was used to recruit mothers suitable for participation in the study. Following initial stages of data collection and analysis, sampling progressed to theoretical sampling as is required in grounded theory methodology (Pidgeon, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling is a specific technique, unique to grounded theory, which is used when concepts and relationships begin to emerge as relevant to the developing theory. The technique ensures the sampling of individuals who can best facilitate the further exploration of emerging concepts and relationships, thus ensuring continued theoretical development (Stern, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

My final sample consisted of 30 mothers, aged between 43 and 78 years (average age of 56.6 years). Most mothers were born overseas (n= 19); the remaining

11 were born in Australia. Of those born overseas, four were born in Singapore, four were born in England and one was born in each of the following countries; New Zealand, Portugal, India, America, Iran, Burma, Sudan, Holland, Timor, Malaysia, and Serbia. Migrant mothers had lived in Australia between 8 and 49 years (average of 24.5 years). The adult children of these women who were/had been involved in an interethnic relationship were aged between 18 and 50 (average 29.1 years) and had been involved in the relationship from 1 to 21 years (average 6.4 years). More detailed information about each participant and their family (i.e., their child and child's partner) is provided in Table 1 below. To ensure the confidentiality of my participants I have not assigned pseudonyms in the table as it is possible that mothers could be identified from contextual detail, particularly if their child/child's partner is aware that they participated in the research. If pseudonyms are assigned to contextual detail it would then be possible for quotes in the findings chapters to be linked back to participants. Instead, participant details are presented in the order of completed interview and pseudonyms are assigned only in the Findings chapters. Although it can be useful to consider quotes alongside participant details, separation of the two was required given my obligation to ensure participant confidentiality.

Table 1: Demographic detail of participants, their child and child's partner.

Part	Age	Ethnicity/ COB	Time in Aust. (years)	Age of child in IER	Ethnicity of child	Ethnicity of child's partner	Relationship status	LoR* (years)	Children
1	78	Australian/Australia	n/a	50	Australian	Singaporean	Separated	19	Yes
2	71	English/England	40	49	English	Thai	Dating	2.5	No
3	59	Australian/Australia	n/a	26	Australian	American	Married	5	No
4	44	Australian/Australia	n/a	19	Australian	Burmese	No longer dating	2	No
5	45	Italian/Australia	n/a	18	Australian	Sierra Leone	Dating	1	No
6	59	Australian/Australia	n/a	34	Australian	Singapore	Married	8	Yes
7	57	Iranian/Iran	26	35	Iranian	Australian/African American	Married	14	Yes
				30	Iranian	Brazilian	Married	2.5	No
8	67	Burmese/Burma	42	29	Burmese/Indian	Scottish	Dating	3	No
				26	Burmese/Indian	New Zealander (White)	Married	4	No
9	58	Sudanese/Sudan	11	29	Sudanese	Australian	De facto	9	Yes

10	54	Dutch/Holland	40	33	Australian/Timorese	Australian	Married	10	Yes
11	53	Timorese/Timor	21	33	Timorese	Australian	Married	12	Yes
				31	Timorese	Italian/Australian	Married	11	Yes
				30	Timorese	Australian	Married	4	No
12	65	Indian/Malaysia	17	31	Indian	European	Married	10	Yes
13	54	Australian/Australia	n/a	26	Australian	Malay Indian	Dating	4	No
14	60	Chinese- Persian (Parsi)/Singapore	20	33	Eurasian	Australian	Married	15	Preg
				30	Eurasian	Australian	Dating	5-6	No
15	46	Javanese/Singapore	11	21	Malay	Indian	Married	3	Yes
16	52	English/England	18	21	English	Burmese	No longer dating	2.5	No
				18	English	Maori (NZ)	Dating	1	No
17	48	Malay/Singapore	12	25	Malay	Indian	Married	1.5	Yes
18	43	Serbian/Serbia	14	21	Serbian	Indian	Dating	3	No
				20	Serbian	English	Dating	3	No
19	56	Australian/Australia	n/a	29	Australian	Burmese	Married	12	Yes

20	49	Australian/Australia	n/a	18	Australian	Thai	Dating	1	No
21	44	Samoan/ New Zealand	8	22	Samoan	Australian	Married	3	No
22	50	Australian/Australia	n/a	24	Australian	Maori (NZ)	Dating	6	No
23	61	Portuguese/Portugal	35	35	Portuguese	Australian	Married	6	Yes
24	61	English/England	36	26	English	Zambian	De facto	5	No
25	71	Indian/India	49	46	Indian	Australian	Married	21	No
26	51	English/England	12	19	English	Palestinian	Dating	1	No
27	60	Australian/Australia	n/a	30	Australian	El Salvadorian	Dating	3	No
28	63	Australia/Australia	n/a	31	Australian	Namibian	De facto	2	No
29	51	Persian/America	20	28	Persian	Australian	Dating	2	No
30	67	Singaporean/Singapore	33	42	Singaporean	Australian	Married	10	Yes
				39	Singaporean	Australian	Married	16	Yes

* LoR= Length of child's relationship

Materials

All potential participants were provided with a detailed information letter that outlined the aims and procedures of the study. Detail was also provided of ethical considerations relevant to the research (Appendix A). Prior to the interview participants were asked to sign a consent form which reiterated key detail from the information letter (Appendix B).

An interview guide was developed which indicated general questions to be covered within the interview. Initially, the interview guide included questions regarding feelings upon learning about their child's interethnic relationship, whether feelings had changed over the course of the relationship, how they felt about their child's interethnic relationship at the time of the interview and whether things had changed in their life as a result of their child's interethnic relationship (see Appendix C for the first version of the interview schedule). The interview guide was revised each time I engaged in data analysis in order to add new concepts or questions that required further exploration and to remove concepts or questions that had been exhausted or found to be redundant to the emerging theory. These changes were informed by data analysis and were made to ensure deeper exploration of the factors that explained variation in mothers' experiences and the implications of a child's interethnic relationship for mothers (see Appendix D for the final version of the interview schedule).

Participant demographic and family details were recorded on a questionnaire form (Appendix E). A note of thanks which included the contact details of family relationship support services was given to participants at the conclusion of the interview (Appendix F). A digital voice recorder was used to record all interviews.

Procedure.

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the commencement of formal data collection in order to test and refine the interview schedule and to provide me the opportunity to familiarise myself with the interview schedule and interview process. I conducted the interview with an Australian mother whose daughter was dating a Tanzanian. The pilot interview revealed a tendency to focus on the relationship itself as opposed to the mothers' experience of the relationship; perhaps reflecting the influence of my position within the research on the process of data collection. As a result, the interview schedule was revised to include more reflective questions such as "If you had to describe what your journey has been like, what would you say?" and "What advice would you give to another parent whose child enters a relationship with someone from a different ethnic background?".

Once the interview schedule was revised, recruitment of the sample began. At first I recruited through my own personal networks. This excluded first person contacts: that is, I did not recruit members of my family or close personal friends. I provided an information letter to family, friends and work colleagues and asked them to circulate the letter amongst their personal networks. Then, where possible, I recruited using the snowball strategy, asking participants who were involved in the study if they knew of anyone who might be interested in participating in the research (Creswell, 2013). In later stages of data collection participants were increasingly recruited through advertisement of the study. Advertisements were placed around the university campus (Appendix G). A short article detailing the research and calling for participants was placed on the university student and staff news feeds (Appendix H) and I also advertised the research via a Facebook 'event page', which my contacts could share with their contacts (Appendix I). Advertising via the Facebook 'event'

page was a useful technique in facilitating theoretical sampling as the sampling criterion could be updated to target required participants. For example, when mothers from more diverse backgrounds were required, the selection criteria for the study were updated on the Facebook event page.

Potential participants were encouraged to contact me via email or telephone. In some circumstances I was provided the contact details of a potential participant by a third party, in which case, I initiated contact by telephone. I spoke with all potential participants via telephone in order to confirm that each met my selection criteria, to clarify the aims and procedure of the research and to address any questions or concerns held by the potential participant (e.g., some expressed concern about confidentiality). If the potential participant met selection criteria and was happy to participate in the research a mutually convenient time and place was arranged to meet and conduct the interview. Participants chose the location of the interview. Most chose to meet in their home (n=16), the remainder chose to meet on the university campus. Seven of these interviews were conducted in a private room in a university library, six were conducted in a university office, and one was conducted in a university café. Interviews ranged from 57 minutes to 152 minutes in duration (the average duration was 92 minutes).

At the start of the interview I restated the aims and procedures of the study and ensured that the confidential and voluntary nature of the study was understood by each participant. Prior to commencing the interview participants were asked to read and sign a consent form, and asked whether they consented for interviews to be audio-recorded to assist with data analysis. All gave their consent.

Once administrative formalities were complete, some time was spent building rapport with each participant. The nature of discussions during this phase of the interview varied from person to person, however, on every occasion I spent some time

discussing the background to the research project. I told participants that I had read about interethnic couples and discovered wide diversity in reported parent reactions to the couples' relationship. I informed participants that these reports had come from adult children involved in interethnic relationships and that no research had yet explored the issue with parents themselves, hence the focus of my research. I explained that the reason for focusing on only mothers in my project (i.e., not mothers and fathers) was to limit the scope of what could have been a very broad investigation.

A key issue that I negotiated in the early stages of my research was whether to disclose to participants that I was personally involved in an interethnic relationship. Josselson (2013) discusses that the answer to this question is complex and one that requires careful consideration, in particular with regard to the potential impact of this disclosure. Whilst disclosure has the potential to facilitate trust, it may also shape the type and nature of information shared by the participant (Josselson, 2013). I thought hard about whether to disclose or not. I was concerned that my involvement in an interethnic relationship might make it difficult for mothers to discuss their experience with me because, to them, I represented either their daughter or their daughter-in-law. It was for this reason that in my first interview I chose not to disclose that I was involved in an interethnic relationship. As the interview progressed and my participant shared details about herself and her family it felt wrong that I had not shared this critical piece of information about myself and my interest in conducting the research. I felt uneasy about it, deceitful even. I also felt that my decision not to disclose my relationship might impact the authenticity of data obtained from participants; if they felt that I was holding something back, then they might do the same. I decided that from that point forward I would disclose, upfront, my involvement in an interethnic relationship. As it happened, a number of mothers I recruited through personal

contacts already knew of my involvement in an interethnic relationship prior to the interview. I also married and took my husband's name whilst completing my PhD. Therefore, in addition to my feelings of integrity and worries about authenticity, the circumstances of data collection required that I be honest with my participants about the personal relevance of my research.

Having made the decision to disclose I was mindful about the amount of information and the point at which I would disclose details about my relationship. I needed to ensure that my relationship did not become the focus, nor influence the nature, of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Therefore, I made a general disclosure about my relationship at the beginning of the interview, highlighting that this prompted my interest in interethnic relationships. I then disclosed more specific details about my relationship towards the end of the interview, if asked. Most participants did ask about the circumstances surrounding my relationship towards the end of the interview. On the odd occasion, when a participant asked me a specific question during the interview I provided a vague response (e.g., 'it's good', 'it was okay') and directed them back to their experience. Later, as the formal interview drew to an end I returned to their question and provided further detail. All participants were respectful of the need to focus on their experience first and foremost.

I started each interview by drawing a family tree of the mother's immediate (nuclear) family. This enabled me to gain some sense of each participants' family context and the nature of their child/ren's relationship/s (i.e., whether their child/ren were partnered, with whom and whether their child/ren had children themselves). More detailed demographic questions were not asked until the end of the interview and only if the information had not been disclosed over the course of the interview.

Once it was established how many and which children were involved in an interethnic relationship the formal interview commenced.

I adopted a form of conversational interviewing with my participants. This approach aligns well with constructionist enquiry as it provides some freedom to the participant in constructing and relaying their interpretations of their own personal experiences (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998; Tufford & Newman, 2012). Conversational interviews are often utilised in constructionist enquiry because the method acknowledges the co-construction of data (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Specifically, experiences are shared and ideas are exchanged between the researcher and participants, facilitating rapport and encouraging greater levels of insight (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). The conversations I had with my participants, however, did not follow the usual conventions of a conversation. In order to obtain the depth of information and level of insight necessary to develop theoretical understanding from personal experiences I needed participants to spend the majority of the time talking. At times I also needed to direct participants to explain further, to return to an earlier point, to provide clarification and/or to provide deeper insight into their thoughts and feelings. In addition, I needed to reflect participant narratives back to them to ensure that I understood what had been communicated. This style of conversation is evidently more intense than a typical conversation both for the participant who is required to reflect, share, explain and clarify, and for me, who must listen, interpret, reflect and clarify, hence the approach is described by Charmaz (2006) as intensive interviewing.

Although an interview schedule was used to guide general topics of discussion, interviews did not follow a structured format. The wording and order of questions, and approach to the interview was fluid so that I could adapt to the personal style and story

of each participant. This flexible approach enabled the participant to develop their own account of their experience, facilitating the discovery of new areas of relevance to be investigated in subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2006). At times, some participants struggled to articulate how they felt about their child's interethnic relationship and/or the implications of their child's relationship for them personally. There are three factors that may explain this. First, the mother may not have considered these issues in detail prior to the interview; or if they had, may not have articulated their views, especially to someone outside their immediate family. Second, and related to this was my experience in asking questions and probing in such a way to encourage participant reflection and insight. Through the process of transcription and reflection on my own performance in each interview I was able to refine my interviewing technique to encourage greater reflection and insight. Third, individual differences in ability to reflect on, process and express emotions, thoughts and behaviours might also explain difficulty in the articulation of experience.

On two occasions, mothers were interviewed in the presence of another individual. In one case the individual was a husband and in the other the individual was a daughter. On both occasions the presence of the family member was deemed to be motivated by reasons of cultural appropriateness. I acknowledge that the presence of these individuals may have influenced the nature of information provided by the participants, however in the context of a constructionist approach (which acknowledges that all experiences are constructed and influenced by experiences and context), the presence of another does not mean that data are redundant. In fact, unique insights may have only been gained due to the presence of the family member (i.e., the participant may have felt uncomfortable and/or the interview may not have progressed in the absence of the family member). During analysis of these interviews

I focussed carefully on distinguishing between information and insights offered by mothers, and information and insights that originated from, or were influenced by the family member. This meant that there were comparatively less data to work with from these interviews, however, the data obtained were of value and added further insight into the experience of mothers.

Interviews closed by providing participants the opportunity to add any further information that they felt was relevant or important to note. Conversations then returned to neutral topics. On a number of occasions, participants shared photos of their family and occasionally I shared a photo of my partner, and in later stages of my thesis, my daughter. After some time was spent closing the interview I thanked the participant for their time and left.

All interviews were audio recorded and brief notes were made throughout the interview. These notes served only as prompts for me to revisit points raised by the participant so as not to interrupt them as they provided their account (King & Horrocks, 2010). Extensive note taking was avoided so as not to distract the participant or interrupt the flow of the interview (Kvale 2007). Given that data analysis in grounded theory is a continual process some form of immediate analysis was completed after each interview. At times this involved complete transcription of the interview along with memo-ing. At a minimum I completed a brief summary of the interview. This involved brief notes, documenting my thoughts, questions, and any connections (i.e., similarities and/or contrasts), initially with other participants (in the early stages of the project), and later with emerging ideas/themes as data collection continued. This process ensured that salient ideas at the completion of each interview were documented and that the data I had collected informed further data collection.

Data analysis.

Data analysis began with the transcription of interviews. In the early rounds of data collection, I transcribed the interviews myself. As data collection progressed, I sent interviews to a professional transcription service. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and included pauses, laughter, and hesitations. Once transcriptions were complete I read over transcripts whilst listening to the interview recording, and read and re-read the transcripts to ensure that I was familiar with the data. The stories became so familiar that I was able to recall them from memory. When I found myself relying on this recall during data analysis, I found it critical to return to the transcripts and check my memory of participant stories. This ensured that my analysis represented the data, and that I was not adapting my memory of participant stories to suit my analysis.

In the initial stages of data analysis, I made notes on each transcript. I highlighted, underlined, drew asterisks, and made notes in the margins of each transcript. The left margin was used for questions, reflections and, as data collection and analysis continued, notes about similarities and inconsistencies across participants. The right margin was used for labelling the data provided by participants. This process is referred to as 'open coding'; the breaking down and labelling of key issues, thoughts and feelings expressed by the participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). As I engaged in open coding I listened to the audio recording of the interview so I was able to consider emotion and tone. After completing open coding, I developed a summary of each interview. Within these summaries the key issues and concepts discussed by the participant were noted and quotes were included to demonstrate these issues and concepts. The purpose of

interview summaries was to create a manageable document to work with when making comparisons across participants.

A key requirement in grounded theory analysis is the ability to move data beyond summary and description towards abstract categories and relationships (Charmaz, 2006; Pidgeon, 1996) and so I needed to theorise. I needed to think beyond the concrete words that mothers provided me and consider the meaning and motivation underlying their words and what they might mean beyond their individual experience. Theorising was, at times, a difficult and frustrating process. To facilitate the process, I utilised a number of techniques recommended by authors of grounded theory methodology to find techniques that worked for me. I discovered that many were useful in their own way, at different points of the analysis.

I began by looking across interview summaries for similar issues or themes. I took note of the things that seemed important to mothers and categorised and organised my data according to these labels. I asked questions of the data, (i.e., 'Why are mothers fearful that their child may leave the country? Why is it important to them?'); I made comparisons between data (i.e., 'Cath and Patricia were fearful that they would lose their relationship with their child if they say anything against the relationship, Jane and Glenda were fearful that their child will leave country, what underlies these different fears?') and I considered different perspectives and/or different scenarios; termed the 'flip-flop' method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), for example; 'What if Glenda's situation involved a daughter rather than a son? Would her expectations differ?'. I considered the use of language; for example, "...they may have been a bit more traditional than us- us being a laid back Aussie family" (Cath) indicated processes of categorisation and perceptions of difference. I also considered the use of language that indicated the passage of time; for example, "but by then I had got to

know her" (Jane) which indicated the changing nature of experiences over time. Finally, I considered negative cases, participants who did not fit emerging patterns. An example of this was Beth who appeared to have no expectations regarding parenting or grand-parenting and so I spent time considering why her experience differed to that of other participants.

As I started to get a firm understanding of key categories I used the technique of mind mapping and diagramming, to organise and integrate ideas, conceptualise relationships between categories and represent the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used this technique consistently throughout data analysis. Sometimes I returned to my developing representation of data and sometimes I started from scratch. Once I had diagrammed I returned to the data; either conducting more interviews or returning to existing transcripts, to check how the data fit with my emerging interpretation of the data. The main versions of theoretical diagramming were saved to maintain a paper trail of theory development.

The application of these techniques and strategies were documented within memos. Memos allowed me to record decisions, thoughts and interpretations, define ideas, ask questions of the data, compare data from different participants, and direct future data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Stern, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I engaged in memo-ing within individual interview summaries and within separate documents. Memos within interview summaries were placed in text boxes, separate to the summary of interview content (e.g., This is similar to the concern expressed by Jane who was also fearful that her son may leave the country). Memos were created in a separate document when a core category became apparent from the data. Within each memo document, data was compared and contrasted *across* interviews to facilitate and document exploration of the emerging category. Very often connections,

relationships and possible explanations for the data would occur at the most inconvenient of times, almost never when I was sitting at my computer. Consequently, my memos have been written on pieces of scrap paper, the back of meeting agendas and as 'notes' in my mobile phone (despite my supervisor's insistence of the importance of carrying a research journal with me everywhere). One frustrating realisation has been the inability to force interpretation and theorising. Consistent with the description provided by Wu and Beaunae (2014), the process was "like a long walk through a dark forest with very limited light" (p. 259).

As I began to write up sections of my analysis I again returned to the data, listing all examples and including quotes to check that my interpretation reflected the experience of my participants. This was edited down as the analysis developed, but essentially, my analysis moved from concrete, to abstract and back to concrete in order to check the final abstract representation of data.

The Process of Developing a Theory: A Summary of Stages and Major Decisions

Data were collected in four phases. In the first phase of data collection I conducted interviews with six mothers. Five mothers were born in Australia and one was born in England. Of the six mothers, three had sons and three had daughters who were involved in an interethnic relationship. The ethnic backgrounds of their child's partners were varied; two partners were Chinese Singaporean, one was Thai, one American, one Burmese-American and one was born in Sierra Leone (my participant was not aware of the ethnic group that her daughter's partner belonged to). Preliminary analysis of these interviews occurred throughout data collection in the form of transcription and memo writing. After I had completed six interviews I stopped data

collection in order to complete a full analysis of the interviews to determine emerging categories of data and questions for future data collection.

Analysis provided insight into the experiences of mothers and revealed a number of emerging factors that appeared to be important to their experience of their child's interethnic relationship (e.g., expectations for their child; the fear of losing their child). Analysis also raised questions such as 'How does the experience of dominant group members differ to the experience of migrant group members?', 'How does the experience of mothers differ to the experience of fathers?' and 'How does the life stage of parents impact their experiences of their child's interethnic relationship?'. Given the broad nature of the original research questions (which were originally written to explore *parent* experiences of their child's interethnic relationship), I decided that some parameters were required in order to limit the scope of the project and ensure that data collection would result in a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences of their child's interethnic relationship.

In deciding on parameters to narrow the scope of my project I carefully considered the questions that had arisen from the first round of data collection. Given that the aim of the research was to investigate parent experiences of interethnic relationships I felt it was important to explore the experiences of a diverse range of participants from a range of ethnic backgrounds. I also aimed to consider parent experiences from a developmental perspective and so I felt it was important to include participants of various ages/stages of life, to explore how experiences might differ across middle to late adulthood. Whilst I recognised the importance of exploring the experience of fathers, I decided to narrow the focus of the research to consider only the experiences of mothers.

I made the decision to focus on mothers for a number of reasons. First, as discussed in Chapter Two, a greater amount of contact is reported between mothers and their adult children compared to fathers and their adult children (Birditt, Miller, Fingerman & Lefkowitz, 2009; Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Dharmalingam, & Baxendine, 2006; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Silverstein & Bengston, 1997; Umberson, 1992; van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Furthermore, a number of past research studies had narrowed their focus to consider the nature of the mother- adult child relationship (for example see, Pillemer & Suitor, 2002; Shaw & Magnuson, 2004; Willson, Shuey, Elder & Wickrama, 2006), providing insight into the nature of the mother-child relationship/experiences of mothering an adult child. Less research had focused on the experience of fathers in middle adulthood. Given that I was exploring a new area of research relevant to parenting (the experience of a child's interethnic relationship) I felt it important that there was literature available to draw on in the interpretation of my research findings (i.e., research relating to mothers). Finally, women tend to be more willing to participate in social science research compared to men (Korkeila et al., 2001; Porter & Whitcomb, 2005; Sax, Gilmartin & Bryant, 2003; Underwood, Kim & Matier, 2000), and my first round of data collection yielded interviews with six mothers, and so I felt that a focus on mothers would best facilitate data collection.

Given that all mothers recruited in the first round of data collection identified as Australian or English, sampling continued with a focus on recruiting mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The purpose here was to ensure that I considered the experience of mothers broadly during the initial phase of theory development; irrespective of ethnic background or migrant versus non-migrant status. This ensured that sampling was appropriate to the theoretical perspective which guided my research; individual life-span development.

In the second round of data collection six mothers were recruited, each from a different ethnic background; Iranian, Burmese, Sudanese, Dutch German, Timorese and Malay Indian. The ethnic backgrounds of their child's partners were varied including American, Brazilian, Scottish, Italian and Australian. Analysis of these interviews resulted in a more thorough understanding of mothers' experiences and importantly, revealed preliminary evidence of factors that explained differences in the experiences of mothers. I felt that the degree of autonomy that mothers had granted to their children was relevant to their experiences. I also understood that the degree of cultural difference between mothers/their child, and their child's partner was relevant to their experiences, as was the degree to which the relationship represented a threat of loss to mothers. Finally, I understood that the degree to which mothers were open, flexible and accepting of difference was relevant to their experiences. I was starting to develop a good understanding of my data and spent time developing categories and drafting models to represent the experiences of mothers in my sample (see Appendix J for an example).

Next, I needed to consider how these factors were relevant to the development of mothers. That is, I needed to understand the experience from a developmental perspective. To do this I developed a new interview schedule that focussed on the experience of parenting an adult child and encouraged mothers to reflect on the things that were important to them, as individuals, at this stage of their parenting journey. I returned to the field to complete interviews with a new sample of mothers from varied ethnic backgrounds. Although the interviews conducted during this stage of data collection were more focussed in terms of proposed areas of relevance, they remained flexible to allow mothers to raise any additional factors that had not surfaced in the analysis of the first 12 interviews.

The third round of data collection resulted in the recruitment of a further nine mothers, of varied ethnic backgrounds, bringing the total sample size to twenty-one. Mothers who participated in the third round of data collection were Australian, Chinese/Persian, Javanese, English, Malay, Serbian and Samoan. During this round of data collection and analysis I experienced a significant (and long awaited) shift in my thinking which enabled a better understanding of how experiences were relevant to mothers' development. This shift was aided by the process of reflexivity which will be discussed shortly. As a consequence, I developed the concept of 'parenting-related, developmental goals' and confirmed the relationship between these goals and mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. My developing model was revised to reflect advances in my understanding (see Appendix K) and I felt I was gaining a comprehensive answer to my research questions.

After the third round of data collection and analysis I had developed a good understanding of the relevance of mothers' experiences from a developmental perspective. Next, I needed to situate this experience within mothers' broader experience of development. In the final round of data collection, I encouraged mothers to position the experience of their child's interethnic relationship within their broader development as an individual. I asked mothers to reflect on whether the changes they had experienced (if any), resulted from the experience of their child's interethnic relationship, or whether changes were associated with ageing. Essentially, I was asking mothers to reflect on the biological vs. socio-cultural/environmental nature of their development. For example, a question that I asked of Gillian during this stage of data collection was; "You've talked there about increased acceptance [of ethnic difference] because of the relationship. Do you think it's the relationship that led to that increased acceptance? Or is it a thing of getting older?". When mothers indicated

little change as a result of their experience, I asked them to reflect on why this was the case. For example: “You mentioned you have always been accepting [of cultural difference] and so this experience has kind of confirmed for you that you are accepting. Why have you been accepting? - Not all people are. What is it about you that led you to be that way?”. Questions of this nature are challenging for participants to answer as they require reflection and an ability to look objectively at personal experience. I was fortunate that mothers in my final group of participants were able, and willing to engage in this process and consider such questions. I was also better practiced and more confident in my approach to interviewing by this stage of data collection, which facilitated this process. I found that a useful strategy to encourage reflection at this stage of the project was to share my developing analysis and ask mothers to reflect on, and add to, my developing theory. This round of data collection really brought clarity to my findings and enabled me to position mothers’ experiences within the broader context of development in middle to later adulthood and existing theory relating to the same. I interviewed a further nine mothers during this stage of data collection, taking my final sample to 30.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Edith Cowan University Human Research and Ethics Committee. Given that prior research had highlighted the potential for extreme reactions from parents regarding their child’s interethnic relationship (sometimes of a violent and hostile nature; e.g., Fernandez, 1996; Owen, 2002) I needed to prepare for participant distress during interviews. In light of this I familiarised myself with appropriate support services such as Relationships Australia and Family Helpline. Irrespective of whether participants indicated the need for support services, a thank you note containing the contact

numbers of these support services was left with the participant at the conclusion of the interview. Any participant who travelled to the university campus for the interview was provided with a $10 fuel voucher to cover travel related expenses. When I travelled to meet participants, I gave a small box of chocolates as thanks for their time. Electronic data were stored in accordance with ethical requirements. Transcription was undertaken by a professional service which requires that transcriptionists sign confidentiality agreements prior to undertaking any work. Each participant, their child and their child's partner were assigned pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis: A Time for Reflexivity

Given my personal involvement in an interethnic relationship I found it difficult, at times, to shift my perspective and consider the experience of mothers during data collection and analysis. This was particularly evident during round three of data collection when I really needed to consider the developmental relevance of a child's interethnic relationship for mothers. To overcome this, I found it useful to reflect on my own mother's experience of my interethnic relationship. I thought of the day I introduced my mum to my now husband. I thought of the day my mum drove me to meet his parents for the first time. I thought of our wedding and of the birth of our first child. All of these experiences were experiences for my mum, as well as for me. Thinking about this, and considering how the interethnic nature of my relationship may have impacted of my own mother, helped me to gain the focus I needed to consider the experience of mothers; my participants. I remember my 'break through' moment very vividly; it was a critical turning point in my research.

This process of reflection facilitated the 'bracketing' of my experience and my interpretation of my mum's experience, from the experiences of my participants. Bracketing is critical in ensuring the integrity of the research process. Tufford and

Newman (2012) discuss bracketing as the recognition and partitioning of preconceptions that the researcher brings with them to the research topic that may influence and/or harm the integrity of the research process. Although contention exists as to when bracketing should occur (i.e., prior to or during the project) I found it most relevant and useful to engage in the process during data collection and analysis stages of the project, when data prompted memories, feelings, thoughts and reflections of my own experience. Bracketing these memories, feelings, thoughts and reflections ensured that I acknowledged mine and my mum's experiences as separate to those of my participants and encouraged me to reflect on and be critical of my interpretations. This process was facilitated through discussions with my supervisors and peers.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I also reflected on the nature of each interview, the dynamic between myself and each participant and the reasons why a particular dynamic took place. This reflection assisted the interpretation of interview data. On a number of occasions, participants asked about my own experiences as an individual involved in an interethnic relationship or my view or opinion about an issue we were discussing. Questions about my experiences, my views and my opinions were recognised as a normal part of the reciprocal exchange that characterises the constructionist approach. On some occasions, participants asked what I had found so far through my research. Often, the motive underlying participant interest appeared to be an attempt to understand the nature of their own experience; to determine whether their experience was consistent with the experience of others. For me, such questions highlighted the practical importance of my research (i.e., from a therapeutic perspective).

More on Rigour

In addition to the above outlined self-reflective practices I adopted during data collection and analysis, additional techniques further ensured and demonstrate the rigour of my research. My supervisors consistently challenged my thinking during supervision meetings and when providing feedback on drafts. They highlighted instances when my interpretation stretched too far from my data, they prompted me to consider alternative explanations and ultimately ensured that my interpretations of data were considered, meaningful and grounded in evidence. Also, whilst undertaking this research I worked as an academic, surrounded by supportive peers who took an interest in my research and my progress. I would often ask their thoughts about procedural decisions I needed to make and spoke to them about my analysis; I shared my thoughts and interpretations and tested working hypotheses that I was developing from my analysis. These discussions were critical in ensuring that my interpretations were logical to those independent of my research. The insights and questions of my supervisors and my peers assisted immensely in the process of data analysis and in maintaining theoretical sensitivity, as they often provided a different perspective and/or challenged an interpretation that I had made of the data. Finally, I found it useful to debrief with my peers about the personal thoughts and feelings I experienced as I worked through the data both in terms of content and process. This process of **peer-review**, discussed by Creswell (2013) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), was a key strategy in ensuring the rigour of my research process and analysis.

I have also maintained an **audit trail** throughout the entire process of conducting my research. This includes interview recordings, marked up interview transcripts, interview summaries, memos, mind-maps, streams of consciousness (in which I attempted to make sense of my developing analysis), draft diagrams (in which

I attempted to integrate and model my developed categories), and all draft versions of my findings chapters. This collection of documents; evidence of my research process, serves to demonstrate the rigour of my undertaking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). I have also provided **detailed descriptions of decisions and processes** within the thesis. This ensures that readers can consider how the data were collected and analysed, and the degree to which findings might 'fit' another setting. The importance of transparency of process in enabling judgement of procedural quality is asserted by a number of authors (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Smith, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Finally, I used **evidence;** specifically, data from my participants, throughout the process of data analysis and write-up (Smith, 1996). I incorporated direct quotes at each stage of data analysis (i.e., within interview summaries, memo documents and drafts of the findings) to ensure that my interpretation remained grounded in and adequately reflected participant experiences. This was an important process for me, to ensure that I never lost sight of the original words of my participants.

Overview of the Presentation of Findings

In the following three chapters I present my analysis of data and interpretation of my findings. Deciding the most appropriate way to present my findings was a challenging task, and I trialled a number of versions. Ultimately, this process brought better clarity to my analysis, as I moved from my own personal, understanding of the data, to consider how best to present my understanding to a naive reader. After so long of pressing forward and searching deeper for meaning, I needed to step back and think about the broader picture of my analysis, and how best to present this. With each version, it was my supervisors who provided the testing ground, to determine whether

the structure worked. I am forever grateful for their patience and guidance during this process.

The way I have chosen to present my findings very much illustrates the development of my grounded theory of mothers' experiences. I start, in Chapter Four, with descriptive insight into mothers' experiences; consistent with the focus of my initial interviews. I detail initial reactions and concerns that were expressed by mothers, addressing my first research question; 'What are mother's experiences of their adult child's interethnic relationship?". A key focus of this chapter is the variation in concern that was evident in mothers' experiences. I describe the factors that influenced the degree of concern experienced by mothers, providing insight into research question two 'What factors influence the experience of mothers whose adult child is, or has been, involved in a committed, intimate interethnic relationship?'. In Chapter Five I explain mothers' concern; adopting a developmental perspective. I begin the chapter with a brief description of mothers' experiences parenting an adult child; which leads me to a discussion of what was important to mothers during this period of parenting, as their child developed towards adulthood. I conceptualise these matters of importance as parenting-related, developmental goals and describe the relevance of these goals, first to mothers' developmental and then to the experience of a child's interethnic relationship. Thus this chapter provides further insight into research question two. In Chapter Six, I delve deeper still into the experience of mothers by considering the developmental implications of their experience. This chapter presents the focus of my final phases of data collection. I consider the growth that was experienced by some mothers, which occurred in the context of their experience of their child's interethnic relationship, and I discuss enablers and inhibitors of growth, highlighting the relevance of contextual as well as individual

factors in individual development. This chapter provides further depth to research question one; regarding the nature of mothers' experiences, by describing the developmental implications of the experience. I have chosen to present my findings in this way to highlight my journey in developing my grounded theory of mothers' experiences and to portray the experiences of a child's interethnic relationship as one which occurred over time; from initial reactions to a specific event in Chapter Four, through to longer-term implications and the broader context of the experience (in terms of mothers' life course) in Chapter Six. Findings are fully integrated across all phases of data collection, however certain findings were more salient in earlier phases of data collection; as I was first considering mothers' initial reactions of their child's interethnic relationship, compared to later interviews; as I became more focussed on exploring the developmental implications of the experience for mothers. As a result, different mothers' voices are heard more at certain points, and less at other points, throughout the findings chapters.

Chapter Four: Findings I - The varied experiences of mothers

Overview

The development of a child's intimate relationship was an event that mothers expected to experience during their middle years of parenting. Specific to the mothers who contributed to this research was that their adult child was, or had been involved, in an interethnic relationship; a relationship with an individual from an ethnic background that differed to their own. In this chapter I describe mothers' experiences of their child's intimate, interethnic relationships with a focus on the variation that was evident in mothers' experiences. I begin the chapter with an outline of initial reactions, outlining the concerns that were experienced by some mothers. Later in the chapter I explain variation in experiences with reference to 1) mothers' experience of difference and 2) mothers' progress with the developmental task of 'letting go' of their adult child.

The Experience of a Child's Interethnic, Intimate Relationship

The development of a child's intimate relationship was an important event in the lives of mothers during their middle adulthood. Expectations regarding this event were evident in discussions with mothers. For example, Leona stated she was "excited" to learn that her son had a girlfriend "because he needed a wife". Mothers expected their child to develop an intimate relationship because it is considered a normative event of adulthood which signifies a further step towards the achievement of adult status. In this way, the development of a child's intimate relationship was not only an important milestone for the child; it also represented an important milestone for mothers. This supports the research of Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer and O'Brien (2011) who found that parents play a key role in supporting their children towards the milestones of adulthood and so, when milestones are realised, there is a sense of achievement for the parent (in this case, the mother) as well as the child. This is also

supported by findings from ambivalence literature, discussed in Chapter Two, which demonstrates higher levels of internal conflict amongst parents whose child fails to achieve the milestone of marriage, or experiences difficulties in their intimate relationships, compared to parents whose child marries, or experiences success in intimate relationships (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit, 2010; Lendon, Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2014; Pillemer & Suitor, 2002; Pillemer et al., 2007; Pillemer et al., 2012). It is presumed that ambivalence results from the unmet expectations that parents hold for their child (Lendon, et al., 2014).

Specific to the experience of mothers in the present research was that their child had partnered with someone from an ethnic background that differed to their own. For some mothers, this relationship was the first serious relationship that their child had divulged to them; for others, it was not (this difference is important in explaining variation in mothers' experiences later in the chapter). Mothers reported varied feelings upon learning that their child was involved in an interethnic relationship, from happiness through to surprise, apprehension and disappointment. Some mothers, most commonly those from migrant backgrounds, understood that in coming to Australia their child was likely to associate with, become friends with, and possibly date people of differing ethnic background and therefore had anticipated that an interethnic relationship was a possibility. Other mothers had not anticipated that their child might enter an interethnic relationship. For example, Gillian stated;

> I just never imagined that [daughter] would want to marry an African man. I would just not have imagined it in my wildest dreams. I just thought, she'll meet an Australian or someone from England and she'll settle down.

The degree to which mothers had considered the possibility that their child might enter an interethnic relationship impacted initial reactions in terms of the degree to which

the news came as a surprise to mothers. For some mothers, a lack of prior consideration that their child might develop an interethnic relationship exposed unconscious expectations that they held regarding the nature of their child's intimate relationship as well as unconscious prejudices, which were realised upon learning of their child's relationship.

For some mothers, the interethnic nature of their child's relationship raised concern. Concern varied across the group, in terms of magnitude and duration, but was typically characterised by three common themes: 1) concern about ethnic difference; 2) concern about relocation/distance; and 3) concern about insincere motives underlying their child's partner's desire for the relationship. Concern about ethnic difference was the most prominent theme discussed by mothers which is why the following section (a discussion of mothers' concerns), focusses most on this matter.

Ethnic difference.

For some mothers, the interethnic nature of their child's relationship raised concern about ethnic difference. Broad concern about ethnic difference was underpinned by three more specific concerns; potential for conflict, threat to values/expectations and threat to family cohesion. Firstly, ethnic difference was seen to equate to differences in values, beliefs and expectations which were perceived as potential sources of conflict within the relationship. For example, Devi stated; "Marriage is already a difficult um… process, two Indians getting together. I think it's just more fraught with problems when you come from different ethnic groups". This concern is supported by the findings of research which demonstrate higher levels of reported conflict in interethnic relationship (e.g. Hollmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

Secondly, differences in values and expectations were seen by some mothers to threaten the values they had instilled in their child and the expectations that they

had for their child. This perceived threat is supported by the findings of research which describes processes of negotiation and a 'blending' of cultural, religious and gendered values and practices as interethnic couples negotiate their family identity (e.g. Luke & Luke, 1998). This was a concern for mothers, who felt that the values of their child and the expectations that they had for their child would be lost in the process of negotiation. This was a particular concern expressed by mothers of daughters. For example, Patricia, was concerned about the role of women in the home country of her daughter's partner (Sierra Leone). Patricia expressed concern that due to cultural/ethnic differences in values her daughter may not be treated in a way that she had hoped and expected for her daughter;

> Um, the only other thing … the fact that they don't tend to look upon women as being as important maybe as the male. And I thought- I didn't want [daughter] to have to go through that, if he was going to be the same.

Similar concerns were expressed by Mahsuri. In recalling a conversation that she had with her now son-in-law upon their first meeting, Mahsuri discussed the importance of her daughter's independence. Mahsuri expressed concern that her expectations for her daughter may not be supported due to differences in values arising from ethnic difference;

> [I said] 'So I know Indians are usually very, they're usually very traditional about having a wife, a stay at home mum', I said 'I don't encourage that, because she will rot at home. You know, really, she will', so I said 'I do not want that. If you do not want her to work, please allow her to do some voluntary work or do part time study or part time work, at least do something else, not just be a homemaker, because that's not what I raised my daughters to be'.

It is important to note the lack of agency that Mahsuri affords to her daughter in the above dialogue. Mahsuri's concern reflects what she wanted for her daughter, with reference to what her daughter's husband might want, with no reference to her daughter's wishes. This is also evident in Patricia's quote, as she states "I didn't want…" - again her concern related to what she wanted for her daughter. I highlight this point as it is relevant to findings discussed in Chapter Five, when I explain why ethnic difference was a concern for mothers from a developmental perspective.

Finally, some mothers were concerned that ethnic difference would impact family cohesion; that their child's partner might not fit in and get along with the family, or might not enjoy or value shared family time together, thus impacting family relationships. This was assumed to be more likely because they were from a different ethnic background. Concern about fitting in was articulated by Linda who expressed disappointment that her son's girlfriend was not Anglo-Australian. Linda spoke of a lack of common ground and wondered whether her son's girlfriend would enjoy spending time together with the family;

> I don't know. Will she become Australianised if she stays here? (laughs) I like to have (pause) family get-togethers at my house and I combine my husband's family and mine um, and I've been doing that for years and now we've all got a good relationship and we like seeing each other from time to time. Is she going to enjoy something like that? The way that we do?

Mothers feared that a lack of integration would inhibit time with their child; as stated by Linda:

> If she doesn't feel comfortable or she doesn't like the idea of it [family get togethers] she won't [fit in] but I hope that doesn't stop [son].

A lack of integration or difference in the value placed on shared family time together was also perceived as a possible stressor for the child and/or their relationship. For example, Samira discussed;

> Yeah, we've had our ups and downs and we tend to blame [daughter-in-law], you know, taking [son] away, not understanding how close our family is and we want that to remain. But also, it was hard for [son]...we started seeing [son] becoming torn, wanting to please his family, wanting to please his future wife, and it's very hard.

Related to the issue of family cohesion, ethnic difference raised concern for some mothers about broader family relationships, specifically, whether their child would be accepted by his/her in-laws. Some mothers also felt it important that they too get along with their child's in-laws in order to assist family cohesion, providing a strong base of family support. Again, ethnic difference was considered a potential obstacle to this; evident in the following quote from Linda who expressed apprehension about her relationship with her son's partner's parents;

> Well I suppose you've got- if they're in the same culture- you've already got a lot in common you can ask them about their jobs, where they work, what they do, you know, do they go on holidays, where do they go, you know, all that kind of stuff. I wouldn't even go down that path when meeting her parents. I don't know how I'd start the conversation.

Evident in discussions with mothers who expressed concern about ethnic difference was a sense of uncertainty about difference, as well as assumptions that had been made on the basis of ethnic difference; that because ethnic background was different, everything would be different. This was evident in the following quote from Gillian:

> Well, cultural differences, like… especially from countries like that [Zambia], where the culture is so different. I mean, for us, leaving England and coming here, it was the same. There was no differences. But for him, his culture is so different to hers. I didn't even know what sort of a background he came from. I didn't know whether his dad had three or four wives, or whether he'd been promised to another wife back in his country. I had no idea, because of all these cultural differences. So that's where, that's what my concerns were there. So, and then, was his cultural differences, the way some cultures, the men look down on the women. So, was she going to be downtrodden, sort of thing? So, I worried about that for her, the cultural differences.

Research regarding the impact of cultural distance on acculturation can be used to understand mothers' concerns about ethnic difference. The concept of cultural distance was first introduced by Babiker, Cox and Miller (1980) to measure the degree of discrepancy that foreign students perceived between the cultural attributes of their home country and those of their host country (e.g., language, food, religion, educational level). Babiker et al.'s initial study demonstrated that greater perceived cultural distance was associated with greater levels of anxiety, suggesting a link between cultural distance and adjustment. Many studies have since demonstrated that cultural distance is associated with sociocultural adjustment (that is; change that occurs as a result of sustained contact with another cultural group; Berry, 1997; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005). Specifically, the greater the cultural distance, the more difficult the adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990; Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). As stated by Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (2002) "when cultural distance is great, behavioural changes pose a greater challenge since the

amount of change required (of both groups, but usually more for the non-dominant group) is greater." (p. 361).

When two people from the same ethnic background come together to form a relationship there is a potential for difference in values, beliefs and expectations. When two people from *different* ethnic backgrounds come together there is a potential for more difference. From the perspective of mothers, these differences create distance between the members of the couple, distance from the mother and distance within broader family relations (e.g., language barriers, celebration of different cultural events, birthdays). These differences require negotiation and adjustment to reduce distance and establish harmonious relationships within the family. When mothers perceived a greater degree of distance between their family and their child's partner, they were concerned that this might create difficulties in the negotiation and adjustment process. Greater perceived cultural distance also created concern amongst some mothers that the things they held as important; the values they had instilled in their child and the expectations that they held for their child, may not be met as the couple negotiated roles, values and norms within their relationship. This was evident from Mahsuri and Patricia's concerns about negotiated gender roles in their daughters' interethnic relationships.

Relocation/distance.

For some mothers, the interethnic nature of their child's relationship raised concern about the possibility of relocation. This concern was specific to mothers whose child's partner had family living overseas. These mothers were concerned that their child's partner may, at some point, wish to return to their country of origin. Mothers were concerned that the desire of their child's partner to relocate may result in the breakdown of the relationship if their child wished to remain in Australia.

Mothers were equally concerned that their child may relocate with their partner. Both concerns were articulated by Jane:

> Oh well of course the natural concern is that she gets sick of it here and wants to go back to America, yeah …worried that they'll break up probably um (.) and worried that he will go, yeah to America. Oh, I don't know, I don't know if he would or not but yeah of course that's a concern yeah that she might want to return home.

Mothers were particularly concerned about a lack of involvement with their grandchildren should their child and child's partner decide to relocate. This was articulated by Linda who described the possibility of her son relocating overseas with his girlfriend as putting "a bit of a dent in one of my long held life wishes", referring to her involvement in the lives of her grandchildren. Concern about a lack of involvement with grandchildren was also discussed by Denise in describing what she would miss if her daughter and son-in-law were to relocate overseas "Oh just the closeness particularly with the grandchildren" and by Jane who stated "I'd hate it, to think that he was in another country and I couldn't see my grandkids every week".

Concern expressed by mothers of sons, whose partners' parents lived overseas, reflected concern that their son's partner may feel the pull of family and/or seek the support of family, particularly during the years of childrearing, and leave Australia. This concern can be understood with reference to the role of women as kinkeepers, and the strength of the mother-daughter bond, which has been described as "one of the strongest of human ties" (Suitor & Pillemer, 2006, p. 139). In an examination of the mother-daughter relationship across cultures, Deakins (2012) describes the "global tenacity of connection between mothers and daughters" (p. 267), highlighting continuity in the importance of the mother-daughter relationship across cultures. A

number of factors give rise to this bond. Firstly, women are socialised from an early age to fulfil the role of 'kinkeeper' and so are strongly invested in maintaining family relationships (Fingerman, 2001). The fact that mothers and daughters share this role; both making efforts to maintain family ties, consolidates this bond (Fingerman, 2001). Secondly, mothers and daughters share the experience of being women (Fingerman, 2001). Daughters seek guidance and look to their mothers as role models, learning how to fulfil roles such as wife and mother (Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson & Kaufman, 2011) and seek guidance, particularly during initiation into and over the course of motherhood (Sterk & Feikema, 2012). It is acknowledged that there are cultural differences in norms around co-habitation (e.g., daughters going to live with their husband's family after marriage), however this was not discussed by any of my participants.

For some mothers, the possibility of relocation raised concern about the quality of life their child would have in the country of their partner. This was a particular concern for mothers whose child's partner's family lived in countries such as Zambia and India. As explained by Gillian, a migrant from England,

> … me and my husband left England to come here so's that we could have a better life. And I want my children to have a better life than I've had. So, if she was going to go to some, like, third world country, she's not going to have a good life, you know.

Mahsuri also felt that relocation would impact on her daughter's quality of life, as well as inhibit her ability to protect and watch out for her daughter's best interests, as described in the following exchange;

> **The first thing you asked him [son-in-law] was whether he was going to take her [daughter] back to India. Why was that a concern for you?**

> Because I don't know, maybe I'm assuming, you know? Maybe I'm wrong, but I always thought that if he would bring her back to India, she's going to be a housewife just at home, not allowed to go out. And she won't be working, she won't be studying. And that's it, she will rot. I don't want that. And it's so far away I won't be able to see her. I won't be able to keep tab on her welfare and yeah, I'm afraid that you know, the mother-in-law, the sisters-in-law, will bully her. Because you know, my daughter is very, very timid.

Evident in both Gillian and Mahsuri's quotes are indications of the role that each mother assumed in parenting their child; Gillian, aimed to provide a better quality of life for her children than she had herself, whilst Mahsuri, aimed to protect her daughter. I highlight this as it is relevant to a later discussion of findings regarding the role of mothers during the middle years of parenthood.

The possibility of insincere motive.

The possibility of insincere motives underlying their child's interethnic relationship was another concern held by some mothers. Specifically, some mothers were concerned that their child's partner was 'using' their child for an ulterior motive; to obtain a VISA, to obtain permanent residence in Australia, for financial support or as a base from which to travel. Mothers were concerned that their child was not truly loved and that the relationship might end once their child's partner had achieved their ulterior goal. For example;

> I don't want him to want to marry my daughter just for visa. You know, and then once you get the visa and you're just going to dump my daughter. I didn't want that (Mahsuri).

> I've got the feeling from day one that he's with her just because of the visa. There is no love at all (Jelena).

The context of this concern within the Australian context relates to political discussion and media coverage of marriage scams in which partnerships with an Australian citizen or permanent resident are developed, or arranged, for the purpose of obtaining permanent residency (Kainth, 2017 Feb 22 & Feb 27). Whilst there are stringent processes in place to avoid corruption of Australia's immigration system (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017b; Sadler, 2017) it does occur, and some mothers were concerned that their child may be manipulated into a relationship by their partner, solely to obtain residency in Australia.

Variation in Experience

The aforementioned concerns were not experienced by all mothers. The degree to which mothers experienced concern varied primarily because of three factors. The first two factors; the extent to which difference was perceived between mothers/their child and their child's partner and, if perceived, the degree to which mothers were accepting of difference, interacted with each other to influence mothers' unique experience of difference. The third factor that explained variation in concern was the degree to which each mother had progressed with the developmental task of 'letting go'. These factors interacted with each other such that, the more difference that was perceived, the less accepting mothers were of difference and/or the less progress made in 'letting go', the more concern was experienced.

I conceptualise each of these influential factors as being on a continuum. For example, some mothers perceived no difference between their child and their child's partner, some perceived some degree of difference whilst others perceived significant difference. When difference was perceived, some mothers accepted and embraced difference, some were wary about difference and others were opposed to the presence of ethnic difference in their child's relationship. In terms of letting go, some mothers

had made significant progress with this developmental task prior to the development of their child' s interethnic relationship (i.e., they had experienced other normative events that facilitated the progress of 'letting go' such as their child moving out of home, travelling, and/or developing other significant, intimate relationships). These mothers described a relationship with their adult child that was characterised by differentiation. Others had made less progress with the task, describing a relationship with their child that was still involved and close, whilst others described a relationship that was, to some degree, enmeshed. Therefore, whilst each factor was relevant to the experience of all mothers, the extent to which difference was perceived, difference was accepted and mothers had progressed with the task of letting go, and the interaction of these factors, explained variation in the degree of concern experienced of mothers. In the next section of findings, I explain this variation in further detail.

Mothers' experience of ethnic difference.

Mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship were influenced by their experience of difference (perception and acceptance of difference). This was unique to each mother, influenced by the nature of their child's relationship and by individual differences (i.e., personality, previous life experiences etc.). To some extent, perceptions and acceptance of difference are interrelated and difficult to disentangle. For example, when more difference is perceived, an individual may become less accepting of difference; whereas when less difference is perceived, the individual may be more accepting of difference. Alternatively, when an individual is accepting of difference, they may be less likely to perceive difference, whereas when they are not accepting of difference they are likely to be more sensitive to difference and so more likely to perceive it. I acknowledge this interaction but, to aid clarity, I discuss perceptions and acceptance of difference separately. I first discuss variation

in the extent of difference that was perceived by mothers, followed by a discussion of variation in acceptance of difference by mothers. I then move on to a discussion of factors that explain variation in extent and acceptance of difference, specifically; the nature of difference, the acculturation orientation adopted by the mother or child's partner and mothers' personality.[18]

In terms of the extent of difference, some mothers perceived no difference between their child and their child's partner, despite coming from different ethnic backgrounds. For example, when asked whether any cultural differences existed between her son (who was Timorese) and his partner (who was Australian-Italian) Emeline stated; "No, no different. I think there's nothing different to my culture" and Vanessa, whose English-Caribbean son was dating a Burmese girl replied "No, not really. No, I can't think of any. No". A lack of perceived difference meant that mothers did not experience any of the concerns relating to ethnic difference described earlier in the chapter. Some mothers acknowledged differences such as food preferences, practices around eating (e.g., eating with hand/spoon) and cultural practices such as the removal of shoes before entering a home. Other mothers perceived significant difference between their child and their child's partner; whether that be difference on a number of dimensions (e.g., language, food and customs) or, vast difference on a single, key dimension (e.g., religion). The greater the extent of perceived difference, the greater the degree of concern mothers experienced about the relationship.

[18] In discussing mothers' experiences of difference, I also include the experience of anticipated difference. I have included this in acknowledgement that mothers reflected on their experience of their child's interethnic relationship over time. A key finding of this research (discussed in Chapter Six), is that for some mothers, perceptions of difference changed over time. Therefore, in some circumstances, difference that was anticipated upon learning of a child's interethnic relationship was found to be non-existent or not of concern at a later stage of the relationship. Nonetheless, this anticipation of difference caused significant concern for some mothers and so is included in the discussion of mothers' experience of difference.

When difference was perceived, some mothers demonstrated acceptance of difference, evident from the way in which difference was discussed; either in a positive or unconcerned manner. Acceptance of difference was also evident from the way in which some mothers described unquestioned accommodation of difference within their family, as evident in Denise's following recollection:

> I can remember when [daughter] first brought [son-in-law] home for dinner I remember her saying 'Mum we have to say grace'. And I said 'That's fine' and we did because that's how he'd been brought up and that's what we did.

Acceptance meant that whilst difference was perceived, it was not considered problematic, strange or an inconvenience, and instead was accommodated within the family. This created a basis for positive and respectful relationships and a positive experience for all involved.

Other mothers demonstrated an inability to accept difference. For example, Rose was irritated with a number of behaviours displayed by her Thai daughter-in-law (with whom she lived for part of each week) because they differed to the way she did things, or the way she thought things ought to be done. Rose did not like the different foods that her daughter-in-law cooked, did not like the way her daughter-in-law did housework and did not like the way that her daughter-in-law interacted with her son. The behaviour of her daughter-in-law was different; which Rose perceived was related to her ethnic background, and Rose was not able to tolerate this, as expressed in the following quote.

> The things she cooks (.) oh the smells and- I mean, we're just basic- I mean- you must know Poms....pie and chips or egg and bacon but you know, I get up some mornings and she's been cooking her lunch to take with her- Curry! Half

> past seven in the morning. My stomach turns over- I mean I'm not pregnant but I feel as though I am... I can't cope with the smell.

For mothers who were less accepting of difference, experiences were described with a sense of animosity; difference was considered to be annoying, strange, an inconvenience. Hence, these mothers also expressed greater concern about their child's relationship.

Explaining variation in experiences of difference.

Through my discussions with mothers I identified that mothers' experiences of difference were influenced by three factors; the nature of difference, the degree to which they and/or their child's partner adopted an assimilation/integration orientation to acculturation and mothers' personality. The final two factors are related, in that migrant mothers who indicated a personal orientation towards assimilation/integration tended to display particular personality characteristics such as openness to new experience. I acknowledge this relationship but discuss each factor separately.

Nature of the difference.

The nature of difference played an important role in the extent to which difference was perceived and if perceived, accepted. This was evident from the way mothers identified or referred to difference. For example, although some mothers identified difference they were dismissive of, or downplayed, the difference. The dismissive way that certain differences were referred to is evident from the use of the term 'only' in both quotes below;

> Only in the eating (laughs)… he loves his greens and they have those in everything. Greens go into everything, the Chinese veggies (Beth).

> Well no- the only differences would be that she would prefer to cook some Chinese style food (Glenda).

A number of mothers initially indicated no difference but subsequently added, “Oh, except the food” or words to similar effect, almost as an afterthought. The dismissive way in which some differences were discussed suggests that certain differences were easier to accept than others. Typically, differences such as food preferences/ behaviours were referred to in this way whilst differences in religion, beliefs and expectations were associated with more concern.

Differences in the acceptance of difference based on the nature of difference might be understood with reference to overt versus implicit elements of culture (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002) or objective versus subjective elements of culture (Matsumoto & Juang, 2017). Elements of culture have been distinguished as either those which are observable and at surface level such as food, dress and music (i.e. overt or objective elements of culture), or those that are less observable, deeper aspects of culture as such as beliefs, values and norms (i.e. implicit or subjective elements of culture). It seemed from the experiences of mothers that surface level elements were easier to accept than deeper level elements. This might be explained by the ease at which such differences could be incorporated into the existing family system. For example, mothers may find it easier to accommodate a preference for “Chinese vegetables” (Cath), or a dislike of “pasta dishes” (Beth), as opposed to differences in values or belief systems. In some circumstances however, the distinction between surface and deeper elements of culture was less easily distinguished, as highlighted by Devi in discussing the difficulty that would result of her youngest son (not yet partnered) were to partner with a person of Muslim faith. In particular, Devi highlighted difficulties associated with food preferences and preparation and what this might mean for shared family time:

> Maybe you won't be allowed to mix with us you know because if they go to the extreme of saying, you know, the food, if it's not Halal you won't be able to eat, you know all those ramifications yeah?

Devi provided this example in the context of a broader discussion of cultural differences associated with Islam, highlighting the relationship between food; a seemingly 'surface' aspect of culture, with deeper elements of culture (i.e., religious beliefs).

Despite some potential complexities (e.g. the association between food and religion), the distinction between surface and deeper aspects of culture aids in explaining both inter-individual variation in acceptance of difference across mothers (i.e. depending on the nature of difference they experienced and individual differences in the extent to which mothers were invested in their heritage culture), as well as intra-individual variation in acceptance. Specifically, some mothers indicated a threshold for difference, beyond which, they perceived greater difficulty in accepting difference (e.g., mother is able to accept food and cultural traditions but not differences in values around gender roles in the family). This may be explained by the extent to which each mother was invested in different elements of her heritage culture.

Acculturation orientation.

Acculturation orientation was also important in explaining both perceptions of, and acceptance of difference. Acculturation refers to change that occurs when members of one cultural group come into contact with members of another cultural group (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasem, 2002). Berry discusses four acculturation strategies which describe the different ways that members of a non-dominant, cultural group members might interact with, and adapt to (or not) the dominant group. Berry

describes each acculturation strategy at an individual level[19]. For example, Berry describes an 'assimilation' strategy as: "when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures" (p. 9) and an 'integration' strategy as "when there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups… here, there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network" (p.9). In relation to perceptions of difference, cultural and ethnic differences were not perceived by some mothers because either they/their family described an assimilation or integration orientation towards acculturation (amongst migrant mothers), or their child's partner demonstrated an assimilation or integration orientation in acculturating to Australian culture (amongst non-migrant mothers).

A number of mothers who discussed an assimilation or integration orientation as relevant to their experience were migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (e.g., Iran, Burma, Timor, Singapore) who had lived in Australia for many years. These mothers described their ethnic identity as fluid, or not strongly defined by their home country. Mothers discussed picking elements of each culture that they liked, celebrating the cultural and religious festivals of both cultures and/or abandoning the cultural practices of their home country. Some mothers specifically mentioned the importance that migrants adopt an assimilation orientation upon migration to Australia. For example, Elaine, a migrant from Burma stated;

[19] Berry (1997) distinguishes between group-level acculturation and psychological acculturation and states that the distinction is important because individuals will vary in the degree to which they participate in/endorse community-level acculturation.

> You must be able to assimilate to a certain extent, isn't it? …why do you come then, in the first place, if you are not ready to assimilate, you know? Why do you come?

The acculturation orientation described by migrant mothers might likely be influenced by time since migration not only of individual mothers (i.e. many of the migrant mothers who exhibited assimilation orientation had lived in Australia for many years), but also of the group (i.e., whether the group has a long history of migration to Australia, or are a relatively recent history). Although all mothers in this research were first generation migrants, generational status might have an important influence on assimilation orientation at a group level, whereby third and fourth generational migrants might consider themselves more Australian than of migrant heritage.

Non-migrant mothers discussed the assimilation orientation of their child's partner. For example, Beth stated that her Chinese-Singaporean son-in-law "didn't want to be a Singaporean … he wanted everything Australian". Personal orientations towards assimilation reduced the degree of cultural distance between children and their partners and so mothers saw no cause for concern (relating to ethnic difference) within their child's relationship.

Non-migrant mothers were more likely to express concern about the relationship when a child's partner did not display an assimilation orientation; for example, Rose's daughter-in-law who continued to speak Thai and would bow when thanking Rose, and Jelena's son-in-law, who continued to practice the religious norm of burning incense,

> I think the big cultural thing is the talking in her language (.) which is very irritating to all concerned not just me, nothing to do with me, it's a family thing. It irritates us (Rose)

> All that, you know, bowing and what not. I said to her 'Okay. You do not have to bow every time you thank me for something. It's okay. This is Australia. We don't do that (Rose)
>
> You have to see my house. It stinks of that smelly stuff and he's praying every single day (Jelena)

The degree of concern was however influenced by individual differences in mothers' personality.

Personality.

Personality played an important role in influencing whether difference was perceived (or assumed) in the first instance and if it were, the degree to which difference was accepted by mothers. In relation to perception/assumption of difference, mothers differed in their tendency to form judgments about their child's partner based on their membership of a particular ethnic group. At one end of the continuum, some mothers demonstrated very little prejudice; they exhibited a general tendency to look beyond ethnic difference and did not make assumptions about the nature of their child's partner on the basis of ethnic background. These mothers asserted that ethnicity did not necessarily define core values, beliefs and expectations and thus they did not see the interethnic nature of their child's relationship as a matter of concern. For example, Vanessa stated;

> [I] don't look at the colour of the skin. It just, it makes absolutely no difference. It's who they are. It doesn't matter what religion or colour of the skin we are, or shape of their eyes, it's just, yeah, if you like them as a person then what difference does it make?

Elaine specifically stated that if a parent was to be concerned about a child's partner based on ethnicity this would indicate narrow-mindedness and prejudice:

> If you're going to base on that [culture] alone then they are not big enough are they? You know? Something is wrong with them, you know? You're not a big enough person to see the whole picture. You must be able to see the whole picture of that person; you know? Not just on race alone or on religion alone

Other mothers did exhibit prejudice, forming negative judgments about their child's partner on the basis of ethnicity, which fuelled concerns about the interethnic nature of their child's relationship. These judgements were often made early in the relationship and appeared to be informed by stereotypes. Whilst stereotypes can be positive, negative or neutral, judgements in the context of their child's interethnic relationship often had negative connotations. The influence of negative stereotypes on the perceptions and expectations of mothers was evident on a number of occasions. For example, in discussing her concerns about Indian culture Mahsuri stated "I know Indians are very traditional about having a wife, a stay at home mum" (which Mahsuri did not want for her daughter). Linda also acknowledged the influence of negative stereotypes in contributing to her concerns about her son's interethnic relationship with a Malay-Indian girl, admitting that she was disappointed that her son's girlfriend was not Australian due to "the stereotypes that I've got hidden in there". The application of oversimplified generalisations about a group at an individual level (i.e., about their child's partner) is problematic because individual differences are overlooked. Instead, the partner was automatically considered to hold the negative traits associated with their ethnic group, feeding concern about difference or the presence of undesirable characteristics or attributes (that might, in fact, not exist).

For some mothers, prejudice exhibited in relation to their child's partner appeared to apply generally, across different contexts. For example, just as Rose was intolerant of difference exhibited by her daughter-in-law, so too was she intolerant of

migrants and the differences they may bring upon immigrating to Australia, evident in the following quote:

> I mean I agreed wholeheartedly with Mr Rudd[20] who said if you don't want to live our way go home (laughs) where I thought that was brilliant (laughs) and he's quite open about it- (.) you don't want to speak our language and you don't want to adopt to our customs what the hell did you come for?

It is acknowledged that prejudice is multileveled and embedded within the social environment of development. In part however, prejudice has been attributed to personality factors such as 'agreeableness' and 'openness to experience', which have both been found to be negatively correlated with prejudicial attitudes (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008).[21] These attributes also explain differences across mothers with regard to acceptance of difference; for this appeared to be a general quality that characterised their general approach to life. This is illustrated in the following narrative provided by Julie;

> There are more ways than one to do something and to see something. Give me a piece of meat, I can cook it a million and one ways, and there's no right way. Whatever takes your fancy! I mean, a Thai beef salad is as delicious as Thai curry or roast beef. It doesn't matter. But there's not one way of cooking beef, that's what I mean.

A number of mothers who exhibited acceptance of difference were themselves involved in an interethnic or interfaith marriage. Others discussed travelling, living for periods of time in other countries, and/or having friends from various ethnic backgrounds. Openness and acceptance of difference is also relevant to the experience

[20] It is assumed that Rose was referring to Mr Kevin Rudd, former Australian Prime Minister.
[21] This is an important point to acknowledge in terms of my sample, as it is likely that individuals who are agreeable and open to experience would be more likely to volunteer to participate in research such as this.

of migrant mothers, discussed previously in relation to assimilation orientation. Mothers described leaving their home country and settling in Australia, and many described adopting aspects of Australian culture and accepting the possibility that their child may date and marry someone from an ethnic background that differed to their own. These mothers did not separate themselves from Australian culture upon settlement; instead they had embraced it "We're all live here– we all are Aussie now" (Emeline).[22] Due to their own life experiences these mothers were able to empathise with the experience of their child/child's partner, and exhibited greater acceptance of the relationship.

It is important to acknowledge that the relationship between personality and experience is bi-directional. It could be that personality influenced the openness and acceptance evident amongst these mothers; that their personality facilitated an interest in other cultures and drove them to seek new experiences. For example, in a demonstration of 'openness to experience', Emeline stated: "I find [it] fascinating to learn about different culture. It's very interesting. And it's me, I don't know the other people. It's me. I like it. To learn". Alternatively, it could also be that life experiences influenced mothers in a way that facilitated open-mindedness and an openness to experience. The impact of both experience and personal characteristics is evident in the following quote provided by Samira, who discusses changes in thinking and approach amongst her generation, compared to her parents' generation:

> I just think part of it's being in Australia. We're not surrounded by lots of our culture, meaning our aunties, uncles, and cousins, and what we used to. But also too, I mean, I love reading books on parenting, you know, I love more so books on raising boys. I love observing different friends raising their children,

[22] Again, an important point to consider in terms of the composition of my sample.

> and some of them are European, some of them Kiwis, some think - you know, that's always interested me, you know, in how people do marriage, how people do teenagers. So I observe and I look at different ways and I suppose I'm getting better at being open and think, 'I'm going to try that way,' or 'I'll try this way.'

Other mothers expressed an intolerance to difference and a closed view about new experiences. For example, when I suggested to Linda that she may travel to Malaysia one day (where her son's partner was born, and where her family still remained) she replied "No, I've got no wish really, to go to anywhere in Asia- or India". Linda's perspective contrasts with that of Beth who, when reflecting on positive experiences resulting from her daughter's interethnic relationship, stated "Well I think it's nice to learn about other people's culture too and you get to understand people more if you know a bit about their culture" and "I used to like going for holidays [to Singapore] meeting his [son-in-law's] family, staying with his sister. I get on well with his sister". These contrasting perspectives may be explained by differences in personality, and/or differences in experiences. It is equally possible that differences could be explained by the point in time (in terms of their child's relationship), at which interviews were conducted. Linda, whose experience of her son's interethnic relationship was fairly new, was considering the prospect of future travel to an Asian country whereas Beth, who was much later on in the experience was reflecting retrospectively on past experiences she had had (that were positive in nature). It could be that, upon first learning of her daughter's relationship, Beth too was hesitant about travel, yet she embraced it, had positive experiences in her travels and so recalled her experience in way that demonstrated openness and acceptance. Regardless, mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship were in part

influenced by their individual nature with regards to openness and acceptance of difference, whether that be driven by personality, experience or an interaction of both. Those who displayed an openness to experience and acceptance of difference reported more positive experiences of their child's interethnic relationship.

Mothers' progress with the developmental task of 'letting go'.

The second main factor to explain variation in mothers' experience of their child's interethnic relationship was their progress with the developmental task of 'letting go'. As discussed in Chapter Two, 'letting go' is a key developmental task for parents in middle adulthood; a task which corresponds with their child's task of establishing autonomy. The task requires parents to transition from an active role of parenting to a less active role, as their child makes a series of moves towards greater independence (Kloep & Hendry, 2010). De Vaus (1994) discusses that the task requires parents to differentiate themselves from their child; see their child as their own person, with their own views, feelings, successes and failures. Successful transitions facilitate the continued involvement of parents in the lives of their children in a way that maintains meaningful relationships that are appropriate to a child's growing independence. I found that the progress made towards the task of 'letting go' impacted mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship such that more progress with the task was associated with less concern about their child's relationship. Progress with the task was influenced by involvement in the parenting role which was influenced by the way that mothers characterised their parenting role and, as a consequence of this, the way they understood the task of letting go. Discussion of this is the focus of this next section of findings.

Before describing the relevance of 'letting go' to mothers' experiences I must acknowledge that discussion of the task is complicated by differences in conceptual

definitions of letting go within the published literature. For example, Kloep and Hendry (2010) summarised their research findings regarding the process of letting go with the assertion that willingness to let go:

> …was influenced by whether or not parents approved of their offspring's choice of lifestyle; with approval, parents could enjoy their children's achievements, keep interference to minimum, and concede adult status to them. Any striving for independence, which did not coincide with parental views, however was often met with hostility and seen as a sign of immaturity (p. 829).

This description requires that parents approve of their child's decision in order to facilitate the process of letting go, a view in direct contrast to the description proposed by De Vaus who asserts the importance of differentiation and the ability to "act independently of the other person's approval or expectations" (p. 186). Differences in understandings of what it means to 'let go' were also evident from the experiences of mothers. This will be discussed later in this chapter, along with the implications of this lack of clarity in understanding what it means to progress with the task (a key focus of Chapter Six). In conceptualising the task of 'letting go' I adopt the definition of De Vaus, where letting go involves differentiation and does not require parent approval of a child's decision in order to accept and respect the decision.

Variation in mothers' progress with the task of 'letting go'.

The parental task of 'letting go' typically occurs incrementally, alongside the development of their child. As a child makes a move towards independence and away from the family the parent negotiates the task of letting go. The incremental nature of 'letting go', and the varied ages (and thus prior experiences) of their children when they entered an interethnic relationship, meant that mothers were at different stages of

'letting go' when they experienced this event. The amount of progress mothers had made towards the task of letting go, prior to the experience of their child's interethnic relationship (an event which also facilitated progress with this task), impacted on experiences of the relationship. For mothers who had made further progress, there was clear differentiation between themselves and their adult child. Mothers saw their child as an autonomous adult who was able to make, and was responsible for, his/her own decisions. Concern about the relationship was less likely to be expressed and if expressed, was discussed in terms of how the concern was relevant to their child, not to themselves. These mothers demonstrated an acceptance and a sense of respect that their child's decisions were their own to make, irrespective of what they thought or wanted. For example, Devi stated:

> We didn't say 'Oh you must marry your own kind' or you know, we didn't insist on that. We would have preferred them but it was ultimately their choice and we are willing to go with their choice.

Leona, who acknowledged concern about her son's happiness in his interethnic relationship, also clearly acknowledged that her son's decision was his to make;

> If he is happy, he feels comfortable, he is making that choice. He may think he is happy. I think sometimes he maybe not happy- but those are all still his lessons in his life yeah.

Although Leona maintained her own view about what was best for her son, she accepted that decisions about what was best for her son were no longer hers to make. This differentiation is an important aspect of 'letting go' (as described by De Vaus, 1994) and is likely to explain a corresponding shift, evident amongst some mothers, away from evaluating themselves according to the achievements (or failures) of their child.

Other mothers had made less progress towards the developmental task of 'letting go' (as it is described by De Vaus, 1994), evident from descriptions of ongoing attachment to and involvement in the active role of parenting. These mothers were more likely to express disapproval of their child's relationship and concern regarding the interethnic nature of the relationship and when expressed, were more likely to discuss concern in terms of what their child's relationship meant for them (e.g., less time with grandchildren, less family time together, how they were impacted by the cultural differences of their child's partner). A lack of differentiation is evident in the following quote from Jelena who did not accept her daughter's relationship with her boyfriend because she felt her daughter was not living the life that she should because of the relationship:

> I've got a feeling that also [daughter] is feeling insecure now towards us because I said look, do not expect me to respect any of your ideas anymore because you're bloody wrong and that not the way you should live, it's not the way that anyone should live like that.

Here, Jelena expresses her disapproval of her daughter's relationship and an inability to accept her daughter's decision because she did not agree with the decision. The contrast between the positions of Devi and Leona, at one end of the 'letting go' continuum and Jelena, who had made less progress with the task, highlights the importance of 'letting go' in explaining variation in mothers' experiences of their child's relationship. Specifically, Jelena, who indicates less progress in 'letting go' compared to Devi and Leona, also indicates a much more negative experience of her daughter's interethnic relationship. For mothers who had made less progress with the task of 'letting go', the experience of the interethnic relationship was often characterised by feelings of ambivalence as they sought to negotiate their feelings of

responsibility for their child whilst, to varying degrees, recognising the need to allow their child to make their own decisions and take responsibility for themselves.

Explaining variation in progress with the task of 'letting go'.

Given that 'letting go' is a task associated with child development, variation in mothers' progress with the task might be expected based on the age of the child and the developmental progress that the child had made towards adulthood. Indeed, less progress in the task of 'letting go' was particularly evident in discussions with Patricia and Cath, whose daughters were the youngest in the sample and still resided with their mothers. However, a lack of progress was not unique to mothers of younger offspring. One of the eldest mothers in the sample, aged in her early seventies, demonstrated little progress in 'letting go'. It was evident then, that progress towards 'letting go' varied across mothers, not as a consequence of age, but as a consequence of their involvement in the parenting role (see Kloep & Hendry, 2010). The degree to which mothers remain involved in the parenting role into middle and late parenthood is impacted by many personal and socio-cultural factors. I focus on mothers' understanding of the parenting role (which includes an understanding of what it means to let go), and consider how this influences involvement in the parenting role and subsequently, progress with the task of letting go.

Involvement in the parent role.

At the time their child entered an interethnic relationship some mothers were still heavily involved in the parenting role; caring for, protecting and nurturing their child. For some mothers, this was because their child was young and had made few moves away from family. For these mothers, the experience of their child's interethnic, intimate relationship occurred earlier on in their journey of letting go. In some cases, the interethnic relationship was the first intimate relationship that the child had formed

(or at least told their mother about). For these mothers, the development of their child's interethnic relationship was a significant step in the progress of 'letting go'. Mothers reported a shift in their relationship with the child as their child spent time with, confided in and sought support from their partner. In these cases, it was important that I distinguish the concern that mothers felt about the interethnic nature of their child's relationship from the apprehension that accompanied the formation of their child's first intimate relationship. For example, some mothers discussed the challenge of acknowledging that their son or daughter was likely having sex in their home, and spoke about having to talk to their child about safe sexual practices and birth control for the first time. In differentiating these concerns, it was evident that the interethnic aspect of the relationship added further apprehension to the challenge of 'letting go'. Mothers were not only letting their child go in the sense of a normative step in their development by forming an intimate relationship, but they were also letting them make a decision that perhaps was not what they expected or agreed with. Other mothers were still heavily involved in the parenting role irrespective of the number of moves of independence that their child had made. For example, Rose's son had lived in his own home, married, travelled, had a child of his own and separated prior to entering an interethnic relationship. Despite this, Rose was still very involved in a parenting role and very involved in her son's life.

Other mothers were less heavily involved in the parenting role at the time their child developed an interethnic relationship. This was typical of mothers who experienced their child's interethnic relationship later along the parenting journey, after their child had made many moves of independence away from home. Most mothers, at this stage of parenting, described a less involved role or less "controlling influence" (Anne) in the life of their adult child at the time their child entered their

interethnic relationship. For example, Anne described that her daughter had travelled overseas for 12 months at the age of 18, went on regular holidays overseas and "just did her thing. She was off". Less active involvement in the parenting role was evident when mothers had made more progress with the task of letting go. This was, to some extent, influenced by how they, as mothers, characterised and approached the role of parenting, which included understandings of, and thus progress with, the task of 'letting go'.

Understanding of the parent role and the concept of 'letting go'.

The degree to which mothers remain involved in the life of an adult child in middle to later adulthood is influenced by many factors. As discussed in Chapter Two, involvement is influenced by the needs/continuing dependence of adult children, mothers' involvement in other roles and presumably factors such as the number and age of children, marital status and so on. I found that continued involvement was also influenced, in part, by the way that mothers conceptualised their role as a parent. Some mothers saw that their role as a parent was to raise an autonomous child and so, worked consistently towards achieving that aim. The gradual process of stepping back in the parent role and letting go over time meant that more progress had been made by the time their child entered the intimate, interethnic relationship, and/or making the transition easier when the time came to 'let go' in the context of an intimate relationship. As a consequence, their experience of their child's interethnic relationship was more positive. This process was articulated by Grace:

> As a mum in the early stages you're a nurturer. You make a lot of decisions for the children and what shoes they wear or what dress they wear, where they go, what they eat. Everything you decide for them. But as they grow older, you release and allow them to make choices, even in how they dress, what

> clothes they prefer, or what they prefer to eat. So it's a process of gradual releasing that yeah, I've found is very important. So that when the final crunch comes and they say "Yeah I've found this girl and I'm getting married", it is quite a big change, but because you've conditioned yourself to release it's easier, I think, because it's not like you're suddenly letting go of them. Because you gradually release, by that time, it's going to happen, it's a matter of when it's going to happen.

In contrast, other mothers, for example Mahsuri, described her role as a protector of her daughter, stating "I always feel like, you know, I always feel the need to protect her". Mahsuri described the experience of letting go in the context of an intimate relationship (when her daughter married), as a difficult process, which impacted her experience of the relationship in that Mahsuri had many concerns.

> It's actually not easy, you know? … I would imagine for any mother to just let go, the son or the daughter. It's not easy, especially when, you know, when you always think that your children will always be your baby, you know?

Evident from this comparison of quotes is the different way in which Grace and Mahsuri conceptualised their role as a parent. Grace described her role as parent as one of change and adaptation as she prepared her children for their independence, whereas Mahsuri, implied that her role was fixed (i.e., her children remaining forever her babies). Mothers described that their understanding and approach to parenting was impacted by many factors such as their upbringing, life experiences, cultural understandings of the role of parenting, gender of their child and the nature of their child.

The way mothers conceptualised their role as a parent impacted on understandings of 'letting go'. Indeed, although the concept of 'letting go' was

common to all mothers, experiences of the process and understandings of what it meant to let go varied significantly across mothers, as evident above. The task was either central to mothers' parenting style or, it was a task that was recognised as important along the parenting journey. This occurred through a process of recognition, learning and adjustment, as evident in the following quote from Isobel;

> I realised when she was being rebellious, I realised that I've always demanded a lot of control, that I wanted to be in control, I need to know where you're going, who you're going with, that kind of thing. And at that point of time I reminded myself, I thought that, 'Stop being a control freak. Let go, let go, let go' (Isobel).

Some discussed the need to accept decisions that were inconsistent with their hopes and expectations (e.g., Leona and Devi), some described an ability to accept only when the decision was consistent with their hopes and expectations (e.g., Jelena), some described passing responsibility to their child (e.g., Denise), and others described passing responsibility to their child's partner (e.g., Mahsuri and Isobel). Despite this variation, all mothers described that they had 'let go'. Variation in subjective understandings of what it means to 'let go' has implications for the objective assessment of progress with the task. This is not only relevant in explaining varied progress with the task (in that the concept of progress is dependent on the understanding/definition that is adopted), but becomes particularly relevant in Chapter Six, which focuses on the potential for growth that arose from the experience of a child's interethnic relationship (i.e., growth and progress with the task of letting go).

Conclusion

In this chapter I detailed mothers' experiences of their children's interethnic relationship and described the concern that was experienced by some mothers relating

to the interethnic nature of their child's intimate relationship. Concern centred on three key themes; concern about ethnic difference, concern about relocation and concern about insincere motives. In this chapter I also described the factors that explained variation in concern expressed by mothers about their child's interethnic relationship. Variation in concern was explained by diversity in mothers' unique experiences of ethnic difference and the progress they had made with the developmental task of 'letting go'. Experience of difference included the extent of perceived difference between mother/her child and her child's partner, and mothers' acceptance of any perceived difference. This was influenced by the nature of difference, the acculturation orientation adopted by the mother or child's partner and mothers' personality. Progress with the developmental task of 'letting go' was influenced by involvement in and understandings of the parenting role, which subsequently influenced understandings of what it meant to let go. Taken together, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship were influenced by an interaction of factors which are unique to each relationship (i.e., the extent of difference) and each mother (i.e., acceptance of difference and progress in letting go), highlighting unsurprising variation in experience.

In the next chapter I focus on explaining mothers' concern from a developmental perspective. That is, I consider why ethnic difference, relocation/distance, and insincere motives on behalf of their child's partner, were of relevance to mothers as individuals who were progressing on their journey through middle adulthood. To achieve this, I describe what was important to mothers at this stage of their life course and discuss the implications of a child's interethnic relationship for these matters of importance.

Chapter Five: Findings II - Explaining mothers' concern

The relevance of developmental goals

Overview

In Chapter Four I discussed the concerns that were experienced by some mothers due to the interethnic nature of their child's intimate relationship; concern about ethnic difference, relocation/distance, and insincere motives on behalf of their child's partner. There are a number of theoretical perspectives that could be adopted to understand these concerns (e.g., cross cultural, social psychological, psychoanalytic). I adopted an adult developmental approach. That is, I considered what was happening, developmentally, for mothers during this phase of their life ('this phase' is defined below) that might explain their concerns about their child's interethnic relationship. To do this I needed to situate mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship within their broader experience of parenting an adult child. Specifically, I needed to understand what it was like to parent an adult child and I needed to understand what was important to mothers during this phase of parenting. In this chapter I take a step back from the specific experience of a child's interethnic relationship and consider the broader context within which this experienced occurred. I describe what I learnt about mothers' experience of parenting an adult child and I use this understanding to explain mothers' concern about the interethnic nature of their child's intimate relationship.

When referring to 'this phase of life' and 'this phase of parenting', I am referring to a time at which mothers experience the growing independence of their child. This phase is not defined by either the age of the mother or the child but by the personal, social and developmental changes experienced by both the child and the mother. Although development from childhood to adulthood occurs in a normative fashion, it is not always a linear process. Progress is signified by events such as leaving home, establishing financial independence, and developing an intimate relationship.

Although developmental timetable literature suggests that these changes are expected to occur in the late teens to early twenties (Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976; Neugarten, Moore & Lowe, 1965), events are influenced by social, cultural and personal circumstances (South & Lei, 2015), resulting in great diversity in the experience of this 'phase' of parenting. This is evident from literature regarding boomerang kids, or 'return to nest'-ers (e.g., Burn & Szoeke, 2016; Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2014).

Another point to note about exploring a particular 'phase' of parenting is that the mothers I interviewed were at different points along their parenting journey (and their life journey) at the time of our interview. Some were just entering the middle years of parenting, and were busy negotiating moves out of home and assistance with university enrolments. Others had experienced this phase of parenting many years prior and, at the time of our interview, found themselves in later adulthood where their role and experience as a parent was different again. This diversity in recall (current and retrospective) impacted the way in which mothers described their experience of parenting in middle adulthood, as well as their ability to consider what their experience meant and how their experience impacted them. Recall was also impacted by individual differences in ability to reflect, consider and articulate experiences and meaning. It was this diversity in experience and ability that enabled me to develop a deep understanding of mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship, through comparing and contrasting the experiences of mothers in different periods of life, at different periods of parenting, and each with different ways of articulating their experience.

To some extent, the issues that I discuss in this chapter have been discussed in previous literature. The differentiating feature of my research is that I conceptualise

and consider these issues from the developmental perspective of the mothers. This has been neglected in the past, with much previous literature focussed on the role of mothers in meeting the needs of children, rather than the relevance of children, and their actions/decisions, to the developmental needs of mothers. The following section details what I learnt about parenting an adult child, from the perspective of mothers, and how this relates to experiences of a child's interethnic relationship.

The Experience of Mothering an Adult Child

In describing the experience of parenting during the middle years of adulthood, mothers spoke of change and adjustment, along with continued involvement and investment in the lives of their adult child. Hence, a sense of continuity and change was at the fore of mothers' experiences. In describing their relationship with their adult child, mothers referred to dimensions commonly used within the intergenerational relationship literature such as contact, proximity, closeness, conflict and assistance (Lye, 1996; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008). Most mothers described that they lived with, in close proximity to and/or had frequent contact with their child. The majority of mothers described a close and loving relationship with their adult child, whilst a small number described more distance in their relationship. Variation in the degree of closeness described by mothers can, in part, be understood as a consequence of the changing nature of the mother-child relationship over time and the different points at which mothers found themselves in their relationship with their child at the time this research was conducted. Typically, mothers described a closeness during childhood and pre-adolescent years, a separation during adolescence followed, generally, by a return to closeness in early adulthood; a pattern which is described in existing literature (e.g. see Levpušček, 2006).

Mothers were cognisant that the changes they experienced in their relationship with their child, over time, were a consequence of their child's journey towards independence. The shifting nature of the mother-child relationship described by mothers is consistent with the findings of previous research, which suggest that the development of independence away from the family does not occur in a continuous, linear fashion. Instead, the parent-child relationship varies in periods of closeness and separation, as children negotiate their autonomy throughout adolescence (Levpušček, 2006) and into adulthood (Aquilino, 1997). Mothers expected this growing independence and most acknowledged the need to grant autonomy and allow their child to find his/her own path in establishing their independence. As described in Chapter Four, the degree to which mothers recognised and accepted this varied, and impacted their experience of their child's interethnic relationship. For most mothers (but as discussed in Chapter Four, not all), this period of parenting was characterised by reduced active involvement in parenting: mothers were still present in the lives of their child, but in the background. The changing nature of the parent role during this phase of parenting was described by Emma who stated:

> It's about letting them make their mistakes, I think that's very important, as a parent, you learn by your mistakes … And while they're little, of course you've got to cosset them to some degree but when they get to young adults, I'm there in the background. I'm the safety net, if you like, if they get themselves in a tricky situation or they run out of money or they want come advice. They probably wouldn't come to me but I'm there. And it's important for me for them to know that they can come to us.

This is consistent with the findings of Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer and O'Brien (2011) who described the responsive nature of the parenting role as children advance

towards adulthood, asserting that parents “act as scaffolding and safety nets” (p. 414) during this phase of parenting.

Adjustment to role change was experienced with varying degrees of difficulty, however most mothers expressed satisfaction, and ultimately embraced the changing nature of their role. For example, Samira described that the adjustment that she experienced in her role was fulfilling and enabled her to enter a new chapter in her life:

> [But] deep down, I'm happy, you know, I'm grateful, because no one wants to be raising children forever. I would never say that to my parents. But there's a sense of relief that that's great that there's one off my hands now. Because I had the boys young, you know, I had [son] young and I'm not old. So you have the kids young, and now one's gone off, hopefully the next one will be gone soon, in a few more years. So that I can do what I want to do. So there's - deep down, I'm grateful and happy for that.

Evident from Samira’s quote was a sense of relief that her duty as a mother was, in some respect, complete. This reflects a sense of responsibility and duty in raising children, and a transition in middle adulthood from an active to a less active role in fulfilling this duty.

Of particular relevance to mothers’ development, mothers who described this change in their role described the opportunity to focus on other areas of personal interest (e.g., hobbies) and development (e.g., education), which many looked forward to. For example, Samira went on to say:

> I think - you know, how someone's always needed you? You know, their whole life, and then all of a sudden they don't any more. That makes you think, 'So what's my purpose now?' It really does question you, 'Well, what should I

be doing with myself now?' Yeah. … But deep down I am looking forward to, 'Wow. What can I do now, now that the boys are grown and almost all out?'

What do you think you'll do?

Travel. And do missions, which I've always wanted to do. Go to Africa and help some African babies, you know, whatever it is.

So … you expect to find a different purpose?

Yes.

Thus role change, whilst prompted by the development of a child, was also important for mothers' development; enabling them to explore new aspects of life, new ways to contribute and new ways to grow. In talking with some mothers there was a sense of sacrifice associated with earlier years of parenting, and a keenness to venture into the next phase of their journey. For example, in describing the changing nature of her role as a parent Lisa discussed "the kids are always going to be in my life. I'm always going to make time for them. But I feel I've missed out on that part of a life [an intimate relationship of her own] for so long … it's my turn now".

The Parenting-Related, Developmental Goals of Mothers during Middle Adulthood

During this phase of parenting, as children sought their independence and mothers experienced the task of 'letting go' of their child, mothers explicitly emphasised the importance of two things; they wanted the best for their child and they wanted to stay involved in the lives of their child. I conceptualised these desires as 'parenting-related developmental goals'. I choose the term 'goals' due to the sense of striving to achieve these things that was evident from mothers' described experiences. These goals were 'parenting-related' because they were unique to the experience of parenting and they were 'developmental' because, as will be discussed in this section

of findings, they had important implications for mothers' sense of self and achievement of broader developmental goals[23]; specifically, generativity. In the next section of findings, I first discuss each goal. I then discuss the implications of firstly, an intimate relationship and secondly, an intimate relationship that is interethnic in nature, for mothers' parenting-related, developmental goals. I have chosen to discuss the implications in this way to highlight that concerns about a child's intimate relationship (in terms of what this means for parenting-related developmental goals), are likely to exist irrespective of the type of relationship that a child develops, before highlighting how factors unique to an interethnic relationship contribute to concern. In discussing the implications of a child's interethnic, intimate relationship for mothers' parenting-related developmental goals I highlight that variation in experience can be explained by the degree to which the relationship was perceived to threaten mothers' goals.

Wanting the best for their adult child.

Throughout our interviews, mothers consistently emphasised that they wanted 'the best' for their child. Through discussion, it became clear that this goal was important to mothers as it had implications for their own sense of self and, for some, enabled satisfaction of generative concern. 'Wanting the best' comprised two elements; a desire for their child to be happy and a desire for their child to achieve success. This finding is validated by research conducted by Ryff, Lee, Essex and Schmutte (1994) who found that success and happiness were the two most frequent responses when mothers and fathers were asked of their hopes and dreams for their

[23] I use the phrase 'broader developmental goals' to differentiate between 'parenting-related developmental goals' (wanting the best for a child and wanting to stay involved in the life of a child) and developmental goals that are more universal in nature (i.e., not specific to the experience of parenting; e.g., generativity and wisdom).

children. Mothers in the present research described happiness primarily in terms of their child's mental wellbeing; in particular, a lack of angst, anxiety and stress. Mothers also described wanting their child to be settled, stable and to have a positive sense of self-worth.

Success was discussed in two ways. The first was their child's successful achievement of milestones commonly associated with adulthood. This included the development of positive, personal relationships, the achievement of educational goals and the establishment of a career. Some mothers considered these successes to be important in ensuring their child's happiness. For example, meaningful, personal relationships were considered a source of happiness whilst the completion of education and career successes were seen to contribute to a positive sense of self-worth, reduce financial stress and ensure stability. Therefore, for some mothers the desire for their child's success was directly related to their desire for their child's happiness. Other mothers felt that success (particularly in terms of career and financial success) was unrelated to happiness. For example, Patricia stated; "you don't need to 'make it' to be happy I don't think". Differences in the degree to which success was perceived to be related to happiness are likely explained by differences in mothers' values and personal life experiences. The second form of success discussed by mothers was broader: it related to being a good person with good values, living a good, ethical life, and contributing to society as a valued member of the community. The importance of these two types of 'success' corresponds with the findings of Mitchell (2010) in her examination of happiness in the parent role during midlife. Mitchell found that two key sources of happiness were 1) the developmental successes of children (i.e., children had achieved developmental milestones in accordance with developmental timetables) and 2) a sense that their children were "good citizens" (p. 334; their

children were good people, who did not cause trouble and who displayed good judgement and good moral character).

The aspirations that mothers held for their child were in part influenced by socially constructed norms around success and the achievement of normative adult milestones in accordance with developmental timetables (i.e., career, education). Aspirations were, however, also influenced by what was personally important to mothers as individuals. For some mothers, aspirations were shaped by what they themselves had done. For example, Linda stated that she wanted her son to find a partner and settle because that was all she wanted for herself.

> **Why is that important for you as a mum?** [for her son to get married] (pause)- I suppose I had a one track mind myself. When I was 10 or so, people's wedding pictures used to be in the paper with their ages. People used to get married in those times at 18 and I used to think 'Oh- only 8 more years'. As it was I didn't get married until I was 25 but anyhow, um, that was a plan I had from then – (laughs) -probably because my extended family- (pause)- were just so loving. There was mum and dads in every case, there were thousands of kids and that was your lot (laughs). But what a great lot that was, and that's what mattered.

For other mothers, aspirations were shaped by what they had hoped for themselves but had forgone or were unable to achieve. For example, Jelena wanted her daughter to travel, make friends, complete university and enjoy life because she herself had prioritised her family over her own aspirations and so wanted her daughter to live the life that she had not. Although the motivation underlying Linda and Jelenas' aspirations differ (achieving something they achieved versus achieving something

they did not or could not achieve), both, in some way, represent an extension of self. This point will become relevant in a later section of findings.

'Wanting the best' for their child, whether that be via happiness, or success, or both, was important to mothers for three, related reasons, each of which relates to existing research and theory in areas of parenting and adult development. First, mothers felt a sense of responsibility to provide their children with the values (e.g., respect, honesty) and opportunities (e.g., education) necessary to achieve happiness and success, and to be the best person they could be. This sense of responsibility was evident in the following quote from Leona;

> These are my children and I have a responsibility to them don't I? I need them to be happy and content in life so they can go out and do something good.

This sense of responsibility was also evident in Beth's expression of failure as she described regret in not providing her children with a religious upbringing;

> Neither of them are religious (.) … I suppose I let them down in a way. I should have been stronger and brought them up, you know, with some sort of religion … I feel maybe I've let them down by not [providing them with a Christian education].

These sentiments echo theory and research regarding the parent role. Mowder discusses that the role that parents assume is often adopted to fulfil "social responsibilities associated with conceiving and bearing a child" (2005, p. 57). Mowder captures the socially constructed nature of the parent role and expectations associated with the role in her Parent Role Theory (PRT). Six specific elements are outlined, that characterise the parent role; bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsivity (e.g., helping, assisting, supporting) and sensitivity (e.g., respecting, understanding, comforting). Mowder asserts that the relevance of these

elements, at an individual level, is influenced by a range of individual, parent- child relational, and socio-cultural factors and that the role changes over time in response to developmental changes of the child and parent. The sentiments expressed by mothers in the present research support the elements of welfare and education, as mothers saw it as their role to provide their children with the skills and knowledge they needed to achieve happiness and success. In relation to expressed concern about providing their children with values, this confirms the findings of Vassallo, Smart and Price-Robertson (2009) who found that the most important role that parents of young adults (aged 23-24 years) perceived a need to fulfil was to pass on their values and/or philosophy of life to their children, highlighting the relevance of generative concern to parents at this stage of parenting.

Second, and related to this, a mother's ability to fulfil the responsibility of raising good, happy and successful children served as an indicator of her own success. The outcomes, values and achievements of their child were seen to reflect their performance in the role of parent. This was evident in Beth's quote above; in which she implies a sense of failure in her responsibility as a parent to provide her children with something that she considered important to provide. In contrast, Raha, described how she "polished" virtues such as truthfulness in her sons and stated that when she saw her sons exhibit those virtues;

> It makes me so happy, as a mother…and yeah- I think I did my best. I'm not saying I did everything best- no- I did my best- in my ability- you know?

The importance of a child's happiness and success to mothers' own sense of self is consistent with the findings of Ryff, Schmutte and Lee (1996) who state that "a central issue of parenting in midlife is the task of evaluating how one's children have turned out" (p. 383). Ryff et al. further assert that "the lives of these grown children constitute

an important lens through which midlife adults judge themselves and their accomplishments" (p. 383). The importance of a child's life choices and outcomes to parent self-evaluation and sense of self was also evident in research conducted by Kloep and Hendry (2010) who described the "deep satisfaction" that parents expressed with the life choices of their child, and "a pride in their [child's] achievements as if they were their own" (p. 824).

Arguably, the importance of a child's achievements to a mother's sense of self will depend on the degree to which the mother is invested in roles other than that of parent (e.g., worker, wife, grandparent). Where mothers are able to derive a sense of accomplishment from other roles it is likely that the achievements (or failures) of a child have less of an impact on their sense of self. Mothers may also be more likely to seek a sense of self/achievement from other roles in their life when they are not able to obtain a positive sense from their role as mother (e.g. due to poor decisions/failures of their child). It is also possible that the decisions and achievements of a child become less important to mothers over time, as does the parent role become less important to identity in later stages of parenting when active involvement in the role diminishes (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987; Eisenhandler, 1992).

Finally, for some mothers, the importance of raising happy and successful children went beyond self-evaluation. The third reason mothers wanted to ensure 'the best' for their child was because they wanted to ensure that their child possessed the values and had the opportunities necessary to succeed in the future, once they were no longer present to guide and support them. The desire to ensure 'good' people for society and for future generations by raising children who do well and are an asset to the community in which they live, was reflected in the following quote from Samira;

> When I say 'good people,' I just mean people that can give something back to society, give back to the hurts of the world… It's important to me because I'm not just thinking about these kids, I'm thinking about their children, and I want to know that I've instilled enough good or another way. Not to say - no one's going to be perfect, but I would like to know that they're going to be decent people so they can teach the next generation to be decent people.

It was for this reason that a number of mothers emphasised the importance of ensuring a religious upbringing for their child. Religion was seen, by some mothers, to provide their child with enduring guidance that extended beyond their own lifetime, and so was a means to ensure that their child maintained 'good values' throughout their life.

The importance of raising a child who is able to live successfully and/or contribute to and guide future generations corresponds with the broader developmental goal of middle adulthood; generativity. The developmental implications of mothers' parenting- related, developmental goals can be understood by applying McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) theoretical extension of generativity; in particular their concept of generative actions. McAdams and de St. Aubin explain that a legacy is created (in this context, in the form of a child), the legacy is maintained (as mothers do their best to instil and preserve desired values and attributes within their child) and finally the legacy is offered to others (in the form of a 'good', contributing member of society who, it is hoped, will have a positive impact on future generations). In this way, the parenting- related developmental goal of 'wanting the best' for their child, contributed directly to the broader developmental goal of satisfying generative concern.

Wanting to stay involved in the life of their adult child.

The second developmental goal of mothers relating to parenting during middle adulthood was continued involvement in the life of their adult child. Despite changes

in their relationship it was important for mothers that they remain involved in the lives of their adult child. Involvement meant different things for mothers depending on their, and their child's, circumstances. For some mothers, involvement meant seeing one another two to three times a week, for others it was a weekly family dinner and for others it meant maintaining contact through the occasional phone call or text message. For example, as explained by Emma:

> For me, it's about being connected with all of my children and that doesn't mean that I have to see them every day and be involved with everything they do every minute of the day but I want to have that connection.

Involvement was important to mothers because they loved their child, wanted to spend time with them and enjoyed family time together. For some mothers, continued involvement with their adult child satisfied the need to give and receive love and to feel connected to their family. Providing support or advice to adult children (when requested) satisfied mothers' need to be needed. In this way, continued involvement in the lives of their children was important to mothers' sense of self. This is consistent with the findings of Blieszner and Mancini (1987) who reported that older aged parents "enjoyed the feeling of being needed and loved by their children, and … were flattered when their children asked them for advice" (p. 178). According to McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992), a sense of needing to feel needed reflects an inner desire for generativity; "a desire to nurture, assist, or be of some important use to other people" (p. 1005).

Mothers emphasised the importance of family relationships, and implicit in their stories was a sense of responsibility to maintain these relationships. Therefore, their desire to remain involved in the lives of their children was a means to maintain family relationships. Continued involvement also served to enable their efforts in

ensuring the best for their child as they were able to keep abreast of their child's welfare. This was articulated by Anne when asked why it was important that she remain involved in her children's lives;

> It's possibly not maintaining control but keeping tabs on where they're at. Staying within their lives so you can do that and if you can help them at any stage, to do that as well.

Ongoing care and support was also relevant to Emma as she discussed why it was important that she keep in touch with, and see how her children were going:

> I don't know where that comes from [wanting to see how her children were going]. If it's something just inside of us, something primeval that we've given birth to this child and, therefore, in my head, that means I care for them until I die. I don't know … yeah. It's that nurture thing that just comes with being a mother.

Finally, continued involvement in the lives of their adult child provided mothers with the opportunity to be involved in grand-parenting, a role which mothers looked forward to, or enjoyed if grandchildren were present. Unlike other aspects of their life (e.g., personal relationships, developing a career and/or having children of their own), mothers were reliant on their adult children not only to achieve the status of, but also to engage in the role of grandparent. In terms of achieving the status of grandparent, reliance on adult children was articulated by Linda who described grandchildren as a goal of hers but added "- mind you, I can't do anything towards that goal, I just have to be patient". In terms of engaging in the role of grandparent, reliance on adult children was articulated by Jane when asked why it was important that she maintain an involved relationship with her son and daughter-in-law; Jane stated, "Oh they'll have kids down the track and I want to see their kids".

Mothers varied in the degree to which involvement in grand-parenting was given priority in their life, however all discussed that involvement with grandchildren provided them a sense of joy. For example, as described by Emeline "your grandchildren just make you happy. They all make you smile. That's important". Providing care to grandchildren satisfied a need to do something of value and contribute to the family. This importance of multigenerational relationships is highlighted by Bengston (2001) who asserts that relations across more than two generations are becoming increasingly important, if not more important, than nuclear family relationships in terms of well-being and support over the life course. Providing support to their family by assisting with grandchildren (e.g., school 'drops'), satisfied the generative need to be needed. In this way, the role of grand-parenting represented an important means by which mothers were able to satisfy generative concern. For example, in describing why it was important that she stay involved in the lives of her children and grandchildren Grace described;

> It's all about love and sharing and caring and you know, that's values I want to impart to the kids. So that's why it's important for me to involved in my grandkids as well, to share the values that we have and be able to tell them little stories that maybe their parents wouldn't even have time to talk to them about… getting involved with my grandkids is as important as it was for me to be involved with my children. So yeah. Mainly it's imparting of values and standards and just having fun time at the same time, you know?

And Isobel, in talking about the importance of her grandchild stated;

> That is the next generation of my investment, my initial investment. [laughs] Yes, I
>
> told them I expect more from the little guy than I did from you.

Consequently, the role of grandparent provided another dimension of identity and further contributed to mothers' sense of self, purpose and development in later life. This is consistent with prior research which has concluded that grand-parenting is a highly generative role that enables individuals to meet their developmental needs in later life (see Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964; Thiele & Whelan, 2008).

Implications of a Child's Intimate Relationship for Mothers' Parenting-Related Developmental Goals

A child's intimate relationship, and choice of partner, were seen by mothers to have important implications in terms of attaining parenting –related, developmental goals relevant to middle adulthood (described above). Specifically, an intimate relationship had the potential to either enable or threaten the achievement of mothers' goals. In terms of 'wanting the best' for a child, the development of an intimate relationship is a key indicator of successful adjustment to adulthood and so, in itself, was an important milestone in achieving 'the best'. Mothers discussed that an intimate relationship provided the possibility of continued love, support and happiness for their child, increasing the chance that their child would "be ok" and "set" (Denise) for the future. This, however, was dependent on the nature of their child's partner and the nature of their relationship, highlighting the relevance of their child's choice of partner to the parenting-related, developmental goals of the mother. Hence, mothers asserted the importance that their child partner with a 'good' person, identifying a number of desirable attributes such as an honest, caring and respectful nature.

The responsibilities of their child's partner, described by some mothers, further emphasised the nature of their child's partner in ensuring 'the best' for their child. Some mothers, in particular mothers of daughters, emphasised that their child's

partner should be mature, secure, stable and responsible. This was for two reasons. Firstly, there was an acknowledgement by some mothers that their son-in-law would need to support their daughter in taking time from work to have and raise children. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter Four, there was variation in mothers' understandings of what was involved in granting autonomy to their child. Whilst for some mothers, the growing independence of their child meant greater responsibility was passed to their child, others described passing their long-held responsibility for the love, care and happiness of their child to their child's partner. For example, Isobel described:

> There's always this- a saying- like when you raise teenager, it's like playing a kite; you let go of the string a little bit, let it fly, and then pull it back so that it doesn't fly too far. So I did that while she was growing up and then now it's like I can see someone else holding the string. It's like it's nice to sit back and watch the kite fly [laughter].

Hence, the nature of their child's partner was important to mothers.

Critical to 'wanting the best' for their child was the ongoing success of their child's relationship (unless, of course, the nature of the relationship and/or partner was seen to threaten what was best for their child, which will be discussed later). The inextricable link between the ongoing success of their child's relationship and the happiness of their child was captured in the following quote from Elaine:

> Any breakdown, of any relationship, don't talk about marriage, even friendship you know ...it's painful. It's very, very painful thing and you don't want to see pain in your children.

Consequently, when mothers felt that the relationship would ensure the best for their child, they hoped for its long-term success. To facilitate the long-term success of their

child's relationship some mothers expressed a shift in their role and perceived responsibility away from supporting their child, towards supporting the relationship of their child. Mothers also acknowledged the importance of extended kin relationships in ensuring the best outcomes for their child. The acceptance and support of extended family was considered important to ensure a happy and harmonious relationship, which has obvious implications in terms of the on-going success of the relationship. The importance of positive, in-law relationships was articulated by Isobel who described;

> Oh, I'm married myself and now you know if, … if I cannot get along with my in-laws then somehow, if not a lot, that a little bit it will affect my relationship with my husband, because that is a very big part of him, isn't it? Your family is a very big part of you. If I see that my husband cannot see eye to eye with my siblings or my mother or, then I feel that oh, I'd be torn in the middle. It's not an easy role to play, to please
>
> your husband and his family, and to please your family.

Finally, in relation to the best outcomes for their child, mothers were keen to see their child in a relationship that would enable them to live the life, achieve the goals and the meet the expectations they had for their child. The continued growth and success of their child was important to mothers; whether that be continued education, career development or achievement of personal goals. There was a sense that mothers had invested much in their child and that as their child partnered, they were releasing that investment into the influence of another person. Mothers wanted their investment to continue to grow, rather than stagnate (a desire which reflects a need to ensure generativity), and saw the nature of their child's partner and the nature of their relationship playing an important role in enabling this growth.

The development of their child's intimate relationship also had significant implications for mothers' goal of remaining involved in the lives of their child. Adjustment was required as existing relationships and roles were re-negotiated and new relationships were formed which, for some mothers, resulted in a sense of loss. Some mothers described reduced contact with their child, a change that was recognised as normal and necessary as their child established their own family unit. For example, Jane stated;

> I probably don't see them as much as I should or would like to, that probably disappoints me a bit in that they don't umm, but they are just so busy and they are young and they're making a new home for themselves and- so I can see that, I can, I realise that.

The potential loss of contact was discussed by mothers of sons more so than mothers of daughters, consistent with existing literature regarding the nature of parent-child relationships following marriage (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008; Yahirun & Hamplova, 2014) and research regarding the strength of the mother daughter bond (Fingerman, 2001; Suitor & Pillemer, 2006). Consequently, mothers of sons felt particularly concerned about their continued involvement in the life of their child and child's family following the development of their child's intimate relationship. The colloquial saying "you have a daughter for life, and a son until he finds a wife" was reflected in the concerns of some mothers, suggesting a different kind of bond between mothers and daughters, and mothers and sons.

The nature of their child's partner was recognised as critical to ensuring mothers' continued involvement with their child and in their child's family in terms of whether the partner would enable or inhibit shared, family time together. This, in

addition to different expectations based on the gender of her children, was acknowledged by Lisa;

> [Daughter] and I are always going to be close and I'm always going to be involved with my grandkids and that. … [Son] it's going to depend a lot on the type of girl that he marries. I think that's pretty traditional and pretty normal.

Mothers discussed the importance that their child's partner 'fit in', get along with other family members and become a part of their family to ensure continued involvement in the life of their child. This again was a sentiment expressed more strongly by mothers of sons, for example Vanessa stated;

> I just think they have to fit in with the rest of the family and yeah, be happy as part of the family unit and not this segregation thing of sitting in another room not wanting to be part of us.

The importance of family bonds, emphasised by mothers, reflects their role of 'kinkeeper' within the family and, as discussed previously, had important implications in terms of satisfying generative concern.

Implications of a Child's Interethnic Intimate Relationship for Mothers' Parenting-Related Developmental Goals

Evidently, the nature of a child's intimate relationship had important implications for mothers' parenting-related, developmental goals. In terms of ensuring their goals, mothers emphasised the importance of similarity. With respect to wanting the best for their child, similarity between their child and child's partner was seen to indicate compatibility. Compatibility was, in turn, seen to increase the chance of a happier, easier relationship that was more likely to succeed due to shared experiences, values, beliefs, and a similar worldview. Consequently, differences arising from the

interethnic nature of their child's relationship represented a threat to the best outcomes for their child. As described in Chapter Four, some mothers saw ethnic difference and consequent differences in values and expectations as a potential source of conflict in the relationship. Mothers also perceived threat to the values and roles (e.g., gender roles) that they had instilled, and hoped to see, within their child's family. Both potential outcomes of ethnic difference within their child's intimate relationship impacted mothers' goal of wanting 'the best' for their child. The possibility of relocation also threatened the goal of wanting the best for their child. Mothers feared that if their child's partner decided to return to their country of origin and their child went with them, their child would not experience the life that mothers had hoped for their child (i.e., 'the best', as conceptualised by their mother). Finally, the possibility of differing motives, specifically, insincere motives on the part of their child's partner also represented a threat to the best outcomes of their child. Mothers were concerned that their child would be hurt and/or relationship would end once the partner achieved their goal (e.g., of a VISA).

Mothers also emphasised the importance of similarity in ensuring their continued involvement in the life of their child and increasing the likelihood of positive family relationships more broadly. Mothers felt that similarity would increase the likelihood of shared understandings and experiences, thereby facilitating family time together. In this way, ethnic difference [resulting from an interethnic relationship] represented a potential threat to continued involvement in the life of their child for mothers who were concerned that their child's partner would not fit in and get along with the family (due to ethnic differences), thereby inhibiting family time together. The possibility of relocation also threatened continued involvement in the lives of

children (and their subsequent family), due to the risk that a child's partner may decide to return to their country of origin, leading their child to move away.

An understanding of mothers' concern from a developmental perspective demonstrates that the factors discussed in Chapter Four as accounting for variation in experience (mothers' experience of difference and progress made in letting go), can be understood as moderators; influencing the degree to which a child's interethnic relationship was perceived to threaten mothers' parenting-related, developmental goals. Specifically, when less difference was perceived, when mothers were more accepting of difference and/or when mothers had made more progress towards 'letting go', mothers perceived less threat to their developmental goals. As discussed in Chapter Four, mothers perceived that more significant differences in their child's relationship would require greater negotiation and adjustment for their child.[24] Mothers were concerned about the possibility of ensuing conflict and that what they wanted for their child might not be realised if values and practices changed through the process of negotiation, both of which impacted the goal of wanting the best for their child. Mothers were also concerned that greater difference might create distance in family relationships, impacting the goal of staying involved in the life of their child. Therefore, if significant difference was perceived and/or mothers were not open to and accepting of difference, greater concern was experienced because mothers perceived greater threat to their goals.

Furthermore, the progress that mothers had made towards the developmental task of 'letting go' influenced the degree of concern that mother's experienced because further progress equated to differentiation. Mothers who had let go accepted that what

[24] This relates to research regarding the impact of cultural distance on acculturation, discussed in Chapter Four.

they thought was best for their child (critical to their goal of wanting the best for their child) might not be what their child wanted. Mothers also accepted that they might not be as close or as involved in their child's life as they would have liked and so experienced less concern about staying involved. For example, in discussing her daughter's decision to move interstate Julie stated:

> Well, I was going to miss her dearly, but I knew you can't hang on to your kids, you've got to let them go.

In discussing her involvement with her son following his marriage Grace stated:

> How involved we get is also to a large degree dependent on how the spouse then allows us to be involved. Because if you sense that, at least that's how I feel, that if you sense that she [DIL] prefers to keep you at a distance, for the sake of their marriage, I would do that.

Both examples highlight differentiation between what the mother wanted and what their child wanted/decided. Mothers respected the desires and wishes of their child separate to their own desires and wishes, even if that meant letting go of what was important to them. Mothers may still have held concern about the best for their child or not being involved in the life of their child but there was some distance from that concern, it did not dominate or consume their experience. In this way, mothers' experience of difference and progress towards letting go were related because mothers may not have been accepting of difference, but had progressed with letting go and so experienced less concern.

In contrast, mothers who had made less progress in letting go remained very much attached to the things that they considered were the best for their child. Their parenting was guided by what they wanted for their child, and what they considered to be the best for their child. The experience of these mothers was characterised by a

focus on concerns relevant to their parenting-related developmental goals that resulted from the interethnic relationship of their child. An example of this was highlighted earlier in the thesis, with the lack of agency that Mahsuri afforded her daughter as she discussed what she wanted for her daughter, and how the interethnic nature of her daughter's relationship was initially perceived as a threat to these wishes.

A comparison of Beth and Jelena's experiences further demonstrates the relevance of developmental goals in explaining variation in mothers' experience of a child's interethnic relationship. As discussed earlier, Beth described the assimilation orientation of her son-in-law "I think of [son-in-law] as an Aussie because he's more Aussie than [daughter] is I think (laughing)". Despite this, throughout her interview, Beth also described a number of differences, revealing that her son-in-law did, in fact, maintain elements of his heritage culture. He maintained a preference for Chinese food, did not celebrate Christmas with the family (and instead spent the day working), did not celebrate his birthday and maintained elements of traditional gender roles within the family (e.g., he did not assist with housework, which Beth associated with his heritage culture). Beth's son-in-law then, did not assimilate completely into Australian culture. Additionally, some of the differences described by Beth were deeper than surface level differences. Despite this, Beth overlooked what could be considered significant differences, of a deep (cultural) nature, which were inconsistent with her expectations (e.g., gender roles) and which impacted on shared family time together. Whilst Beth described these differences, she did not directly identify them as differences (i.e., they were mentioned in passing) and they did not concern her.

Beth's lack of concern can be understood by the fact that the differences did not threaten her developmental goals. From her perspective, her daughter was happy in the relationship and she was still able to spend time with her daughter. Her son-in-

law's absence at family events did not equate to her daughter's absence and so she was still able to stay involved with her daughter. It was evident in interviews with a number of mothers that the relationship they most wanted to maintain remained with their child and any subsequent grandchildren. Mothers begin by accommodating their child's partner within the family, and although all parties might grow to like and enjoy spending time with one another, the person mothers most wanted to see and spend time with was their child. Therefore, so long as their daughter- or son- in-law did not impact 'the best' for their child or interfere with their involvement with their child, the mother accepted the situation and any ethnic differences that existed within the relationship.

Beth's experience contrasts with that of Jelena, who was accepting of differences in food and religion, but not in the gender roles that she observed in her daughter's interethnic relationship. The difference in gender roles between what she expected for her daughter and what she observed (which Jelena attributed to ethnic difference), threatened what Jelena wanted for her daughter. Jelena felt her daughter was not happy in the relationship and felt that the relationship was not ensuring 'the best' for her daughter. Given her views, Jelena described animosity between herself and her daughter's boyfriend and tension between herself and her daughter. As a consequence, her daughter stayed away from the family home, impacting Jelena's involvement in the life of her daughter. Jelena could not accept or respect her daughter's decision because she had not 'let go' of her expectations/wishes for her daughter; she had not differentiated her expectations/wishes for her daughter from the decisions of her daughter. Thus, Jelena's experience of her daughter's interethnic relationship was negative because the relationship threatened her parenting-related, developmental goals. This comparison of Beth and Jelena's experiences highlights

that it is not the interethnic nature of a child's relationship, or the presence of difference or distance resulting from the interethnic nature of their child's relationship that is critical. Instead the degree of concern that mothers experience, in the context of their child's interethnic relationship, is explained by the degree to which the relationship is perceived to threaten their parenting-related, developmental goals.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained that concern about a child's interethnic relationship was underpinned by perceived threat to the goals that were important to mothers during the middle years of parenting. These goals, which I characterised as 'parenting-related developmental goals' were; wanting the best for their child and wanting to stay involved in the lives of their child. For some mothers, the possibility of ethnic difference, distance and insincere motives underlying the relationship, that accompanied their child's interethnic relationship, threatened one, or both of these important parenting goals (which ultimately threatened the broader goal of achieving generativity). However, as discussed in Chapter Four, not all mothers experienced concern. The degree to which an interethnic relationship was perceived as a threat to developmental goals was influenced by mothers' experience of difference (extent and acceptance), and progress with the developmental task of letting go, as depicted in Figure 2 below.

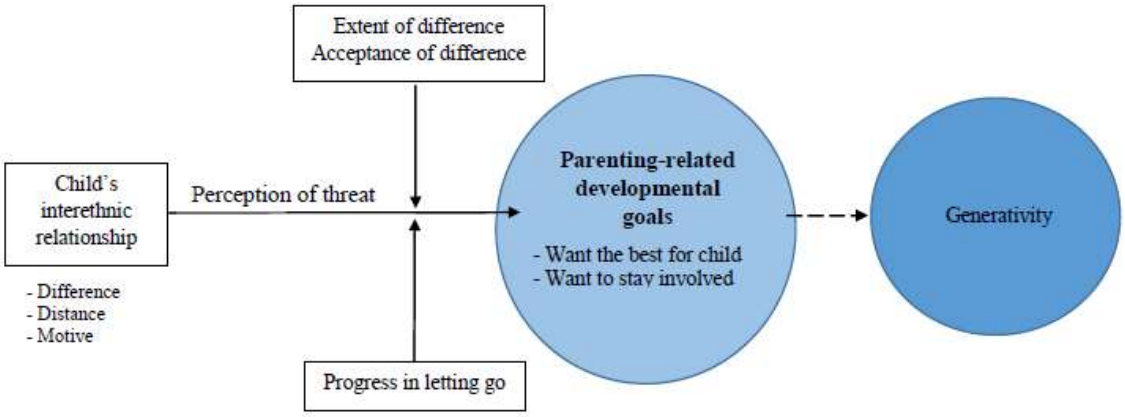

Figure 1: Relationship between a child's interethnic relationship and perceived threat to mother's parenting related developmental goals.

As described in Chapter Four, I conceptualised experience of difference (specifically, extent of difference and acceptance of difference), and progress with the developmental task of letting go, as being on continua, in order to capture commonality in experience as well as variation. Importantly, experience was not stagnant. Movement along these continua was evident, which influenced mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. In the next chapter I discuss the growth that occurred for some mothers, in the context of experiencing their child's interethnic relationship, the factors that enabled/inhibited growth and the implications of growth (versus stagnation) for the broader developmental goals of generativity and wisdom.

Chapter 6: Findings III - Opportunities for growth

Overview

In the preceding chapter I described how mothers' concern about their child's interethnic relationship could be explained by the degree to which the interethnic nature of their child's relationship threatened their parenting-related developmental goals. I also explained that perceptions of threat were influenced by mothers' perceptions and acceptance of difference and the amount of progress they had made with the developmental task of 'letting go'. Experience was not, however, static, with change and adjustment central to mothers' accounts. Adjustment occurred when there were changes in perceptions and acceptance of difference and when there was progress in the developmental task of 'letting go'. Some mothers moved beyond prejudicial views and became more accepting of difference, some progressed further in 'letting go' and some experienced growth in both areas. Growth along these dimensions, which influenced the experience of a child's interethnic relationship, influenced mothers' experiences of the relationship, reducing concern about the relationship and enabled growth towards broader developmental goals.

In this chapter I discuss opportunities for growth along the continua of perceived difference, acceptance of difference and letting go, with a particular focus on the factors that enabled and inhibited growth. I also discuss that although some mothers perceived their child's interethnic relationship as a potential threat to parenting-related developmental goals (and therefore a threat to the broader developmental goal of generativity) the experience of a child's interethnic relationship in fact presented an opportunity for growth. Specifically, growth towards generativity was facilitated via the process of letting go, whilst growth towards wisdom was facilitated via changes to perception and acceptance of difference.

Change in Perceptions and Acceptance of Difference

For some mothers, the way in which they perceived and responded to difference (i.e., whether the accepted difference or not) was relatively stable. Others, however, demonstrated change in the way they perceived and responded to difference; change that was attributed, to some degree, to the experience of their child's interethnic relationship.

Moving beyond prejudice.

For some mothers, the experience of a child's interethnic relationship was associated with change to their prejudiced views. Mothers who assumed difference based on ethnic background (surface level differences) were able to overcome preconceived judgements about their child's partner, that had been formed largely on the basis of stereotypes, and recognise that individual differences can and do exist within ethnic groups. Whilst prejudices about the group may have remained, mothers were able to individuate their child's partner from that group. Related to this, mothers were able to recognise that despite coming from different ethnic backgrounds, similarities can exist between people on deeper levels of culture (e.g., values and expectations). This is consistent with research which shows the moderating influence of time on perceptions of surface- and deeper- level diversity. As explained by Harrison, Price and Bell (1998) "group members base an initial superficial categorization of other group members on stereotypes and subsequently modify or replace those stereotypes with deeper-level knowledge of the psychological features of the other individuals" (p. 98).

Change to the assumption of difference over time was evident from Mahsuri's experience, who held concerns about the future role of her Malay daughter, in her relationship with an Indian man. Mahsuri's concerns diminished after she discussed

her concerns with her son-in-law and learnt that despite coming from a different ethnic background, his views were similar to her own. Patricia reported a similar experience. Her concerns for her daughter (who was Italian-Australian) subsided as she learnt that, in contrast to her assumptions based on his African background, her daughter's boyfriend did not devalue the importance or role of women.

Accepting difference.

Mothers also described increased acceptance of difference associated with their experience of their child's interethnic relationship.[25] For example, Samira discussed the need to accept differences in the way that her daughter-in-law interacts with family, specifically, the amount of time spent together; which she felt differed due to her differing ethnic background:

> But with [daughter-in-law] being Australian there's- leading up to the wedding, there's not - they didn't spend a huge amount of time with the family, so that's different for us. Something we have to get used to. We're still getting used to.

Beth also described an acceptance of her son-in-law's adopted gender roles within the family. Although she did not agree with the fact that her son-in-law did not help with the housework, Beth accepted this difference:

> But with the Asian culture… and this is the only thing I have to say against [son-in-law], we'd come home from shopping and there'd be all the bags in the car and we'd be carrying them in and he didn't, he wouldn't come out and carry them in, he'd go on with what he was doing or if he was watching something with the girls he'll stay there watching something on TV with them, whereas my other friend's husband would come out and so I'd notice that, the

[25] Later, the difficulty in determining causality is discussed; i.e., whether the interethnic relationship influenced change in perceptions or whether change to perceptions was influenced by some other third variable.

> different and um, (.) you know how sometimes the husband might get up and wipe up and you're washing up or do things like that um (.) he didn't do the housework, you know, any of the housework …. but then I used to think, well, he makes up for it in other ways.

In the quote above, Beth states her son-in-law "makes up for it in other ways", which indicates a sense of balancing in the acceptance of difference. Beth was able to accept difference through acknowledgement that on balance, it was not an important issue.

Enablers and Inhibitors of Change

Although a child's interethnic relationship presented an opportunity for mothers to overcome concerns about ethnic difference, the ability for this to occur was dependent on both contextual as well as individual factors. Mothers needed to have 1) the opportunity for contact with their child's partner, 2) the motivation to engage with their child's partner and for that contact to be positive in nature and 3) an openness and capacity to learn and adjust perceptions. Each will be explained in further detail.

Contact.

Change in prejudicial views was facilitated through contact with a child's partner (and in some cases, the partner's family). Mothers described that with time, and consistent exposure to information which contradicted their prior assumptions, they were able to move beyond assumptions and prejudiced views. This process was articulated in a quote provided by Patricia as she discussed her father and brothers' reaction to her own interethnic relationship. Patricia discussed that her Italian family were initially opposed to her relationship with her English then-boyfriend, now-husband. She discussed that over time and in getting to know her boyfriend (now husband), the family moved beyond stereotypical perceptions of 'Poms' and got to know her boyfriend as an individual;

> …they got to know him. They actually gave him a chance they actually got to know him for who he is. They didn't categorise him in a box saying okay he's a Pom, Poms are like this. He became Fred and they got to know Fred- you know?

Contact also facilitated acceptance of difference. This was relevant to Beth's experience as she described how contact with her son-in-law's family, through family trips to Singapore, facilitated an understanding of ethnic difference. This understanding assisted in her acceptance of adopted gender roles within her daughter's relationship (an aspect of the relationship that had caused her some concern):

> …. but then, I've realised that through all my trips to Singapore with a big family of them and they're all very nice and they're all very good to me and I notice that the men are the same, and the wives do all the cooking and all the, you know, making the beds and all that… I don't know whether it'll change. Like a lot of our men have changed, over the years, you know?

The role of contact in reducing prejudice and improving acceptance relates directly to theory and research regarding the intergroup contact hypothesis. This literature, canvassed in Chapter Two, demonstrates that increased contact between members of different groups has the capacity to reduce prejudice. Research which examines the intergroup contact hypothesis, however, highlights that the nature and context of contact have an important impact on the outcome of intergroup contact. Specifically, contact can exacerbate negative attitudes, particularly in circumstances where threat is perceived (Barlow et al., 2012; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015). In the present research, ethnic difference was a concern for mothers because it was seen as a threat to their goals and yet, increased contact with their child's partner commonly led to more positive attitudes (in the form of greater acceptance). This can be understood as due to

the motivation underlying mothers' contact with their child's partner, which created one of Allport's (1958) optimal conditions; common goals, as will be discussed next.

Motivation to engage: The importance of 'staying involved'.

The amount of contact that mothers had with their child's partner (and family) was an important determinant of change. Whilst this might be affected by situational factors such as the duration of the relationship or proximity (i.e., if the partner lived or worked away), mothers' motivation to 'get to know' their child's partner was also an important determinant of the amount and nature of contact. Specifically, mothers needed to be motivated to a) have contact with their child's partner (and possibly his or her family); for example: Jaleh recalled that upon learning of her daughter's boyfriend "right away we said, 'Well, we want to get to know him as well, so bring him around more often', so she did"; and b) have contact that was positive in nature. For example, in recalling the first time she was to meet her daughter's partner, Helen stated; "it would be awful if you went into someone's home and they really showed dislike to you…it would be horrible, so we wanted to make him feel welcome", reflecting her motivation to ensure a positive interaction with her daughter's boyfriend.

This contrasts with the experience of Linda who remained very unsure of her son's interethnic relationship and consistently referred to a lack of contact with, and a lack of knowing her son's girlfriend. Although the couple had been dating for four years, Linda had only met her son's girlfriend on two occasions. In recalling how she reacted when she was to first meet her eldest son's Malay Indian girlfriend she compared the experience with that of learning about her middle son who dating an Australian. Linda recalled:

> I was trying to think back when my middle one announced that he had a girlfriend I probably would have said something like- 'Oh great mate when can we meet her?" (pause). When [son] announced that he was bringing [girlfriend] out [to meet us] - I was like 'nice mate, yeah good' (laughs)

Evident from Linda's recollection was an apparent lack of motivation to meet her son's Malay –Indian girlfriend. Despite this, Linda stated the need to get to know her son's girlfriend on a number of occasions through the interview. Linda was concerned that on-going distance in her relationship with her son's partner would impact on her relationship with her son and his girlfriend in the long-term, that is, Linda recognised the need to engage in order to ensure the goal of staying involved with her son. This was an experience that was common to many mothers. The motivation to engage, get to know their child's partner and accept difference came from a fear of loss. For example, in discussing the possible consequences of a lack of acceptance, Emma stated: "I fear that I'll lose my daughter, that she'll move out and she won't maintain contact". Here we see the importance of mothers' parenting–related developmental goal 'staying involved in the life of a child' as motivating contact with a child's partner and facilitating acceptance of difference. Mothers were motivated by the goal of staying involved with their child which resulted in motivation to engage with and have positive contact with their child's partner.

Although the perspective of the adult child was not considered in this research it was evident from the descriptions provided by mothers, (and would be logical to assume), that in introducing their partner to their family, adult children are also motivated to maintain positive family relationships, in order to ensure the acceptance of their partner within the family. Presumably, partners also hope for positive interactions when meeting their partners' family and so, at some level, all parties are

motivated by similar goals (the maintenance of positive family relationships), a situation consistent with one of the optimal conditions proposed by Allport (1958) as necessary to enable positive outcomes from intergroup contact (i.e., common goals).

Capacity to change.

The final element that was necessary to facilitate change to perceptions and acceptance of difference was capacity for change. Just as individual differences in personality explained initial perceptions of difference (discussed in Chapter Four) so too do they explain ability to adjust perceptions. Specifically, mothers required a willingness to learn, and ability to incorporate new information into their existing understandings of ethnic groups and individuals in order to understand, accept and accommodate difference within their family.

The process of learning was central to the experience of most mothers. Increased contact, enabled by their child's interethnic relationship, led to greater acceptance as mothers learnt about their child's partner, gained insight into their ethnic background and adapted to changing circumstances and new ideas. The importance of learning through contact supports the work of Pettigrew (1998) who discusses learning as the first of four key processes through which contact reduces prejudice and increases acceptance. Some mothers demonstrated this willingness to learn, understand and accommodate difference. For example, in the following quote Samira displays an openness to new information and new experiences in the context of her son's interethnic relationship:

> Maybe what we've learned so far with [son] and [daughter-in-law], because this is the first grandchild of our family to meet somebody and someone outside the culture, and then having to learn lots of things. So I think too, it's accepting different - like, different. And what we may think is how it should be done is

> not necessarily what, say, [son] and [daughter-in-law] may think is right. And I think that's just a taste of what the grandchildren are going to bring, that generation is going to bring, they're going to be even more - probably more different. Having an open mind, yeah. I think it's very easy to get stuck in your ways, stuck in even our culture, what we're used to, what we think is right, and then not having the open mind to accept, hey maybe we can do it this way, or maybe that way is okay. Just little things like that.

As explained in Chapter Four, other mothers were closed to new experiences and new ideas, and remained so; inhibiting the growth that was possible from the experience of a child's interethnic relationship.

The Importance of Acceptance to Parenting-Related Developmental Goals

Change to perceptions and/or acceptance of difference were important to mothers' experiences as each influenced the concerns that mothers had (relating to their parenting-related developmental goals) in two ways. Firstly, the ability to look beyond surface level cultural differences to deeper level culture and learn that differences did not necessary exist on key underlying values meant that concern about ethnic difference diminished. Mothers no longer perceived ethnic difference as a threat to their goal of wanting the best for their child because mothers understood that what they wanted for their child could still be achieved, despite their child's partner coming from an ethnic background that differed to their own. Secondly, acceptance enabled mothers to accommodate difference in the family, therefore achieving the goal of continued involvement in the life of their child. For example, some mothers did identify difference on underlying core values (e.g., gender roles within the family) but acknowledged that in order to ensure a continued relationship with their child, they needed to consider and accommodate their child's partner (and ultimately, accept their

child's choice to be with that person). Acceptance of difference enabled accommodation of difference within the family which demonstrated mutual respect for one another. Mutual respect of difference, in turn, facilitated shared family experiences. For example, Sahar stated:

> She came here, she sometimes … she share with us, my celebrations of my religion. Ramadan, sometime she come break my fast with us to join us for breakfast and sometimes she bring some her religion, like Easter, Mother's Day, all this stuff she brings something to me.

For some mothers, shared family experiences were focused on cultural and religious events (as evident from the quote above). Certainly, an element of this related to the importance of continuing these practices (thus ensuring cultural generativity). This was particularly relevant to mothers, such as Sahar, who remained connected to their culture and religion. Many shared family events discussed by mothers in the current research were also religion-based, the continuation of which was important for mothers in ensuring the best for their child (due to the values and ongoing guidance provided by religion, as discussed in Chapter Five). More commonly, though, the celebration of cultural and religious festivities served to ensure shared family time together. For example; as described by Julie:

> I like to celebrate Christmas more with festive and so forth, but it hasn't got the religious element to it. But Chinese New Year for example, I like to celebrate Chinese New Year, because that's one occasion when everybody comes together, you have the family. It's no different to Christmas time. I do that at Christmas, I do that at Chinese New Year, and every excuse to have a meal together. And the children are like that too. We don't have to have a

> meal every night together, but once in a while, when it's a festive season, we make a point of coming together. And it's just the family.

For Julie, as well as other mothers, cultural practices and traditions were not important in terms of the continuation of cultural norms and traditions, but because such events provided an opportunity for the family to share time with one another. Thus, for some mothers, cultural celebration was less about the reason for the gathering and more about the coming together of family; implying the importance of family over culture. In this way, cultural practices were a means through which family cohesion could be maintained. The importance of family cohesion, over the continuation of culture was also demonstrated in research conducted by Connolly (2009) who investigated the concerns of Christian Dayaks in Indonesia regarding the interfaith marriage of their children to Muslim partners. Connolly found that Dayak parents were concerned about interfaith marriage, not because of concerns regarding the continuation of religion, or the desire to maintain the identity, values and tradition of their ethnic group, but because of threats to family unity in the afterlife (due to their child's conversion from Christianity to Islam). In presenting her findings, Connolly emphasises the importance that anthropological research consider the "microlevel" (p. 503) of analysis (i.e. the family), in addition to macro and median levels of analysis. This assertion highlights the value and contribution of my research, which considers the microlevel of analysis by considering the experience of interethnic relationship from an individual, developmental perspective.

Perceptions and Acceptance of Difference and Broader Developmental Growth

Change to perceptions and/or acceptance of difference was not only relevant to parenting- related developmental goals but also to broader developmental goals; specifically, wisdom. As described in this section of findings, some mothers described

change with regard to their openness to learn, to embrace new experiences and to accommodate new ideas that differed to previous understandings. They demonstrated a desire to understand difference, and a willingness to consider situations from the perspective of others (e.g., their child, their child's partner, their child's family). These are qualities commonly associated with wisdom. For example, Gillian described:

> It's [the experience of the relationship] just made me accept things more and be more open-minded. And now, like, when I'm in the shops and I see young African boy or a young African, I have respect for them. I have respect for them. And I think, maybe it [daughter's relationship] happened to make me respect them. Because maybe I didn't respect them because I was just afraid of this culture thing.

The achievement of wisdom is commonly understood as an ultimate human quality; the "pinnacle of successful human development" (Ardelt, 2000), and yet the construct is discussed in many diverse ways (e.g., knowledge, expertise, personal qualities, self-development; e.g., see Bassett, 2006 and Sternberg, 1990). Erikson theorised that wisdom was the eighth virtue of psychosocial development, achieved via the crisis between ego integrity and despair. According to Erikson, the virtue is characterised by tolerance and compassion. Plews-Ogan, Owens and May (2012) describe that acceptance is a key component of wisdom. Consistent with the experience of mothers in the current research, Plews-Ogan et al. describe that acceptance takes time, is facilitated by an openness to new experience, the development of nonjudgmental awareness, and an ability to release negative feelings. Kramer (1990) discusses that wisdom develops from personal difficulties, which, for some mothers in the current research, was the concern they experienced about the interethnic nature of their child's intimate relationship. Yet a number of mothers,

motivated by parenting-related developmental goals, embraced the challenge and ultimately, grew from their experience.

Progress in Letting Go

The second factor that influenced mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship was the degree to which they had progressed with the developmental task of 'letting go'. As discussed in Chapter Four, mothers had made varied progress in the developmental task of 'letting go' when their child entered their interethnic relationship. Less progress or difficulty with the task was associated with greater concern about the relationship. The experience of a child's interethnic relationship, however, provided mothers with an opportunity to progress further with the task. The ability to progress along the continuum of 'letting go' influenced mothers' experience of their child's relationship as they became better able to differentiate themselves from their child and accept that their child's life was his/hers to lead. This, of course, was related to role development in the middle years of parenting and also contributed to growth towards the broader developmental goal of generativity as well as wisdom.

Enablers/Inhibitors of Progress

Although a child's interethnic relationship presented an opportunity for mothers to progress with the developmental task of 'letting go', the ability to let go and grow from the experience was again dependent on both individual as well as contextual factors. Although prompted by change to the context in the mother-child relationship (resulting from the development of a child's intimate relationship), growth required self- awareness, self-reflection, and the ability to adjust (on the part of the mother), which varies from one individual to the next. For some mothers, the ability to adjust to the changing nature of the parenting role required that they 'let go'

and adjust the hopes and aspirations that they held for their child. That is, for some mothers, growth was facilitated by a challenge to hopes and aspirations, and resolution of this challenge; explained below.

Adjustment to the parenting role.

Progress with the task of 'letting go' (in the context of their child's interethnic relationship), required adjustment to the role assumed by mothers; in particular, with regard to the way they responded to concerns relating to their child. Although mothers recalled previous instances of active intervention in the life of their child[26], those who progressed with the task of letting go were conscious that active intervention was no longer an appropriate response to the concerns they felt as a parent. Mothers described communication as a useful strategy to assist role adjustment, enabling them to release their sense of responsibility through the communication of their concerns to their child. Communication was delivered in various ways; subtle, explicit, gentle or strong; all of which represent a degree of interference. The strategy, provided a means by which mothers could satisfy their ongoing sense of responsibility as they adjusted to the change in their role from authority figure (where active intervention would be an appropriate response) to peer, equal or companion; facilitating the transition of 'letting go'. For example, Glenda, who described initial concerns about the interethnic nature of her son's relationship, stated;

> These two want to get married, we can't stop them, um. We put forward to them what we thought might be the pitfalls and whatever and said this could be, could be, could be … but we have to work through all these things if these are our issues and we did that's that's ah- we put it to the two of them yeah.

[26] For example, Vanessa recalled, one night before her son was due to sit an exam, travelling to her son's friend's house, knocking on the door and demanding that her son return home. Julie, recalled the day her son brought home a motorbike, despite her opposition to motorbikes. She refused to allow the bike onto her property and stated "I think he got the message, he got rid of it".

Mothers described that the use of communication as a strategy to assist role adjustment was a learning process, having to determine when it was and was not appropriate to voice their view, concerns or opinions. For example, Samira stated "it's a learning thing for us… we've had to learn to close our mouths sometimes and not say anything". This again highlights the role of self-refection and learning that mothers experienced through the process of adjustment and growth.

Some mothers, however found it harder to adjust to the changing nature of their role; exhibiting on-going attachment to the parent role, which impacted their ability to 'let go'. Linda, was very much in the throes of adjusting to her new role, negotiating the 'step back' that was described by other mothers. Ambivalence about her role was evident throughout her interview. Although she described an awareness that she needed to 'let go' she experienced difficulty in doing so due to concern about her son and an on-going commitment to her role as mother. This is evident in the quote below in which Linda discusses her concerns about her son's girlfriend's citizenship status:

> **How do you feel about the fact that she won't become an Australian citizen?**
>
> Is that going to be a problem?
>
> **In what way?**
>
> Well, if they have children or is she working here? Is she only on a Visa? I don't know, to work, how will she work here- if she is not a citizen- for an indefinite period? I don't know. I suppose these are conversations I could have with him (pause) But I guess it's probably not my business really
>
> **Do you think it is your business?**

> I want it to be my business (laughs). Because I'm just looking out for him I don't want him to have unnecessary complications and that could be a complication.

At another point of the interview Linda described:

> I feel like, poking a little hole in it and peeping in is what I feel like I want to do. But I'm yet to think how I can do it without hurting his feelings or (pause) seeming like I'm (pause) trying to organise him. I mean I am guilty of trying to organise him sometimes…

At the time of her interview, Linda was in her early fifties. Her son had moved out of home but was planning to move back again and he was dating his first long-term girlfriend. In terms of normative goals, in the context of developmental timetables, it was clear that her son was still transitioning to adulthood. Therefore, we might expect Linda's continued concern for her son and attachment to her active role as mother; it would be expected at this stage of her parenting journey. Alternatively, Linda's continued concern and attachment to the parenting role might be the reason why her son (in his mid-twenties) was still transitioning to adulthood (i.e., her son's plan to move back into the family home was at Linda's insistence).

Linda's experience contrasts with that of Rose, who was still very attached to her role, and exhibited little adjustment within her role as a parent, despite being in her early seventies. Rose felt that her son was not happy in his interethnic relationship and described interfering in the relationship. In terms of developmental timetables and milestones, Rose's son was firmly established in adulthood. In light of this, and given Rose's age, it would be expected that Rose fulfil a less active role in parenting, yet she remained active in, if not enmeshed to, the role. Enmeshment refers to a lack of individuation within the family system, an over involvement with one another, a

tendency to intrude on thoughts, feelings and communications and role confusion (Minuchin, 1991). In a sense, enmeshment represents the opposite of “letting go’. Enmeshment was depicted a number of times throughout Rose’s interview and the ambivalence surrounding her role is captured in the following quote “Although it's his life and he's got to sort it out I'm still a mother”.

The role of mother remained highly salient to Rose’s identity. Throughout her interview, Rose consistently spoke of the advice and assistance she provided to others, referring to her “adopted” children on a number of occasions: “I’ve got adopted kids all over the place, you know- well they adopt me actually” and “Oh god if I had to give a register of all the kids that I've adopted in my life I wouldn't be able to do it (laughs)”. Rose displayed a strong sense of needing to be needed and indicated that the role of mother continued to be an important aspect of her identity which provided her with a positive sense of self; “I think I do a good job”. This relates to role theory which describes the sense of identity that is derived from the roles that are central within one’s life. At her age, it would be expected that Rose rely less on the role of mother as such a critical source of her identity. Evidently, however, this separation from the role has not occurred. Enmeshment in the role indicates some degree of stagnation and demonstrates that age does not necessarily equate to development.

Rose was divorced, and had retired. Unique to her experience (amongst my participants) was the fact that her son had separated and then re-partnered. Research demonstrates that a child’s divorce causes ambivalence for parents as they feel obliged to re-engage in the active role of parent and support their child, whilst trying to maintain boundaries around the extent of support that is provided (Timonen, Doyle & O’Dwyer, 2011). Rose also lived with her son and his girlfriend for part of the week and was involved in housework, cooking and caring for her grandchild. These factors

may explain why the role of mother remained so salient to Rose's identity, because she often assumed activities that are commonly associated with an active role of mothering. Rose explained that her living arrangement was due to her poor health, however it is possible that the arrangement also appealed to Rose as it enabled an ongoing, active role as mother. This is likely, given the importance of the 'mother' role in other areas of Rose's life. Rose's situation reflects the findings of Kloep and Hendry's (2010) research, in which some parents were found to use conscious and unconscious strategies to 'hold on' to their children, delaying the process of 'letting go', and thus delaying the loss of role and the relationship changes that accompany a child's independence. Relevant to this research, on-going attachment to the role of parent (i.e., an inability to adjust to the changing role), had significant implications for mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship; manifesting as ongoing concern about, and/or interference with, the relationship.

Adjustment of hopes and expectations.

For some mothers, adjusting in their role as a parent and progressing with the task of 'letting go' required an adjustment to the hopes and expectations they held for their child. For some mothers, their child's choice to partner with someone of a different ethnic background was a choice that went against their wishes/or was in opposition to what they felt would be best for their child (as discussed in Chapter Four and Five). For these mothers, acceptance of the decision required that they put aside their hopes and preferences for their child and accept the decision of their child as their own to make. Some mothers found it difficult to do this and so they experienced difficulty and delay in 'letting go' of their child.

The prospect that hopes and expectations may not be met due to the interethnic nature of a child's relationship was relevant to Linda's experience (who, as discussed

earlier, was very much negotiating the task of 'letting go'). Linda felt ongoing concern about her son's relationship for a number of reasons, one of which related to the religious upbringing of potential, future grandchildren. Specifically, ethnic difference and the fact that her son's girlfriend was Hindu, represented a threat to Linda's hope of providing a Catholic education for her grandchildren, as evident in the following exchange;

> My husband and I have such a commitment to Catholic education, our three lads went to Catholic education, to Year 12, that is kind of what I'd like for my grandies. I would even help them to do it if that was necessary. (pause)
>
> **So how does that work then if [daughter-in-law] is of a different religious faith?**
>
> (pause), um, it would go right back to would she be happy and ask for the kids to be baptised Catholics.
>
> **And what would happen if she said no?**
>
> I'd be a bit ferrety but if [son] doesn't make a stand he doesn't make a stand (pause) mmm. [Looks visibly upset at this point]. (Long pause)
>
> **Difficult.**
>
> Mmmm (long pause) Yes.

The above discussion highlights the difficulty that Linda experienced at the thought of her son making a decision to date a Malay Indian due to the potential implications of this for her wishes regarding the religious upbringing of any future grandchildren. Linda hoped for her grandchildren to be baptised and raised Catholic. The difficulty that Linda experienced at the thought of having to 'let go' of this desire can be understood by considering the implications of this in terms of her desire for wanting 'the best' for her grandchildren which is relevant to her achievement of

generativity. Devi also stated she would experience significant difficulty if her youngest son (not yet partnered) were to marry an Atheist because this would likely influence the religion of future grandchildren which may impact the likelihood of redemption for her grandchildren after their death. Again, Devi's concerns are driven by her desire of wanting the best for her grandchildren, as well as the importance of family cohesion. Evidently, for these mothers, the aspirations that underpinned the goal of 'wanting the best' for their child extended from their adult child to their grandchildren, and from the present into the afterlife.

Jelena also continued to experience strong opposition to her daughter's relationship because she felt that the relationship prevented her daughter from achieving what she had hoped and expected for her daughter (to travel, study, and 'have friends'). Jelena was not able to let go of her aspirations for her daughter and instead displayed a strong need to make a point, to maintain authority and to exert influence. This might be explained by attachment to the parent role and the sense of identity and purpose Jelena derived from this role. However, it could also be understood in consideration of Jelena's fear that she had served as a role model for her daughter and that as a consequence, her daughter would live a similar life to her, which she did not want for her daughter.

> Obviously I'm role model for my daughter… I think that she is actually trying to be me. A caring person to the husband and you know, not going anywhere, not doing anything for herself. I was exactly the same, I was 100 kilos, okay now I'm putting on weight again but you know, she doesn't look after herself and she doesn't wear any make up, I don't wear any make up so I can see that she's becoming what I am.
>
> **And how do you feel about that?**

Crap, I can tell you that.

This communicates a strong message about the role of a mother, and how a mother's aspirations for her child are driven by a strong sense of responsibility to ensure better for her child than she experienced herself. Jelena's sense that her daughter might not achieve this and her belief that she was in some way responsible for this (indirectly, through serving as a role model for her daughter), meant that the decision of her daughter was particularly difficult for Jelena to accept. Alternatively, Jelena's unhappiness about her daughter's situation may reflect an unhappiness with herself and her situation. Either way, each explanation demonstrates that Jelena's sense of self is impacted by the decisions of her daughter, revealing a lack of differentiation. This lack of differentiation manifested as a power struggle between Jelena and her daughter, which at the time of the interview characterised their relationship. Jelena was looking to prove to her daughter that her boyfriend was only in a relationship with her to gain a VISA "There is no love at all, and then I'm going to prove her this December" [when the boyfriend's VISA was due to expire]. Jelena's goal was to prove to her daughter that her partner's motives were not genuine and that she was misguided in continuing the relationship. Jelena pursued this goal to the detriment of her relationship with daughter and to the detriment of personal growth in terms of 'letting go'.

The importance of challenges to growth.

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the potential for progress with the task of 'letting go' was dependent on whether mothers were able to let go of the hopes, aspirations and expectations that they had for their child, as this facilitated differentiation. Thus, a prerequisite for growth was a challenge to hopes and expectations. This is consistent with literature which discusses that growth occurs in

response to life challenges (Riegel, 1975). Some mothers described no challenge to their wishes or their desires as a result of their child's interethnic relationship. For example, Raha experienced no concern about her son's interethnic relationship because her expectations were consistently met. When asked how she would feel if her son and/or daughter-in law did not respect her wishes Raha replied "To be honest it never happened, such a thing from childhood and till now for us, I can't say er- … Probably I was-what do you call it-very sad or devastated you know?". Grace also stated "I'm just so grateful that they chose girls that are pretty similar in their basic grounding. So it's just helped me. If it had been probably somebody totally different, I may have struggled more". Both mothers recognise that their experience would have been more difficult if there had been a challenge to their hopes and/or expectations for their child. However, although challenges may create conflict, difficulty and/or disappointment they also create an opportunity for growth. Without challenge, there is no way to grow as mothers were not required to differentiate and 'let go' of their hopes and aspirations for their child.

A number of mothers discussed that although they expected a challenge to their hopes and expectations for their child (due to the interethnic nature of their child's relationship), they came to learn (by moving beyond prejudice and 'getting to know' their child's partner) that what they wanted for their child could still be achieved in the context of an interethnic relationship. An example is a case discussed earlier in the chapter, in relation to perception of difference; that of Mahsuri, who realised that what she wanted for her daughter would still be achieved in the context of her interethnic relationship. Consequently, Mahsuri experienced no challenge to her hopes and expectations, and no need to process a situation that was in opposition to her wishes. Mahsuri stated that for her, 'letting go' was made easier through the realisation that

their hopes and expectation would be met. This is in stark contrast to the concept of 'letting go' as discussed by De Vaus. In fact, in adopting De Vaus's definition there seemed little evidence of 'letting go' throughout Mahsuri's discussion of her relationship with her daughter. For example, dialogue such as "she's my first born, she's my baby- still", "I always feel the need to protect her", the lack of agency she afforded her daughter (highlighted in Chapter Four) and her response when asked how she would feel if she daughter were to live in India; "Oh, no. No, no, no. Not happening. No, not happening. Not going to allow that. No", all suggest a lack of 'letting go' as defined by De Vaus. Yet Mahsuri consistently discussed 'letting go' of her daughter. This raises the question of what is involved in, and what it means to 'let go'. As discussed in Chapter Four, different definitions and understandings of 'letting go' have implications for the discussion of progress with the task. Although all mothers referred to 'letting go' of their child, progress with the task was not experienced in the same way.

The Importance of Letting Go to Parent-Related Developmental Goals

The ability to adjust and let go was a key factor in mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. This is because 'letting go' impacted the concerns that mothers had in relation to 'wanting the best' for their child and staying involved in the life of their child. Undeniably, mothers continued to want the best for their child, however the process of 'letting go' meant that they experienced less concern about their role in ensuring this; that is, they felt less responsibility for ensuring the best for their child. As stated by Linda, who was in the midst of negotiating the task:

> He's old enough to run his own life (pause) they're all old enough to run their own lives and I just hope (pause) that the groundings and the values and what not that we've given them (pause) you know…

Growth in letting go was also important in ensuring their continued involvement in the life of their child. Mothers were aware that they needed to let go a little so as not to lose the relationship that they had with their child completely. This was captured in dialogue recalled by Patricia that occurred between herself and her own father when he expressed disapproval of Patricia's daughter's relationship. Patricia recalled;

> I just sat Dad down and said 'Dad would you rather that I put my foot down and say that she cannot see [boyfriend] and I'll probably never see [daughter] again or, I welcome him and welcome her in this relationship and I know that my daughter will still be my daughter'.

An inability to let go impacted negatively on relationships. This manifested in different ways depending on why mothers experienced difficulty with the task. When mothers experienced difficulty in letting go due to continued attachment to the parent role, the impact on the relationship was interference (evident from Rose's experience). When letting go was inhibited because mothers experienced difficulty in letting go of their own hopes and aspirations, the result was conflict, as evident from Jelena's experience. This is consistent with the findings of Kloep and Hendry (2010), who found that interference was characteristic of parents who were 'holding on' to their role of parent, whilst "power struggles" (p. 823) were characteristic of parents who did not agree with the lifestyle decisions of their child. Tensions in relationships either due to interference or power struggles affected the goal of staying involved in the life of their child (and child's partner) which as discussed previously, has implications for development within later life (e.g., if access to grandchildren is restricted).

Letting Go and Broader Developmental Growth

Growth in 'letting go' was not only important to parenting-related developmental goals, it also facilitated growth towards generativity, as described by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992). Specifically, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) state that the ability to let go and grant autonomy to future generations is an important component of achieving generativity and is perhaps the greatest challenge that a parent is likely to face. 'Letting go' in this broader sense requires that mothers 'gift' their legacy to future generations, "granting the gift its own autonomy and freedom" (p. 1006). 'Letting go' is also indicative of the virtue of wisdom. According to Bassett (2006), wisdom is characterised by self-transcendence, whereby an individual is able to let go of individual concerns and adopt shared concern, where the needs of others become more important than individual needs. This was described by Elaine;

> I don't care, I'm old, I'm too old to worry about, you know, why do I worry, I don't mind giving in- I don't mind coming halfway or all the way (laughs) you know- what does it matter at my age? it doesn't matter, you know? Their relationship they're just building, they're just starting to build, you don't want to see it crumble.

What we see here then, is that the process of 'letting go' moves mothers closer towards 'offering up' their legacy in the achievement of generativity and also, moves mothers towards wisdom, accepting that one's own perceptions, beliefs and values may not be 'right', may not suit and/or may not be relevant to others.

The Bigger Picture of Individual Psychological Development

In considering the experience of growth in the context of a child's interethnic relationship, the event must be situated within the broader context of mothers' development. The question then becomes, whether the experience of a child's

interethnic relationship was the catalyst for growth or whether growth, which was occurring alongside the experience, assisted mothers in the experience of the relationship. Both are likely. For example, age-related growth that is indicative of wisdom was described by Beth, the eldest mother in the sample, who was approaching 78 at the time of her interview. When asked whether it was important to her what other people thought about her daughter's interethnic relationship Beth replied;

> it was, but (.) not so much now but then with a lot of things now I've changed, I, I'm a great worrier, always have been, I panic, I worry… I worry about little things, I worry about things that don't matter (.) but I've noticed in the last 12 months, things that I'd, worry me before I can't care about now, I seem to be changing, um, yeah like (things?), more tolerant, or more mellow or, or something,
>
> **Mmm, what do you think has caused that change?**
>
> I don't know (.) I don't know (.)I think I'm, I think more of (.) I was too quick to judge earlier, on anything you see on the TV you know child in swimming pool and that oh what sort of mother's that? You know to let- now I sit back and I think, I feel for the mum and I think, she turned her back for a minute to grab the phone or grab or to see the other child and in that split second, and I don't blame her whereas once I'd sit (in front?) of the TV and blame her for everything, you know, that sort of- I'm changing in those ways as well, I'm not judging people as much I'd, I'd sit on the bus stop and think, oh, fancy wearing that, (.) and- I don't mean money wise I mean putting things together and now I, it's not worrying me, I just see the same thing and I'm not thinking those thoughts I'm noticing different ways coz I'm thinking to myself gee you know, once I would think 'why would she wear that' and these days I think

> who cares, you know it doesn't matter, wear what you like, as long as you're comfortable, I'm getting more thoughts like that now.

Age-related development was also discussed by Samira "…as I get older too, I'm starting to think, you know, some things it's just not worth going there. Some things it's just, let it go. And I think that's part of me getting older". These quotes provide an illustration of developmental change, becoming more accepting and compassionate over time. Not only letting go and adjusting to the parenting role and in some cases, the hopes and aspirations that are held for a child, but also of letting go of worries, concerns and judgements, a change that is indicative of wisdom.

In these quotes, Beth and Samira equate a sense of developing wisdom as a consequence of ageing. Yet it is critical to acknowledge, and also evident from this research, that increased age does not guarantee development or wisdom, as demonstrated from the experience of Rose. Also, some mothers identified the relationship as a catalyst for growth. For example, when asked whether changes in her perception and acceptance of difference were the result of the relationship or change associated with ageing, Gillian[27] stated:

> No, I actually think it's definitely the relationship and the respect that I've got for [daughter's boyfriend] because of the person that he is. Like, now, I don't see these, like, when I'm in the shopping centre and I see these African boys and these African girls, I don't see them as African, I just see them as people. Where I would have at one time seen them as black and, you know?

And later:

[27] Gillian was interviewed in the fourth and final wave of data collection, during which mothers were encouraged to position their experience within their broader development as an individual.

> I do think, obviously as we get older, we get more wisdom. But I would not have known this wisdom but for the experience that I've had. I've got wisdom in other areas, but I wouldn't have known the wisdom in this area if not for this experience. So, you know. It happened to open my eyes, I'm sure. You know, God, as I said, God works in mysterious ways.

Therefore, consistent with existing theories of adult development (i.e., Valsiner, 1997 and Baltes, 1987), this research demonstrates that development results from the interplay between individual differences and contextual factors and the successful negotiation of life challenges. Consistent with Riegel's (1975) interpretation of development however, these challenges do not occur in a predictable, stage-like fashion. Instead, development-promoting events, such as the challenge of a child's interethnic relationship, can occur at any point along the mid- to- late- parenting journey, enabling growth irrespective of parent age or stage. Importantly then, the point at which a child's interethnic relationship occurred along a mother's developmental journey influenced her experience of the event due to development that had or had not yet occurred.

In situating mothers' experiences within the broader context of their development it is evident that prior experiences which encourage developmental growth had been experienced, to varying degrees by mothers, prior to their experience of their child's relationship. Thus, at the time of experiencing the event, mothers had made varied progress in their own personal development. The nature of each mother, as well as where she found herself along her journey in terms of progress towards developmental goals, impacted her experience of her child's interethnic relationship and her ability to grow from the experience. Hence, mothers' development impacted her experience but her experience also impacted development. This is because the

experience was only one of many faced by mothers on their journey of parenting and growing. I represent this in the diagram below. The diagram is simplified; in reality the path of every mother would look very different. However, it situates the experience of a child's interethnic relationship in the broader context of mothers' lives and supports the central idea discussed by Riegel (1975), that development is a journey, impacted by the experience of multiple life events and the interaction between these external life events and individual differences in personal disposition (i.e., an individual's negotiation of these events, which is unique for each person).

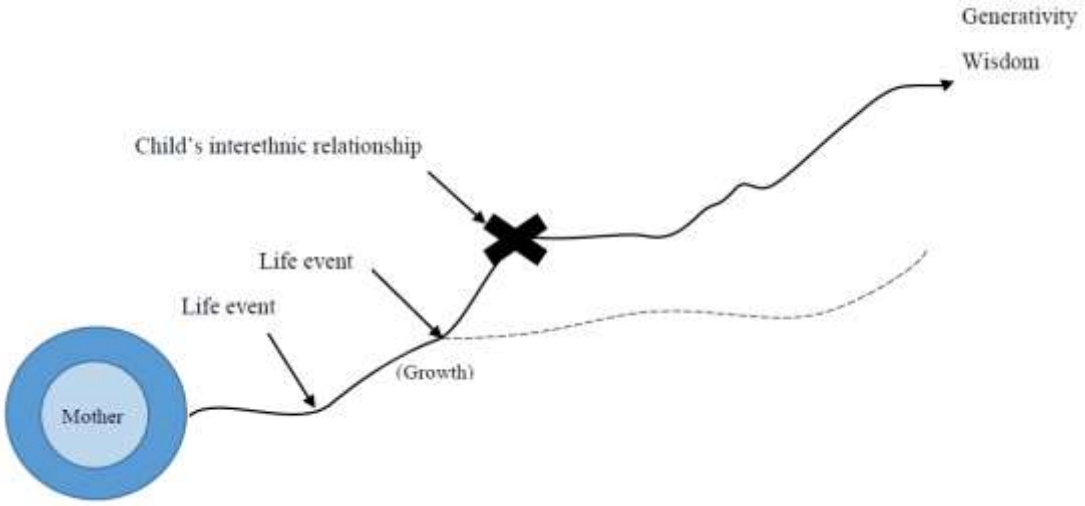

Figure 2: The experience of a child's interethnic relationship along a journey of personal development

In the diagram, the circle represents the mother. The inner core of the circle represents her inner psychological features – each mother has a unique personality, motivations, and goals. The outer circle represents the mother's interaction with the environment (i.e., observable traits, characteristics, relationships). The mother is on a journey and along this journey she experiences various life events. The way she negotiates these experiences, influenced by her unique psychological features, shapes the developmental outcome of that experience; influencing whether she progresses with development or remains stable/stagnant (indicated in the above diagram with the

dotted line). In this way, previous experience shapes future experience. That is, where mothers are along on the path, in terms of their development, when they experience an event (in this case, her child's interethnic relationship) will influence her experience of that event. For example, if significant progress had already been made towards the goals of generativity and wisdom at the time that a child developed an interethnic relationship (resulting from other growth-facilitating experiences such as travel, migration etc.) this impacted mothers' experiences of the relationship. Experiences were impacted by how many life experiences the mother has had and how many steps she has climbed as a result of these experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed that the experience of a child's interethnic relationship was associated with growth as a parent and as an individual. Through positive contact with their child's partner, mothers were able to see beyond difference and/or become more accepting of difference. In negotiating concerns about their child's interethnic relationship, mothers were able to progress further with the developmental task relevant to the middle years of parenting; 'letting go' of their child. A number of factors were required for growth to occur, yet when mothers did experience growth in the content of their child's interethnic relationship, positive repercussions were evident not only in relation to parenting-related developmental goals (wanting the best for their child and staying involved in the life of their child, both of which were important in satisfying generative concern), but also in progression towards the broader developmental goals of generativity and wisdom. Therefore, although some mothers expressed initial concern about their child's interethnic relationship due to perceived threats to parenting-related developmental goals, successful negotiation of the challenge enabled not only the achievement of parenting-

related developmental goals but also facilitated growth in relation to generativity (through the generative action of ‘offering up’) and wisdom (through changes to perception, acceptance of difference and ‘letting go’ of personal needs/agendas in order to facilitate collective needs).

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

Overview

The aim of my research was to investigate mothers' experiences of their adult child's interethnic relationship and develop a grounded theory to explain the nature of this experience. A grounded theory approach was required given 1) my goal of understanding how and why the ethnic background of a child's choice of intimate partner impacted mothers and 2) the lack of prior research from which I could draw upon to consider this. I adopted a developmental perspective to consider the relevance of the experience in terms of personal growth. In this chapter I review my grounded theory of mothers' experiences and position it within existing knowledge relating to parent experiences of their child's interethnic relationship, parenting adult children and development during middle to later adulthood. In this chapter I also discuss the practical implications of my research and conclude with a discussion of strengths and limitations of my findings and areas deserving of further research attention.

Representing Mothers' Experiences of a Child's Interethnic Relationship

The below diagram presents my grounded theory of mothers' experiences of their child's intimate, interethnic relationship (Figure 3).

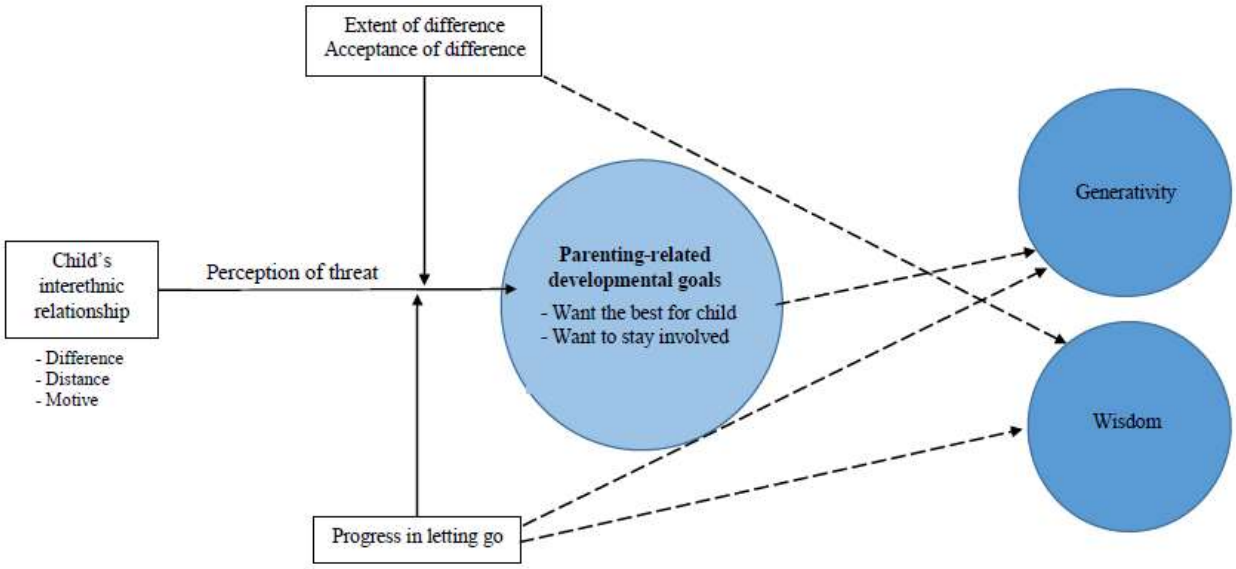

Figure 3: Grounded theory of mothers' experiences of their child's intimate, interethnic relationship

My theory confirms the continuity and change that characterises the middle years of parenting, and presents the experience of a child's interethnic relationship as a key life event for mothers, that has the potential to enable or disrupt personal growth. Next, I discuss key elements of my model; highlighting themes of continuity and change in mothers' experiences, and position these elements within broader literature relating to experiences of parenting and development throughout the middle to later years of life.

Continuity in mothers' experiences.

Perhaps most apparent from mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship was the enduring care and concern that mothers exhibited towards their children. The majority of mothers spoke about their child with great love and compassion, and described love and care as a consistent feature of their relationship with their child. Even through times of disagreement (and for some, turmoil), mothers loved their child and wanted to see their child experience what they perceived to be 'the best' for their child. This was evident in circumstances when mothers disagreed

with their child's choice of partner and, as a consequence, mother-child relationships became strained. The central reason for disagreement about the relationship was an overriding concern for their child. Some mothers held on to their views, about what was best for their child, with such determination that they experienced significant distress when their child made a decision that went against these views (i.e., to pursue an interethnic partnership).

A continuing desire to care for a child can be explained from numerous theoretical perspectives. From a biological perspective, the tendency for women to care for their child has been explained by an innate, biologically driven, maternal instinct. This is evidenced within a body of research that investigates maternal biological responses to their infants (e.g., Barrett & Fleming, 2011; Swain, Lorberbaum, Kose & Strathearn, 2007).[28] Whilst few researchers have considered if and how this instinct changes over the course of motherhood, participants involved in the current research reflected on the relevance of an ongoing, innate desire to care for their children. For example, in explaining the continued concern she felt for her daughter, Emma stated; "It's that mothering instinct". From a social psychological perspective, maternal behaviour is influenced by social norms, expectations, and individual conformity to the socially constructed role of 'mother' (Dally, 1982; Lawler, 2000). The characteristics of 'good mothers' include sensitivity, responsiveness to the emotions of others, patience and tolerance, which together enable fulfilment of a caring, loving and nurturing role (Lawler, 2000, p. 130). From a developmental perspective - the approach I adopted in understanding the experience of mothers- the caring and supportive role of mothers enables individual development, both of the child (Lawler, 2000), and of the mother; in particular, with respect to

[28] It is acknowledged that there have been critiques of this biological 'instinct' approach.

achieving generativity. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) describe that generative concern is provoked by both an inner desire to produce and care for offspring, as well as cultural demand, because society requires that adults care for, and provide for, the next generation. In essence then, the concept of generative concern incorporates both biological and social explanations for the caring and nurturing role exhibited by mothers. This continued sense of caring for and wanting the best for their child has obvious relevance to the broader developmental goal of generativity and was a key influence in the experience of mothers.

Another continuity that was evident in mothers' experiences was the continued desire to remain involved in the lives of their children. Mothers were aware that their relationship with their child, and the nature of family relationships would change over the course of adulthood, but stressed the importance that the family maintain contact. Mothers very much assumed the role of kin-keeper, working to maintain family ties and connection; a role which is well documented in existing literature (e.g., Brown & DeRycke, 2010, Leach & Braithwaite, 1996; Lye, 1996). The desire to stay involved, in order to guide and nurture future generations, again has obvious relevance to the broader developmental goal of generativity and was another key influence in the experience of mothers.

Change in mothers' experiences.

Change also characterised mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. The event meant the introduction of a new individual to the family system, which, as the keeper of kin relationships, was a significant event for mothers. Mothers were concerned as to whether family relationships would remain close as their child sought to establish his/her own family. In most cases, mothers discussed that over time and in getting to know their child's partner, mutual adjustments were

made; both by their child's partner and themselves, to accommodate new ways of thinking, engaging and relating to one other, thus ensuring family cohesion. Flexibility and "a malleability" (Leona) were described as important individual characteristics in facilitating effective adjustment to change. When these mutual, relational adjustments did not occur, family relationships became strained and mothers expressed upset with the situation.

Perhaps, though, the greatest change, evident from the experience of a child's interethnic relationship, was individual, personal growth experienced by some mothers. For some mothers, this growth was evident from their ability to contribute to the mutual, relational adjustments described in the paragraph above. Individual, personal growth was also evident along the three dimensions that influenced the degree to which mothers experienced concern about their child's relationship (specifically perceptions of difference, acceptance of difference and the degree to which mothers had 'let go' of their child). Change that occurred in the context of a child's interethnic relationship led mothers further in their own personal development, towards both generativity and wisdom. As discussed in Chapter Two, the process of 'letting go' can be understood as enabling the generative act of 'offering up'. McAdams, Hart and Maruna (1998) explain that generative commitment and generative action (i.e., offering up) requires trust and faith in future generations. This explains why mothers were focused on establishing strong values and moral behaviour within their child/ren and providing their child/ren with an education (religious and/or formal (i.e., ensuring 'the best' for their child). In doing so, mothers were able to bolster their trust and faith that their legacy was one to be proud of, and one which could withstand negative influence in their absence. In this way, the parenting-related

developmental goal of ‘wanting the best’ represents an attempt to ensure their legacy when it came time to ‘offer up’ their child to the future generation.

The ability to change, integrate new information and adjust oneself based on new experiences demonstrated by some mothers, is indicative of wisdom (Kramer, 1990). This view is characteristic of the organismic perspective of development, which asserts that individuals are active participants in their development, responding to environmental changes to ensure continued adaption and growth across the lifespan (Kramer, 1990). In her theory of wisdom, Kramer (1990), emphasises that adaptation to life events is indicative of, and enables further development of, wisdom across the life span. Unlike theorists who emphasise intellectual abilities and expert knowledge as indicators of wisdom (e.g., Baltes 1987; Gugerell & Riffert, 2012), Kramer emphasises the inclusion of affective components in her model of wisdom given that life events, which provide a catalyst for growth, ignite both cognitive and affective responses.

Mothers described a number of wisdom related processes, central to Kramer’s model, which facilitated the resolution of challenges arising from the experience of a child’s interethnic relationship. Specifically, mothers described that the experience enabled them to *recognise individuality* through acceptance of difference, through differentiation of their child’s partner from their ethnic group and through differentiation of their needs and wants from the needs and wants of their child. Mothers also displayed an ability to *interact effectively* by adopting an openness and flexibility in their relationship with their child’s partner and expressed an *understanding of change and growth* through recognition and acceptance of the changing nature of their role and their relationship with their child. These processes enabled functions of wisdom, specifically, the solution of problems confronting self

and management of social institutions (i.e., the family), which influenced mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. In this way, mothers' response to a child's interethnic relationship had the potential to promote broader developmental growth.

The nature of growth.

Growth, however, is a complex process. It was not simply the case that mothers experienced their child's interethnic relationship and grew, personally, from the experience. The process of growth was dynamic and influenced by various factors. Hence, whilst the experience of a child's interethnic relationship provided the opportunity for growth, the experience did not necessarily result in the occurrence of growth. My findings confirm Valsiner's assertion that development is "deterministically indeterministic" (1977, p. 232).

First and foremost, the catalyst for growth was dependent on the degree to which the interethnic relationship represented a challenge to mothers. This confirms the work of many theorists who discuss that development occurs from challenges and dilemmas which individuals must work to overcome (e.g., Kramer, 1990). The degree to which a child's interethnic relationship represented a challenge for mothers was influenced by individual differences in personality (e.g., an open-mindedness and acceptance of difference) as well as previous life experiences that facilitated development prior to the experience of their child's interethnic relationship (e.g., prior development towards wisdom and/or 'letting go'). Prior development, in some sense, meant that less development was needed (or was possible). This is not to say that there is a threshold of development, but rather, that in some cases, development resulting from the experience of a child's interethnic relationship was less obvious due to evidence of prior development.

When a child's interethnic relationship did represent a challenge, and thus psychological development was possible, a mother's experience of growth was dependent on a complex array of factors. This is consistent with systems theory of development which asserts that both individual and environmental factors are important in enabling, or inhibiting growth (Valsiner, 1977). Riegel's (1975) Dimensions of Development theory is useful in explaining this process. Riegel outlined four dimensions of development and proposed that development results from interaction among these dimensions. These dimensions of development include two internal dimensions; inner-biological (e.g., physical and sexual maturity) and individual-psychological (e.g., emotional maturity) and two external dimensions; cultural-sociological (e.g., expectations and opportunities defined by society), and outer-physical (e.g., physical, economic and political environment). Riegel proposed that development occurs when a change in one dimension of development requires a change in another dimension in order to re-establish equilibrium.

In my research, key influential factors were evident in mothers' outer-physical, cultural sociological and inner-psychological dimensions of development. When a child entered an interethnic relationship a change occurred in the mother's outer physical and cultural sociological dimensions. This change, in the external environment, may have required change in the mother's internal, individual-psychological dimension, for example, as she adjusts her self-concept as a parent. If a mother was able to achieve this (i.e., she was able to re-establish equilibrium between the dimensions), the result was development and growth. If, however, mothers were not able to adjust (i.e., remained attached to the role of parent as it was relevant to earlier years of childrearing), this impacted her ability to respond to the change in the outer-physical dimension (the child's relationship), thus impacting her ability to

develop from the experience. A lack of flexibility and openness to change, and a lack of motivation to address any challenges arising from the experience of their child's interethnic relationship (all of which exist in the inner-psychological dimension), also impacted mothers' ability to overcome challenges and grow from the experience.

The dynamic nature of growth was evident from mothers' descriptions of other developmental changes at the time that their child entered the interethnic relationship (i.e., age-related development). It is possible then that internal change (i.e., change to personal goals or self-perception) necessitated change in the mother's outer-physical dimension (i.e., her relationship with her child). In this way, the experience of a child's interethnic relationship may have served as a medium through which the mother was able to enact change that originated from internally-driven development. Thus, my findings regarding the complex nature of psychological development, support existing systems theory of development which asserts the difficulty (indeed impossibility) of attributing growth solely to one experience.

Related to this, I must reaffirm, that the focus of my thesis is one life event; the experience of a child's interethnic relationship. There are many life events that mothers experience, both within their role as mother and in other roles (i.e., as an individual outside the role of mother), which enable developmental growth. A critical point to make then is that if mothers do not negotiate the experience of a child's interethnic relationship in a way that promotes developmental growth, this does not mean that growth cannot occur in other ways, in response to other life events. If a mother does not accept her child's relationship (e.g., cannot acceptance ethnic difference or cannot 'let go' of hopes and expectations), it does not mean that she cannot live a happy and fulfilling life. If she loses contact with her child or grandchildren as a consequence of her child's interethnic relationship, it does not mean

that she cannot work towards achieving generativity in other ways/other areas of her life. Mothers will likely face many challenges, in other areas of life, which allow them to climb the steps of development in other ways.

Contributions to Theory and Knowledge

I commenced this study because no research had considered parent experiences of their child's interethnic relationship, as reported by parents themselves. Previous reports provided by adult children provided insight; detailing significant variation in parent reactions to interethnic relationships. Reliance on the reports of children is, however, problematic as they are only able to provide their subjective interpretation of their parents' reaction /the nature of their parents' concern. Furthermore, the reports of parents and children, about the nature of their relationship, are likely to differ due to the different developmental stake that each party has invested in the relationship (Kobayashi & Funk, 2010; Shapiro, 2004; Winkeler, Filipp & Boll, 2000). The developmental stake hypothesis asserts that children are likely to emphasise independence and conflict in their relationship/interactions with parent, whilst parents are likely to emphasise connectedness and harmony (Kobayashi & Funk, 2010; Shapiro, 2004; Winkeler, Filipp & Boll, 2000). Hence, it is possible that existing reports from adult children regarding parent reactions to their interethnic relationship overemphasise conflict and differences of opinion. Consequently, my research offers an important counter view to that which is currently available in published research regarding parent reactions to their child's interethnic relationship.

My findings confirm reported variation in parent experiences of a child's interethnic relationship in that some mothers were opposed to the relationship whilst others were accepting. Despite reported opposition, no mother who participated in my research reported the same level of vehement opposition as has been documented in

previous research and no mother was completely estranged from her child. This may be explained by the nature of my sample, such that those who had significant concerns and/or were estranged from their child may not have been willing to share their experience for the purpose of a research study. However, evident variation within my sample makes selection bias less likely, given that selection bias tends to result in extremities of experience.

The lack of vehement opposition amongst my participants might also be explained by the context of my research. Firstly, my research is more recent than that published previously, and as discussed in Chapter One, statistics reveal increasing rates, and acceptance of interethnic marriages over time. Secondly, attitudes towards interethnic marriage/relationships within Australia are fairly positive. This is likely to be because Australia is a multicultural society with an ethnic composition and history of race relations and immigration that differs significantly to that of other countries, where research documents more extreme reactions (e.g., the United States and Cuba; see Fernandez, 1996). Whilst social segregation of ethnic groups and opposition towards interethnic relationships characterises Australian history (and arguably, present day context to some degree), it could be argued that this was not experienced to the same extent as other countries (e.g., the United States and Cuba). For example, anti-miscegenation laws were not formally enacted in Australia. It is for these reasons that we might expect a greater level of tolerance towards interethnic relationships within an Australian context, and hence, amongst my participants. This raises a broader question as to the relevance of the 'norm' of ethnic endogamy; at least within certain contexts (e.g. Australia). It is possible that this longstanding, social norm is no longer relevant in contexts where contact between ethnic groups is enabled by social structure, facilitated by social norms and promoted by social policies and strategies

which advocate for social inclusion and integration. This poses an interesting question to explore in future research.

Whilst my finding regarding variation in mothers' experience was consistent with the findings of prior research (albeit it, not to the same degree), the reasons for opposition provided by mothers in my research were not consistent with what has been proposed in previous literature (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Fernandez, 1996; Luke & Luke, 1998; Owen, 2002). Previous research suggests that opposition resulted from concern about discrimination and social acceptance amongst dominant group members (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Luke & Luke, 1998) and a desire for cultural groups to 'stick together' amongst non-dominant group members (Byrd & Garwick, 2006). My research, however, indicates that concerns were similar, irrespective of group status, and related to wanting the best for a child and wanting to stay involved in the life of a child. This finding adds to existing understandings regarding parent reaction to a child's interethnic relationship by highlighting similarity in mothers' concerns, and individual developmental needs, irrespective of group membership.

The difference between my findings and those of the above mentioned research (e.g. Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Fernandez, 1996; Luke & Luke, 1998; Owen, 2002) can likely be explained by differences in adopted perspective. Previous research has documented parent reactions from the perspective of the child and mostly from an anthropological/sociological perspective. This approach has resulted in findings which emphasise concerns relating to groups and/or intergroup relations. In contrast, I adopted a developmental perspective, given that little research has considered the experiences of parenting in middle adulthood (beyond that which considers the 'empty nest' phenomenon, and more recently the 'boomerang generation'). This approach enabled me to consider what was important to mothers in their role as a parent at this

stage of their life journey, and the consequent implications of a child's interethnic relationship. My finding of similarity in concerns, irrespective of group membership, reflects the shared experience of my participants; they were all mothers, who cared for their child. Adopting a developmental approach in my investigation of mothering across an ethnically heterogeneous group of mothers in middle adulthood not only provides valuable insight into a relatively, under-researched period of adult life, but also into the shared experience of mothering an adult child.

My findings highlighted the importance of wanting the best and wanting to stay involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren. These constructs, which I have conceptualised as parenting-related developmental goals, have been discussed in previous literature (e.g., Mitchell, 2010). Hence, knowledge that mothers want the best for their child and want to stay connected to their child is not new. However, what I have been able to do in my research, which differs to that of much extant literature, is conceptualise and consider the importance of these goals from the developmental perspective of mothers, rather than as a consequence of a mother's role in meeting the needs of her child/ren. As suggested by Woolett and Phoenix (1991, cited in Lawler, 2000, p. 133);

> "The invisibility of mothers in much psychological work is probably linked with the lack of a conceptual framework for analysing mothers' feelings and experiences as distinct from those of their children. It is not surprising, then, that conceptualisations of motherhood and of good mothering merely reflect ideas about children. What children are considered to need for development is generalized to define good mothering".

I have addressed this shortfall of existing literature by considering the needs of mothers as individuals, separate to the needs of their child. In doing this I have been able to demonstrate the relevance of a child's decision of partner for the developmental progression and achievements of mothers. Specifically, I have discussed the hopes and expectations that mothers have for their children and how these hopes are relevant to mothers' development through conceptualising two key, parenting –related, developmental goals.

Unbeknownst to me at the time of analysis, my conceptualisation of 'parenting-relating developmental goals' aligns with a discussion of developmental goals provided by Heckhausen (1997). Heckhausen asserts that, "developmental goals are future outcomes of development that the individual tries to attain within a medium time range (i.e., 5-10 years). Developmental goals can either reflect the striving for [developmental] gains or the avoidance of [developmental] losses" (178). During the middle to later years of adulthood, it is asserted that individuals are most likely to focus on avoiding the loss of existing developmental gains, rather than the pursuit of new developmental gains (Hutteman, Hennecke, Orth, Reitz & Specht, 2014). This is confirmed by the parenting-related, developmental goals that I identified; avoiding the loss of their initial investment in their child by way of 'wanting the best', and avoiding the loss of their relationship with their child by way of 'wanting to stay involved' in the life of their child. In this way, I have confirmed and further defined the relevance of developmental goals to the experience of mothering throughout middle adulthood. This adds to understandings of parenting an adult child and how parenting contributes to development in middle to later adulthood.

My findings highlight that the normative event of a child developing an intimate relationship brought about change in the life of mothers and that the way that mothers responded to this change was important to their developmental growth. This is consistent with a number of perspectives of growth and development (e.g. Baltes, 1987 Havighurst, 1972; Lang & Heckhausen, 2006; Valsiner, 1997; Heckhausen 1997). The fact that growth was dependent on complex interactions between the individual and their environment lends support to the systems approach of developmental psychology. This theory asserts that when an individual acts in response to their environment, their environment changes, creating a dynamic environment which shapes their developmental trajectory (Valsiner, 1997). Importantly, Valsiner describes that it is not only the actions of the individual that change the environment, but also the actions of others. In the case of my research, the action was that of a child, choosing to partner with a person from an ethnic background that differed to their own. My findings also confirmed the 'plasticity' of development, which refers to individual differences in capacity to develop (Baltes, 1987). The variability of growth evident in my research 1) between individuals, 2) within an individual over time and 3) within an individual in terms of their potential to progress to the next developmental state confirms the work of Valsiner who describes development as "deterministically indeterministic" (1997, p. 323). Valsiner further states that "this deterministic (bounded) indeterminacy guarantees stability and instability, continuity and change, and rigidity and flexibility in development" (p. 323).

Finally, my research provides further evidence in support of the importance of 'letting go' as a task relevant to parenting in middle adulthood. Findings highlight the importance of differentiation within the parent-child relationship to ensure the

healthy development of each individual and their relationship. As discussed, conceptualising the task of 'letting go' was complicated by the fact that mothers' understandings of the task differed, seemingly dependent on how they understood their role as parent during middle adulthood. The description provided by some mothers exemplifies De Vaus's (1994) definition of 'letting go'. There was a sense of "giving up idealised fantasy images of what the other person ought to be like" (p.186) and "responding to others as they are rather than as we imagine they should be" (p. 186). The description of letting go provided by other mothers was in line with Kloep and Hendry's (2010) position, where willingness to let go is dependent on the degree to which a child's decisions coincide with the wishes of the parent. This seems to represent the antithesis of 'letting go' as defined by De Vaus.

Understandings of the concept of 'letting go' may be dependent on ethnic background. For example, Isobel, who described parenting as akin to holding kite strings, and 'letting go' as akin to passing the kite strings to her daughter's husband, was Javanese. Mahsuri, who also described 'letting go' as passing responsibility for her daughter's happiness and well-being to her daughter's partner (and who indicated a particular lack of agency with respect to her daughter when describing the process of letting go) was Malay. Both Javanese and Malay cultures align with a more collectivist orientation. Furthermore, both mothers were born in Singapore and both were of Muslim faith. The descriptions of 'letting go' provided by Isobel and Mahsuri differed to those provided by other mothers, particularly those from more Western, individualist cultures. This implies that, just as understandings of the parent role, and the nature of family relationships are influenced by cultural norms, traditions and expectations, so too may understandings of the related concept of 'letting go'. Differences in conceptualising 'letting go' could also be explained by the fact that

understandings are derived from subjective descriptions of largely cognitive and emotional processes that are shaped by the nature of experience.

Very little research has been conducted on the topic of 'letting go' and it was too far out of the scope of this thesis to consider in detail. Ideally, future research should address this. 'Letting go' is undoubtedly prompted by various life experiences, is likely to be impacted by many contextual factors, and appears to be an important developmental experience for parents as they adjust to the increasing independence of their child. One would expect that further investigation of this experience would be of value not only theoretically, but also for any practitioners who may be working with middle-aged parents in adjusting to the changes of middle adulthood.

Of significance to all of the above, my research was conducted using grounded theory methodology. Hence, I commenced my investigation with no a priori assumptions about the relevance of any existing theoretical constructs or concepts to my research question. Yet my research demonstrated that many existing constructs and concepts were relevant to mothers' experiences. My findings support the understanding that development results from the experience of normative life events (consistent with Baltes, 1987), that development is dependent on both individual differences as well as contextual factors (consistent with the work of systems developmental theorists such as the Rigel, 1975 and Valsiner, 1997), and confirmed the relevance of 'letting go' (consistent with De Vaus 1994 and Kloep & Hendry, 2010) generativity (in particular the work of McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) and wisdom (in particular the work of Kramer, 1990) to adult development in later life. Uncovering the relevance of these theoretical constructs from the direct experiences of mothers further consolidates their importance in understanding adult development in middle to later adulthood.

Contributions to Practice

My research offers valuable insight for clinicians working with individuals who may be dealing with family tensions and/or conflict (real or anticipated) due to a child's choice of intimate partner. In previous research, adult children have reported estranged family relationships and/or problems within their relationship stemming from parent reactions to (rejection of) their interethnic relationship (e.g. Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Luke & Luke, 1998). I felt it was important to investigate mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship to provide insight into this apparent discontent (as reported by adult children); particularly given the increasing rate of interethnic relationships in many countries across the world (Jacobson & Heaton, 2008). My research provides an understanding of mothers' concern, which will likely be of value from a clinical perspective.

My findings confirmed those of previous research (from the perspective of adult children; Baptiste, 1984; Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Fernandez, 1996; Katz, 1996; Killian, 2001, 2002; Luke & Luke, 1998; Owen, 2002), that when tension was present within a family due to a child's choice of partner, family relationships were impacted in a negative way. Mothers described stress, tension and strain. One mother recounted a period of estrangement between herself and her daughter because she did not agree with her daughter (who was English) moving out to live with her boyfriend (who was from Zambia). The following dialogue demonstrates the level of emotional distress she felt as a consequence of the disagreement:

> So, I said, okay, if you want to move out with him, you move out. And I didn't speak to her. And it broke my heart. Like, the weeks were going by and I couldn't bring myself to phone her. And she wasn't phoning me. And it got to about three weeks after she'd moved out. And I phoned

> her up. I came home from work and I was sat in the car and I phoned her up. And I literally couldn't speak. I just sat there like that. I couldn't speak. I'm getting upset now, thinking about it. And she couldn't speak either.

Difficulty with the experience of their child's interethnic relationship was also evident when, in a number of interviews, the focus shifted towards the end of the interview from me asking questions of mothers, to them asking questions of me. A number of mothers wanted to know what I was finding with other mothers, whether their experience was common or unique to the experience of others; to make sense of, and gain ideas of how to handle the situation. As stated by one mother: "it's not ideal [the situation]. I don't know. Maybe talking to you will get me some ideas [of how to manage the situation]". One mother, who was struggling to balance tensions between her daughter (who was involved in an interethnic relationship) and her husband (who did not accept the relationship), described the interview as "cathartic", adding that the opportunity to step back and recount the experience in full, to a stranger, enabled her to see the significance of the issue and the possibility that external support may be beneficial in assisting her with the management of relationships within her family. Hence, the importance of empirical insight into this experience, and the relevance of this insight in a therapeutic sense, was confirmed.

My findings suggest the importance of therapeutic focus on the nature of parent concerns, encouraging reflection and insight as to how concerns relate to perceptions of the mothering role and the sense of self that is derived from the role. Practitioners could encourage mothers to consider if and how their concerns relate to the hopes and expectations that they have for their child/ren and if/how these hopes and expectations represent an extension of self. Findings also suggest the need for mothers to re-

conceptualise their relationship with their child to enable the process of 'letting go', to consider new personal goals and interests as they enter middle and later adulthood and to give consideration to how they are able to satisfy their parenting- related developmental goals in the context of a child's interethnic relationship. Alternatively, if parents remain opposed to the relationship, understanding the nature of this opposition may assist them in working through relationship issues with their child and decisions about the future of their relationship with one another. By acknowledging that a child's interethnic relationship may present a challenge, but also an opportunity for growth, positive therapeutic gains are possible. Likewise, for adult children and/or interethnic couples seeking therapy to manage family reactions, a focus on how and why their decisions are relevant to their mother (or parents) and how to encourage differentiation within the parent-child relationship would likely result in positive therapeutic gains.

Limitations and Strengths

One potential limitation of my research is the high degree of cultural integration evident amongst mothers in my sample. As discussed previously, many of my participants who had migrated to, and settled in Australia had lived in the country for a number of years and most described an orientation towards assimilation/integration. The potential relevance of this became apparent from the lack of concern expressed by mothers about a loss of culture. I had expected, when starting this research, that a loss of culture and implications related to cultural generativity may be relevant to the experiences of mothers. This expectation came from my early readings regarding the development of interethnic couple identity, whereby the couple adopts aspects of one another's culture in shaping their identity as a couple/family (Byrd & Garwick, 2006; Killian, 2001, 2002). I had expected that mothers may be

concerned about a loss of culture as a consequence of this process and was surprised that this theme did not emerge. Instead, concern about a loss of culture was discussed by very few mothers; only two in fact. These mothers were the only two in my sample who reported greater connection to their culture compared to the rest of my sample. Hence, I have considered that the lack of importance given, in the present research, to the preservation of culture in mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationship may be unique to my sample.

I was aware of the issue of cultural integration throughout my project and discussed this with my supervisors. We discussed the difficulty of defining and identifying levels of integration, and difficulties in accessing and interviewing 'less integrated' mothers (e.g., the potential need for interpreters). We also discussed scope and the need to keep this somewhat contained for the purpose of a PhD thesis, and for me to recognise that this project represents the first of (hopefully) many steps in the exploration of this, and related issues. Importantly, the degree of integration/an orientation towards assimilation is acknowledged in my findings as relevant to perceptions of difference and important to mothers' experiences of their child's interethnic relationships. There is, however, a need to investigate if and how the concerns and experiences of 'less integrated'/more recent migrants to Australia differ to the experiences shared by my participants. Hence, I acknowledge the limit of my research with respect to sample, and hope that research continues to explore this issue in further detail; as is characteristic and necessary to empirical inquiry.

Despite the limits of my sample with respect to level of integration, a strength of my research was the diversity of ethnic backgrounds within my sample. Mothers from 14 different ethnic backgrounds took part in my research, providing great diversity in that respect. Another strength of my research was the depth of data that I

was able to obtain. The mothers I was able to recruit, seemed for the most part, willing to explore their hopes and concerns for their child and themselves. This obviously varied within my sample. Some mothers were more guarded, or less able to reflect on and explore the nature of their concerns, however many provided deep, rich insight in response to my questions.

Future Research

As indicated throughout this chapter, there are a number of issues, related to my research, which are worthy of further attention. As already identified, there is a need for research which continues to explore parent experiences of their child's interethnic relationship. This project represented an important first step, however, there is a need to consider the experience of fathers. This is important given the growing number of interethnic relationships in Australia and many other countries around the world, and given that my findings suggest that the experience can have important implications for parent development. Little research considers the experiences of fathers during middle adulthood and so investigation of the developmental implications of a child's interethnic relationship for fathers will be of great benefit. The experiences of fathers could then be integrated into the model of mothers' experiences and the resulting model (of parent experiences), be tested quantitatively, to demonstrate the empirical validity of the model.

This research adopted a developmental perspective and so participant experiences were explored and interpreted through a developmental lens. There is merit in investigating this topic from other theoretical perspectives, such as cross-cultural psychology and/or sociology, with greater emphasis on factors such as; race/ethnicity relations, length of time since migration, processes of acculturation, generational status, colorism/discrimination, the intersection between ethnicity and

social inequality, gender, birth order and so on. These issues were acknowledged in the current work but require further exploration.

Extending from this research is the possibility of exploring other types of relationships that a child may form; with a partner of a different age, a partner who has partnered previously, a partner with health concerns, a partner who has experienced social problems in their life (e.g., drug use, imprisonment) or, circumstances in which a child does not partner. With the legalisation of same sex marriages in developed countries now a reality, future research could also consider the intersection of ethnicity and sexual orientation in explorations of parents' experiences of their adult children's intimate relationships. What, if any, are the concerns of parents in relation to these issues, and how can these concerns be understood from a developmental perspective? In essence, are the parenting-related developmental goals identified in this research; of wanting the best for a child and wanting to stay involved in the life of a child, relevant to parent experiences of other relationship types? Of particular relevance was the finding that similarity in religious background was more important to mothers than similarity in ethnic background. My findings suggested this was to ensure similarity in values, traditions and practices (e.g., tithing), but research could examine interfaith relationships and implications for parents in more detail.

I also believe there is a need to look beyond a child's choice of partner to other life events that occur within the context of parenting that may have important implications for development in middle adulthood. Woolett and Phoenix (1991, cited in Lawler, 2000, p. 133) assert "the lack of a conceptual framework for analysing mothers' feelings and experiences as distinct from those of their children" and I assert that there is a need to address this. There are a number of events that occur in the context of parenting during middle adulthood that undoubtedly effect the development

of mothers (and fathers). Work has been conducted around events such as leaving home and, more recently, children returning home, but there are other life events and decisions that are made by adult children that could be considered, with a particular focus on the implications of these events/decisions for parent development. For example, various life challenges experienced by an adult child (e.g., drug use, mental illness, imprisonment), the decision of an adult child to live interstate or overseas, to remain single, to deviate from religious upbringing, the loss of a child, the adoption or fostering of children in middle to later adulthood and so on. The pursuit of this research would provide valuable contributions to theory development regarding adult development throughout middle adulthood.

Finally, I found that mothers' perception of their role as a mother to an adult child was a relevant factor in influencing their experience of parenting in middle adulthood. Yet very little research has considered the role of mothers (and fathers) in middle adulthood. Less still has considered what mothers (and fathers) derive from the role and how the role changes over time, highlighting the need for research of a longitudinal nature. Related to this is the need to further explore the task of 'letting go'. Letting go appears to be a significant developmental task relevant to parenting in middle adulthood, yet the task is not well conceptualised in existing literature. Further research could consider mothers' (parent) understandings of the task, how these understandings relate to understandings of the parenting role and how experience of the task relates to broader development.

A Final Reflection

As my thesis draws to an end, I thought it fitting to offer a final reflection on my research journey. This thesis has taken me a number of years to complete. I have worked fulltime for the duration of my candidature, I have married, we have had our

first child, bought our first home and travelled overseas on a number of occasions to share precious times with our family and friends. Although I have taken my time in completing this work, I would not change a thing if I had my time over again. I have grown as I have worked to complete my thesis. I have developed along my own path, from a girl in an interethnic relationship to a mother, with my own hopes and fears for my daughter. I have learnt so much from my participants, many of whom spoke to me about the trials and tribulations of mothering. I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to learn from each one of them. I feel that my journey and my own life experiences have enabled me to better understand and represent the experiences of my participants. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to undertake this challenge and grow from the experience.

Conclusion

Taken together, I found that the experience of a child's interethnic relationship was an important experience for mothers. It provided an opportunity to learn, adapt and progress with personal development. The potential for growth, resulting from the experience, was dependent on a number of factors including; prior experience of developmental life tasks (i.e., prior life events), the nature of the event (e.g., when the event occurred along mothers' parenting journey, the nature of their relationship with their child, the nature of their child's partner, i.e., degree of perceived difference), mothers' sense of self/self-concept (e.g., perception of self, perception of and attachment to the role of mother) and inner psychological disposition (e.g., personality, ability to consider, reflect and adjust). Through it all, however, was a strong sense of love and care which characterised the journey of motherhood.

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Appendix A

Information Letter

Mothers' Perspectives of Interethnic Relationships

Dear Potential Participant,

Hello! My name is Nikki and I am currently working on my PhD in Psychology at Edith Cowan University. The topic of my research is '**Mothers' Perspectives of Interethnic Relationships'**. I am investigating this issue because previous research reveals wide variation in parent reactions to their child's interethnic/interracial relationship. The problem with this research is that parent reactions are reported by the adult child. No research has yet asked *parents* about *their* experiences of their child's interethnic relationship and so the aim of my research is to speak to mothers (in the first instance) about this issue. In order to do this I need to speak to mothers whose adult child is involved in a committed relationship with someone from an ethnic background that differs from their own.

If you choose to take part in this research I will arrange for us to meet and conduct an interview to discuss your perspective about your child's interethnic relationship. The interview is likely to take around one hour and will be held at a time and place that is convenient for you.

My research has the approval of the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee. Participation is **completely voluntary** and **you are free to withdraw your consent at any time**. Your responses will be audio-recorded, however only I and my research supervisors will have access to the recording and all information will be kept strictly confidential. No names will appear on interview transcripts; instead, pseudonyms (fake names) will be used. If I ask you any questions during the interview that you do not feel comfortable in answering we can skip the question and move onto the next one. In the event that this research is published, **no identifiable personal information will be released**.

If you have any questions regarding my research please feel free to contact either myself or one of my research supervisors (contact details are provided on the next page). If you wish to speak to an independent person regarding the research process please contact the University Research Ethics Officer on (08) 6304 2170 or Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Thank you for taking time to read this information letter.

I hope to hear from you soon!

Nikki Rajakaruna

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Appendix B

Consent Form

Mothers' Perspectives of Interethnic Relationships

I, _____, hereby state that:

- I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter, explaining the research study
- I have read and I understand the information provided
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and any questions that I had have been answered to my satisfaction
- I am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the researcher and/or her supervisor at any time
- I understand that participation in the research project will involve:
    - Participation in an interview
    - Checking the interpretation of my interview- if I wish to be a part of this process
- I understand that the information that I provide will be kept confidential.
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project.
- I understand that information from this research may be published; however no identifying information will be included in the publication.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty
- I freely agree to participate in this research project

Signed_____ Date: _____

Researcher

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Appendix C

Interview Schedule 1 (first version)

Parents' Perspectives of Interethnic Relationships

Interview Questions

Tell me about their relationship...

- When did you find out about it?

- How did you find out about it?

How did you feel when you found out about it?

- Ok? Upset? Why?

How have your feelings changed over the course of their relationship?

– what has changed?

- why? *- (If married) Did your feelings change when they got married? Why?*

= (If have children) Did your feelings change when your grandchild/ren were born? Why?

(probe re: validity of their original concerns)

How do you feel about their relationship now?

- Good things- benefits?

- Bad things- concerns?

What sorts of things have changed in your life as a result of your child's relationship with ___?

- How do you feel about that?

-Is that important to you?

How do you see things in the future?

Appendix D

Interview Schedule 4 (final version)

Mothers' Perspectives of Interethnic Relationships

Interview Questions

Tell me about your relationship with your son/daughter

How has your relationship changed over time?- what has that been like for you?

What was important to you as your child moved from adolescence through to adulthood?

[Wanting the best]

[Staying involved- involved or connected?- unpack this]

Why were these things important to you?

[Love/support/connection]

[Sense of self]

[Generativity]

Tell me about your child's interethnic relationship

How did you feel/what did you think when you found out about the relationship?

Why did you think/feel this way?

Did you have any concerns? Why/Why not?

Did your feelings/thoughts/perspective about the relationship change over time?

In what way?

[Acceptance - Letting go]

Why do you think your feelings/thoughts/perspective changed/didn't change?

Were there other changes going on in your life, in how you felt about things?

[Prompt to try and disentangle relationship between IER as a catalyst for change or change more broadly as influencing mothers' perspectives of IER].

Would it be fair to say that… [Reflect back participant's experience through the lens of my analysis]

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

Mothers' Perspectives of Interethnic Relationships

Demographic Questions

YOU	
Name	
Age	
Country of birth	
Ethnicity	
Religion	
Marital status	
Length of time in Australia	
The father of your child who is involved in the Interethnic relationship	
Country of birth	
Ethnicity	
Religion	
YOUR CHILDREN	
Number of children	
YOUR CHILD who is involved in an interethnic relationship	
Name	
Age	

Sex	
Country of birth	
Ethnicity	
Religion	
Marital status	
Where does your child currently live? (State/country)	
Does your child currently live with their partner?	
Living arrangements	☐ *Lives in own home* ☐ *Lives with you* ☐ *Lives with partner's family* ☐ *Lives with friends/shared home*
YOUR CHILD'S PARTNER	
Sex	
Age	
Country of birth	
Ethnicity	
Religion	
Length of time in Australia	
THEIR RELATIONSHIP	

Length of their relationship	
Number of children?	
Age of children (if applicable)	

Appendix F

Thank you note

A Very Big Thank You!

Thank you for offering your time today and for sharing your experiences of your child's interethnic relationship. Your insight is invaluable and your time is very much appreciated. If you have any questions that arise after today, or if you think of anything else at all that you would to add please do not hesitate to contact me.

It is possible that discussing your experiences with me today may have raised some issues or concerns. Therefore I have provided you with the name and contact numbers of some support and health care services below. If any of the things that we discussed today are causing you worry or playing on your mind please give one of these numbers a call.

Relationships Australia:	**(**family relationship advice and counselling) 1300 364 277
Family Helpline:	(family difficulties and counselling) 1800 050 321
Lifeline:	(counselling service) 13 11 14

Thank you once again for participating in my research.

Kind regards,

Nikki Rajakaruna

Researcher

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Appendix G

Advertisement

Calling all Mums….

Is your adult child involved in an interethnic/intercultural relationship??

(Or are you involved in an interethnic relationship and think that your mum may be willing to speak to me?)

If so, then I would love to speak to you!!

My name is Nikki Rajakaruna. I am currently completing my PhD in Psychology at Edith Cowan University. I am exploring the experiences of mothers whose adult child is involved in an interethnic/intercultural relationship.

I am investigating this issue because previous research reveals wide variation in parent reactions to their adult child's interethnic relationship. The problem with this research is that parent reactions are reported by the adult child. No research has yet asked *parents* about their experiences……until now!!

So, if your adult child is involved in an interethnic relationship I would love to hear from you

OR if you know someone who may be interested in participating in this research, please pass my details on to them.

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Appendix H

News Article (Advertisement)

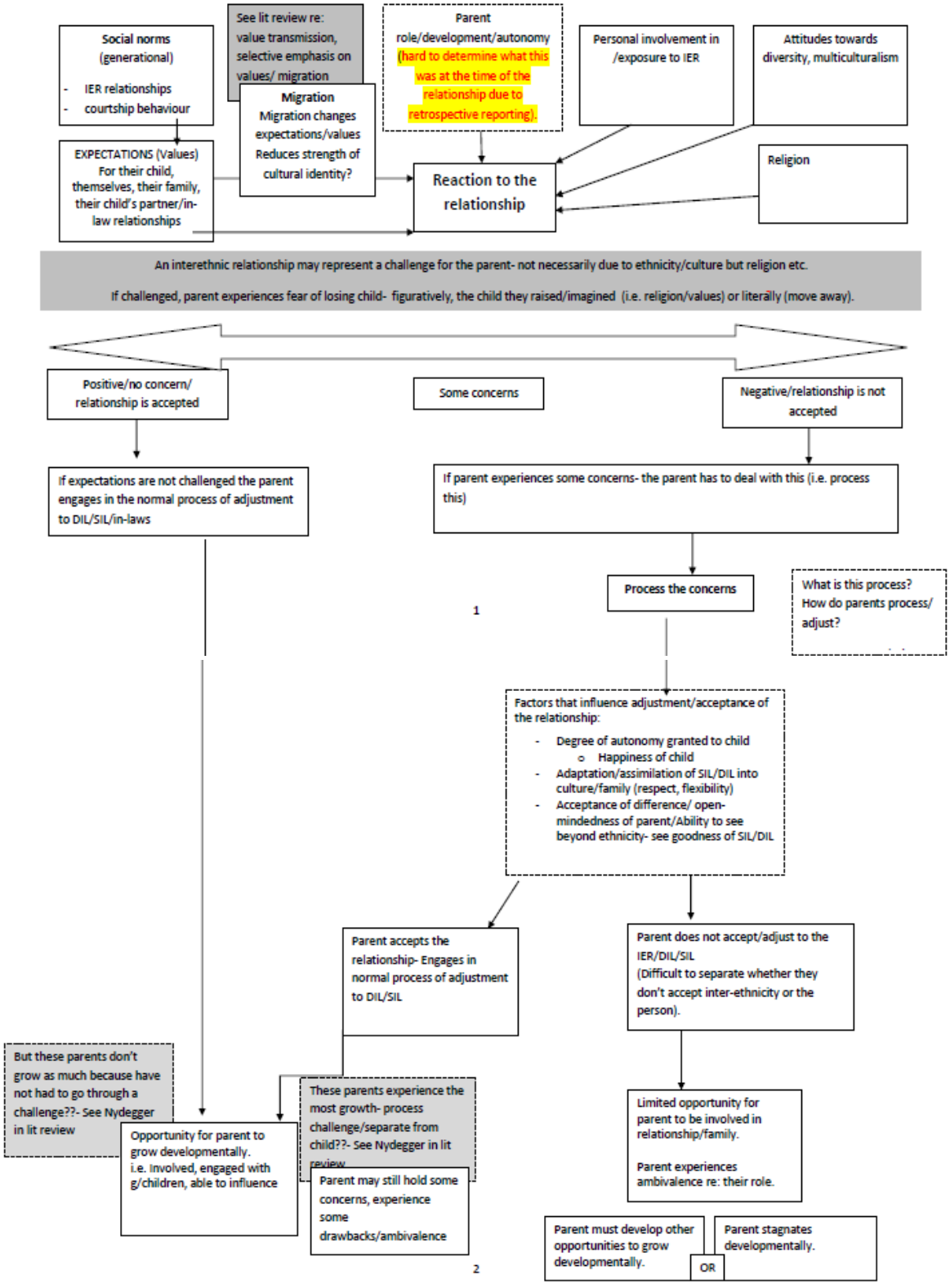
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 31.3% of marriages in Australia in 2012 were between males and females who were born in different countries. If defacto couples and relationships between second and third generation migrants are also considered, the rate of interethnic relationships in Australia is higher still. Research regarding the experiences of interethnic couples indicates wide variation in parent reactions towards interethnic relationships, ranging from unquestioned support through to violent opposition. This research is however limited as it relies primarily on the reports of adult-children who are involved in interethnic relationships and so reported reactions fail to consider the perspective of parents. Nikki Rajakaruna, a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology and Social Science at Edith Cowan University aims to address this gap in research by investigating the experiences of parents whose adult-child is involved in an interethnic relationship. To explore this issue, Nikki would like to speak to mothers whose adult child has been involved in an interethnic relationship for longer than 12 months. To find out more about this research please contact Nikkin.rajakaruna@ecu.edu.au or 63045497.

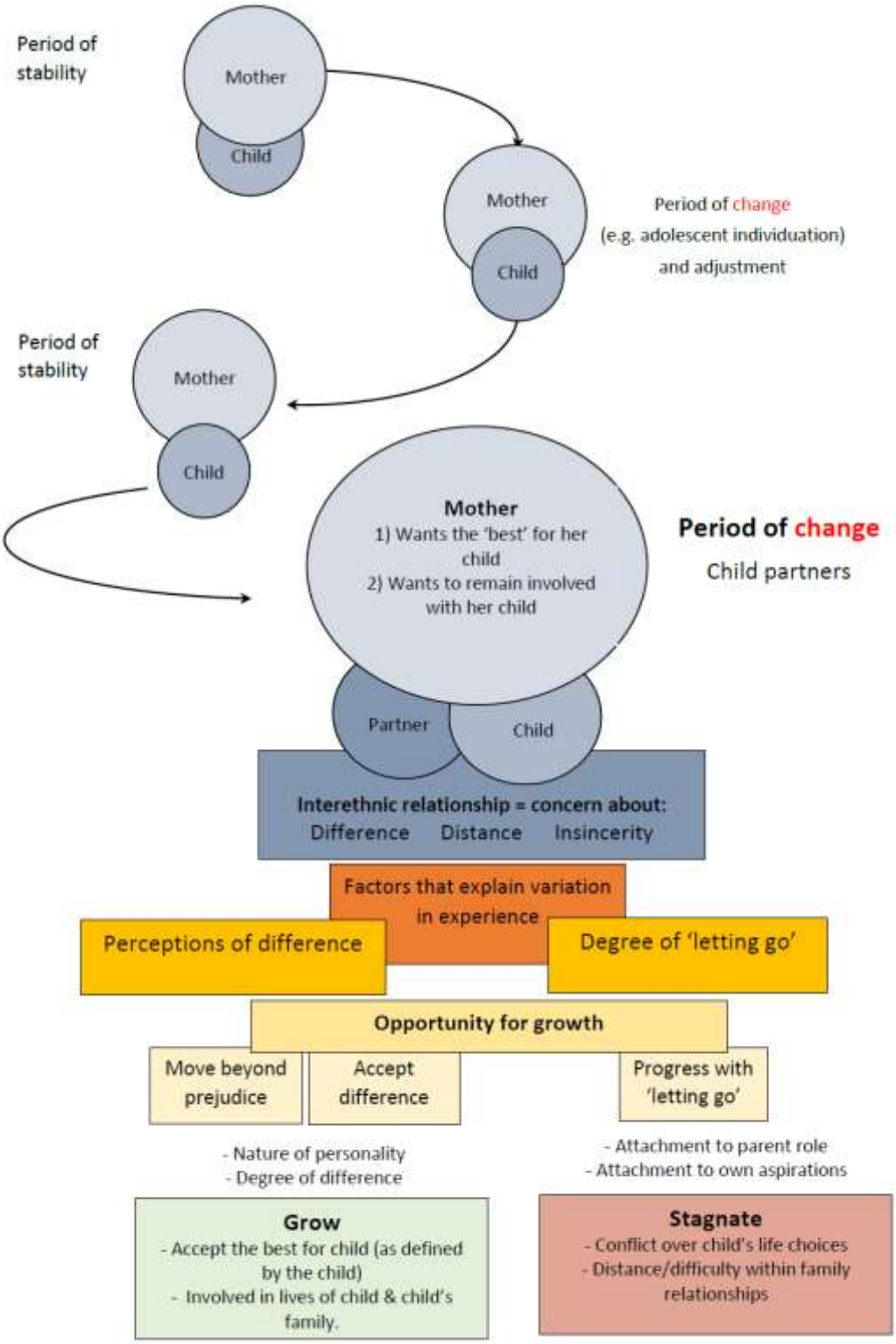
Appendix I

Facebook advertisement

Appendix J

Round 2 analysis



Appendix K

Round 3 analysis