Returning to Co-residence:
The Experiences of Young Adults and Parents

by

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Abstract

Young Australians in their twenties, much like their international counterparts, are experiencing a range of pathways in life, love and work. Whether by choice or as a consequence of societal changes, they are often spending extended time in higher education, encountering a range of different work experiences and postponing marriage and parenting.

These patterns have coincided with increasing support from parents, with access to the parental home particularly significant. Young adults are remaining longer in the parental home, though not all co-reside as a result of delayed departures. Many return home after previously moving out. Research into the return to co-residence in Australia, as well as overseas, has for the most part relied on quantitative methods to analyse data collected decades ago. Thus, there remains a need for a more detailed understanding of the nuanced experiences of returning to co-residence within a contemporary family context.

This research aimed to explore the lived experiences of young adults and their parents when they return to co-residence. Addressing the questions of how family members describe the return and what it means for them to do so, the study adopted a qualitative approach with underpinnings from hermeneutic phenomenology.

Participants sought for this study were currently sharing the household as a result of returning to co-residence after at least four months living separately. Ten young adults aged between 21 and 28 years and 11 of their parents (10 mothers and one father) volunteered to participate.

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Participants were asked to describe their experiences of returning to co-residence in their own words, before an interview guide was used to elicit more detailed information
on its meaning. Follow-up interviews were conducted, with participants asked to comment on their thoughts on the developing themes.

Data was analysed thematically, with a focus on the meaning of the return to co-residence. Employing the hermeneutic circle when reviewing the transcripts meant the nuanced experiences of each individual could be explored, while also allowing differences between them and participants of the same generation to be uncovered. This method also enabled the use of dyadic analysis; the movement between the interviews of each family member revealed further overlaps and contrasts.

Returning to co-residence meant that the young adults and their parents came to accept the change in living arrangement, accommodate each other in the household and also appreciate how doing so enabled them to advance in various life domains. Although these themes of acceptance, accommodation and appreciation were common across both parties, the existence of multiple realities meant that how these were experienced were similar in some aspects yet different in others. As such, experiences were interpreted as reflections of the family members’ different roles in relation to the return to co-residence and their personal developmental goals.

The current study, as a detailed and contemporary exploration of experiences of the return to co-residence, contributes to filling a considerable gap in the knowledge of this living arrangement in the Australian context. By highlighting how returning to co-residence can be accepted, accommodated and appreciated by those involved, this research has the potential to improve understanding and thereby challenge the often-negative perceptions that persist around this living arrangement. The return to co-residence warrants broader recognition, especially as more families are likely to find themselves living together in the future.
Chapter One: Introduction

My parents will have any of their children back at home knowing that it would improve their lives personally or financially for the future, that’s what it comes down to... – Amanda

Young adults in Australia, much like their international counterparts, are experiencing a range of pathways during their twenties (Beer, Faulkner & Gabriel 2006; European Group for Integrated Social Research (EGRIS) 2001; Huntley 2006; Settersten & Ray 2010; Smart & Sanson 2005). They spend extended time in higher education and, regardless of their qualifications, encounter various employment experiences; remain longer in the parental home, as well as return, and live independently in assorted housing arrangements before permanent coupling. As a result of these changes, marriage and parenting are often postponed until much later (Beer et al. 2011; Bell et al. 2007; Fussell & Furstenberg Jr. 2005; Heath & Cleaver 2003; Settersten & Ray 2010).

In response to these extended and more diverse pathways, the family is being called upon, more than any other time in recent history, to provide continued assistance (Aquilino 2006; Fingerman et al. 2009; Gitelson & McDermott 2006; Liem, Cavell & Lustig 2010; Schoeni & Ross 2005; Settersten & Ray 2010; Yelowitz 2007). Having access to the parental home, both in terms of the timing of departure and whether they are able to return, influences how young adults balance the complicated and often contradictory demands of their transitions (Goldscheider 1997, 2000).

1 Amanda (not her real name), 26, was interviewed as part of my Honours project in 2009. This earlier research focused on the lived experiences of young adults who returned home but constraints meant the parental perspective remained unexplored.
Many young adults are electing not to leave home but instead remain living with their parents for extended periods (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2005, 2008, 2009b); this includes those who have not yet left home and those who have returned after moving out (Coles, Rugg & Seavers 1999; Flatau et al. 2007; Mitchell 2006a, 2006b). Although returning to the parental home has become more evident among Australian young adults in recent times (ABS 2008), and is likely to continue amid heightened housing expenses and increased competition for education and employment (Cobb-Clark 2008), researchers have largely ignored individuals’ actual experiences of this transition. Extant research into home returning, both in Australia and internationally, has for the most part relied on quantitative methods to analyse data and predict the factors conditioning the return home (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008).

Considering the transition out of, and back into, co-residence contributes to discontinuity and change in familial relationships (Aquilino 2006), and offers a unique window into how the transition to adulthood is experienced by both young adults and their parents (Gitelson & McDermott 2006), the fact few studies have examined the texture of family life during this time (Furstenberg Jr. 2010) highlights a significant gap. As outlined in the second part of Chapter Two, researchers appear to have a greater understanding of the timing of home-leaving and returning events than about the management of the process by either young adults or their parents. Relatively little is known about the extent to which young people seek parental involvement in regards to their decisions and whether, in turn, they receive parental advice, support and resources (Furstenberg Jr. 2010). How parents and young adults actually work things out, including what rules, routines and understandings emerge with regards to obligations, household costs, and the ‘comings and goings’ of young adults and other members of the family, also remains understudied (Furstenberg Jr. 2010). Consequently, Furstenberg Jr. (2010) argues this gap in understanding would be significantly filled with good qualitative research involving both parents and young people.
In light of this literature, presented in more detail in Chapter Two, the current study aims to explore the lived experiences of parents and young adults when a young person moves back to the parental home to live, and thus increase knowledge of this phenomenon. As such, it addresses two main research questions: How do family members describe the return to co-residence? What does it mean for parents and young adults to return to co-residence?

A qualitative approach with hermeneutic phenomenological underpinnings was considered the most appropriate to answer these research questions. This methodology, which is outlined in more detail in Chapter Three, focuses on the meanings individuals give to their experiences and therefore aligned with exploring the return to co-residence from the perspectives of parents and their young adult offspring.

This approach also fits with my own philosophical viewpoint and experiences. According to hermeneutical belief, we each come to a situation with a pre-understanding that influences how we interpret phenomena around us (Koch 1995; Lopez & Willis 2004). Chapter Three thus outlines my position as the researcher, including how the current study builds on my Honours project (Warner, Henderson-Wilson & Andrews 2010, 2012). This earlier work, from which the opening quote was drawn, adopted a phenomenological approach to explore young adults’ decisions about returning home from a wellbeing perspective. The use of Ryff and Keyes’ (1995) dimensions of wellbeing offered an in-depth view of the young adults’ experiences. However, it was clear from this earlier study and a review of the literature that a more holistic approach, one inclusive of both young adults and their family members, was needed to fully understand the phenomenon of home returning.
Chapter Four outlines the methods used to explore the lived experiences of young adults and their parents. This includes a description of how the family members were recruited, their narratives were collected through interviews and the subsequent data was analysed and interpreted.

Findings are presented in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight. Chapter Five describes the participants involved in this study and outlines how they came to experience the return to co-residence. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight then focus on what it means to return to co-residence, exploring how the parents and young adults learn to accept the change in living arrangement (Chapter Six); accommodate each other in the household (Chapter Seven); and come to appreciate the return to co-residence as a way to advance (Chapter Eight). Finally, Chapter Nine reflects on the parents’ and young adults’ experiences of returning to co-residence and, in doing so, considers the research findings in light of the existing literature (Chapter Two) and the theoretical perspectives (Chapter Three).

The tenth, and final, chapter provides an overview of the key findings and highlights the implications for young adults and their families moving forward. Chapter Ten also examines the study strengths and constraints and offers suggestions for further research. Finally, because this research focuses on lived experiences, the thesis concludes with the parents’ and young adults’ recommendations for other families who may come to experience the return to co-residence.

Before continuing on to these chapters, it is important to take note of several key terms. While these are social constructions and are therefore the subject of debate, they will be defined as follows for the purpose of this thesis. A young adult is an individual aged in their twenties. These individuals, who may also be
referred to as ‘emerging adults’\textsuperscript{2}, have diverse characteristics and experiences, though of particular relevance to this research is the tendency for some to return to the parental home after living elsewhere. A parent refers to the individual who identifies himself or herself as either the mother or father of the young adult and manages the home to which their offspring returns. A family is conceptualised as a group of related individuals who share the same household as a consequence of a young adult’s return home. It is inclusive of at least a young adult child and one of their parents, however, may differ in size and diversity, encompassing additional members (other parents and siblings) in varying structural forms.

Returning to co-residence refers to the process whereby parents and young adults find themselves living together again in the same home after time spent residing apart. The specific act of moving back to the parental home by young adults is termed returning home, with those who do so often labelled return co-residents or, more colloquially, ‘boomerang kids’. In the context of the current study, home will be explored in reference to the parental house and the relationships located within this space.

In conclusion, this chapter has offered a brief overview of the research. In addition to highlighting the key terms, it has stated the aim, namely to explore how parents and young adults experience the return to co-residence, and identified the methodological approach and techniques employed to address its related research questions. While these will be expanded on in subsequent chapters, attention now turns to reviewing literature pertaining to the return to co-residence.

\textsuperscript{2} The term ‘emerging adult’ is used in Chapter Two where this occurred in the original literature.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of literature relating to the return to co-residence. In doing so, it first establishes the context of the current study by discussing young adulthood as a period of the lifespan experienced in modern society, including the significant role of the family during this time. The chapter then goes on to build the rationale for this research by exploring what is currently known about co-residence and returning home, including identifying gaps and limitations.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that the nature of young adulthood, family and housing transitions means this review draws on literature from a range of disciplines, including health and human development, sociology, psychology and demography. The scope of this review, however, means it cannot endeavour to explore all topics within each of these fields and must instead focus on those areas considered most pertinent to an understanding of returning to co-residence. In doing so, this chapter tends to focus predominantly on research from advanced industrialised societies. This not only reflects the volume of evidence emerging from these contexts, which include Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States among others, but also acknowledges that there are certain similarities to Australia. As predominantly English-speaking, liberal democracies, these societies are alike in terms of their institutions, overall levels of economic development and diverse cultural profiles. More specifically in relation to the current study, they have also observed general trends in relation to their young people and the supposed postponement of the attainment of adulthood.

Of course, these patterns are by no means heterogeneous or applicable to all young people in each context, with experiences dependent on the country-specific values and particular polices related to welfare, housing, education and employment. While attempts to explore these differences in great detail are
limited by the parameters of this review\(^3\), it should also be noted that in several instances the age of the data itself means any comparisons are not necessarily going to be applicable to young adults in contemporary contexts.

**Young adulthood in modern society**

Young people today have to negotiate risks that were largely unknown to their parents. They are faced with labour market re-structuring; the demand for more highly educated workers; increasingly flexible employment practices and social policies that encourage extended dependency on families (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). How young people have responded to these changes has led to much debate within the field of youth research. For instance, scholars question the use of previous generations as ‘benchmarks’ and the relevance of more traditional markers to the achievement of ‘adulthood’; how the years spent between this status and adolescence should be conceptualised; and if patterns reflect increasing agency or continue to be shaped by structural forces. These discussions, in highlighting what it means to be a young person in modern society and the complexities involved, offer important context when studying contemporary patterns such as the return to co-residence.

**A different experience now to what it was**

Young people in Australia are experiencing extended periods of time in education, departing the parental home later and are often returning after living elsewhere (Allan, Taylor & Borlagdan 2013). Comparing the patterns of those aged 18-34 years in 2011 with those of the same age in 1976, young Australian adults were more likely to attend an educational institution (26% compared with 14%) and thus hold a bachelor or higher qualification (26% compared to 5%) (ABS 2013a). They were also more likely to live with their parents (29% compared to 21%) and less likely to be married (29% compared to 64%). Such

\(^3\) For an example of how the transition to adulthood differs in Australia compared to Canada and the United States, see the work of Fussell, Gauthier and Evans (2007). Similarly, for a discussion of Canada versus the United Kingdom, refer to Côté and Bynner (2008).
patterns overlap with decreased likelihood of living with a partner and having children. For instance, in 1976, 65% of young adults were cohabitating, with nearly three-quarters of these having children, whereas in 2011, 42% of young adults lived with a partner and around half had children (ABS 2013a).

The tendency for comparisons to be made between the pathways of today's young people and those of previous generations coincides with the conclusion that the transition to adulthood has been extended until the mid-to-late twenties. This constitutes one of the least contested issues in contemporary youth studies (Côté & Bynner 2008), with most in agreement that young people are taking longer to achieve the traditional markers of adulthood, namely completing an education, being financially independent, leaving home, marriage and parenthood (Sigelman, Rider & De George-Walker 2013). In addition, the transition to adulthood has become diversified. There is widespread acknowledgement that young people are no longer following standard, linear pathways (Biggart & Walther 2006; Roberts 2011; te Riele 2004; Walther 2006) and are instead pursuing “movements which are less predictable and involve frequent breaks, back-tracking and the blending of statuses” (Furlong et al. 2003, p. 24). With many of the ‘traditional’ events undertaken during this period, including leaving home, no longer permanent (Jones 1995; Mitchell 2006b), some describe current transitions metaphorically using the yo-yo (EGRIS 2001).

The reputed deferral or even rejection of adulthood has attracted considerable attention within youth research, with social scientists often evaluating current patterns negatively (Blatterer 2007). For instance, much has been made in both the academic and public discourse about returning to the parental home (Heath & Cleaver 2003). This phenomenon, which constitutes the focus of the current study, is frequently cited as an example of both ‘back-tracking’ (Jones 1995; Roberts 2007) and the delayed trajectories of young adults (Kilmartin 2000). Researchers have in the past labelled young adults who return as ‘fledgling’ (Clemens & Axelson 1985) and ‘incompletely launched’ (Schnaiberg &
Goldenberg 1989), even proposing the existence of a ‘returning young adult syndrome’ (Schnaiberg & Goldenberg 1989).

Several scholars challenge these pronouncements, arguing they reflect the assumption of a normative transitional process from which today’s young people deviate (Wyn & Woodman 2006). These authors suggest that models of ‘standard adulthood’ continue to represent the implicit norm (Blatterer 2007, 2010). Specifically, the transitions of the Baby Boomers⁴, who progressed from school to work, left home and settled down to marriage and family formation, are often used as the standard timeline when judging current-day young people (Wyn & Woodman 2006). Doing so, however, incorrectly establishes assumptions about what “ought to be” (Dwyer et al. 2003, p. 23) and, in turn, results in the questioning of young people’s choices and the classification of patterns as not only elongated and diverse but also faulty and invalid (Blatterer 2007; White & Wyn 2013; Wyn 2004; Wyn & Woodman 2006).

It is very easy, when examining how the lives of young people differ from those of previous generations, to slip into the view that they would or should be the same (Wyn & Woodman 2006). However, this is not a possibility, as the economic, social and political contexts that led to earlier patterns have ceased to exist (Wyn & Woodman 2006). Achieving the ‘traditional’ markers of adulthood is no longer as easy (Molgat 2007), meaning that aspiring to follow the path of previous generations may not necessarily assist with the setting of goals but rather result in hopes that cannot be achieved and self-doubt (Blatterer 2007). Therefore, rather than use the transitions of earlier generations as the benchmark, Wyn and Woodman (2006) advocate the adoption of a generational perspective; this acknowledges that young people today are

⁴ ‘Baby Boomers’ refer to those born between 1946 and 1965. After World War II, when servicemen and women returned to family life, countries including Australia, England, Canada and the United States saw a dramatic increase in birth rates. These babies came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, a time of relative prosperity but also social change (Australian Government 2007). Now in their late 40s, 50s and 60s, ‘Baby Boomers’ made up approximately one quarter of Australia’s population in 2013 (5.88 million) (ABS 2014).
engaged in the process of creating new meanings and experiences of adulthood within the context of changing structures and practices.

**Contemporary definitions of adulthood**

Adulthood has, in the past, been symbolically represented by five transition events: finishing school, departing the parental home, entering full-time employment and settling into a career, marrying and becoming a parent (Arnett 1997; Leopold 2012; Shanahan, Porfeli & Mortimer 2005). However, with a proposed shift in modernity, and the widespread and significant changes in labour markets, in the association between education and employment and in the actions of government within industrialised countries, the significance of these more traditional markers of adult status have altered (Cohen et al. 2003; Mitchell & Evans 2003; Wyn & Woodman 2007).

Young people, according to Furlong (2011), continue to wholeheartedly buy into this ‘traditional’ future, one characterised by financial security, access to rewarding employment and committed relationships. Researchers should therefore not exaggerate the disorderliness of present-day youth transitions or overlook the fact that the majority of young people will ultimately reach traditionally adult destinations, insofar as they will marry, become parents and achieve employment (Roberts 2007).

However, while young people may recognise the more standard model of adulthood as the ideal, they are equally likely to doubt how far they are succeeding (or wanting to succeed) in its realisation (Blatterer 2007). Young people are increasingly recognised within the literature as adopting their own definitions of adulthood (Natalier 2007). For instance, a recent qualitative study found more than half of participants included non-traditional social roles when prompted to discuss circumstances in which they ‘really felt like an adult’, whereas around one third of participants also included traditional adult roles (Lowe et al. 2013). However, the roles appeared to carry different meanings for the young adults, with variance in the style of language used when describing
them; traditional roles were generally identified as straightforward markers of adulthood, whereas the less traditional social roles were named with indecision or qualifications (Lowe et al. 2013). Open-ended responses from a survey of Australians aged 21 also suggest young people refer to the conceptual ‘ideal’ of ‘adulthood’ in terms of both transition markers (such as completing school and acquiring a job, entering into financial obligations, leaving home, forming partnerships and becoming parents) as well as individual qualities (autonomy, financial independence and responsibility) (Allan, Taylor & Borlagdan 2013).

In contrast, other studies reveal that young people’s conceptualisations of adulthood do not involve traditional events (Arnett 1997, 2000; Green & Wheatley 1992; Jones 1995; Nelson et al. 2007). For example, in Arnett’s (2000) study, none of the five ‘traditional’ transitions were endorsed by more than one-third of participants, with marriage and parenthood two of the least-endorsed items (out of the 38 items). Instead, individualistic transitions were the highest rated criteria, with ‘accepting responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions’, ‘deciding on personal beliefs and values’, ‘establishing relationships with parents as equal adults’ and ‘becoming financially independent’ considered the most important (Arnett 1997, 2000). The acceptance of personal responsibility and achievement of financial independence were also endorsed by young adults in a more recent study by Nelson et al. (2007), though the avoidance of driving while intoxicated and not committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting were considered equally important criteria for adulthood.

Research suggests that parents’ criteria for adulthood are similar to emerging adults’ criteria, in that both view aspects of relational maturity as the most important rather than events such as marriage (Nelson et al. 2007). This consensus may indicate that parental criteria for adulthood form part of the value system they attempt to teach their children. However, highlighting the importance of exploring the views of both parents and their offspring, the study revealed that the two parties were not always in agreement as to the
importance of critical issues pertaining to adulthood. For instance, emerging adults considered role transitions and biological/age transitions to be more important for adulthood than did their parents, while the latter rated norm compliance as more imperative than their offspring (Nelson et al. 2007).

These studies reinforce that individual judgements, not simply the status conferred by others, must be acknowledged in relation to young people (Natalier 2007). However, even then, the diversification of subjective and structural dimensions means defining the point when adulthood is attained is not clear-cut (EGRIS 2001). This has, in turn, led to challenges in terms of how to conceptualise the preceding years of a young person’s life.

**Conceptualising the stage ‘in-between’**

Many social scientists utilise the established term *youth* when describing the period spanning the transition from adolescent to adult (Côté & Bynner 2008; Heath 2007). The increasing duration of this period, however, raises questions as to the usefulness of this concept, particularly in terms of its relevance to a wide range of individuals with diverse ages (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). Aiming to apply one word to people in the entire range from the age of 10 or 12 until at least 25 cannot conceivably work (Arnett 2006). They are not only physically different but also vary in experiences, ranging from teenagers with little independence to those in their mid to late 20s who may be dependent on their parents financially but otherwise live autonomously and hold responsibilities for the care of others (Arnett 2004, 2006; Bynner 2005; EGRIS 2001).

With young people no longer ‘youth’, but yet to attain the social status of adults in the more traditional sense, it would seem appropriate to refer to them as *young adults* (EGRIS 2001). However, while this term may encompass some of the contradictions associated with this period, others suggest there is yet to be a convincing definition that enables the conceptual distinction between youth and young adulthood to be made (Furlong & Cartmel 2007).
There is also disagreement as to the value of *young adulthood*, with Arnett (2004) arguing that it implies people define themselves as adults. He suggests that this does not fit the twenties; studies both internationally (Arnett 1997, 2000) and in Australia (Taylor, Borlagdan & Allan 2012) have shown many people of this age consider themselves to be neither adolescents nor adults but somewhere in-between.

Arnett (1997, 2000, 2004, 2006) consequently proposes the period between ages 18 and 25 be termed *emerging adulthood*. He recognises that, while young people feel in-between, this is also the age of possibilities, when they are able to take hold of their lives and turn ideas into reality. They are also engaged in identity exploration, exploring their views on life, love and work, and can be self-focused, as life centres on them and what they do without the obligations, commitments and responsibilities to work and family that occur in middle adulthood. However, young people can also experience instability in love, work and education as they attempt to work out who they are and what they want to do (Arnett 2000, 2004, 2006).

While this alternative concept may provide an appropriate synonym for the twenties, and thus bring attention to the protracted transitions experienced by many young people, reactions have been somewhat polarised (Côté & Bynner 2008). On the one hand, many researchers have embraced the idea of emerging adulthood, recognising it as a useful metaphor for how the transition to adulthood is different from the past (Côté & Bynner 2008).

There is, however, also scepticism about the need for new terminology, with several authors contesting the ideas of Arnett in terms of their utility and applicability. According to Hendry and Kloep (2010), many of the features associated with emerging adulthood are not exclusive to a specific age, but with turning points at any time in a person’s life course. The key argument against the concept of *emerging adulthood*, however, relates to its inadequate
consideration of the structure-agency dilemmas of the individualisation process (Bynner 2005; Côté & Bynner 2008).

Australian researchers Allan, Taylor and Borlagdan (2013) suggest Arnett’s perspective situates ‘adulthood’ as a destination at the end of a linear path and assumes not only that individuals have the responsibility of reaching this goal but that the time taken to do so is a reflection of individual choice. These authors, like others before them, argue that Arnett’s framework mistakes the tendency for young people to delay their entry into adulthood as a freely chosen option, when they are in fact responding to structural obstacles and normative ambiguities (Allan, Taylor & Borlagdan 2013; Côté & Bynner 2008). For example, in proposing that they are inherently ‘self-focused’ and prone to ‘instability’, Arnett would claim that young people prefer these circumstances. While it may be the case that a number of young people do relish those conditions, Côté and Bynner (2008) consider it more plausible that at the cohort level these represent the consequences of being ‘on hold’ or delayed in transitioning towards adulthood. Furthermore, while Arnett suggests that emerging adults experience ‘feeling in-between’ and a ‘sense of possibilities’, these are more likely to be subjective responses to the financial exclusion and marginalisation from the labour force that would otherwise offer economic independence (Côté & Bynner 2008). Thus, when structure and agency are considered, Côté and Bynner (2008) contend that the need for the new conceptualisation of ‘emerging adulthood’ becomes redundant.

**Understanding contemporary patterns**

Any attempt to explain changes in transition destinations requires the consideration of structure and agency (Walther 2006). The extent to which young people’s current patterns are determined by broader structural forces, as opposed to being the result of personal choice, is an ongoing focus of youth studies, particularly in relation to inequalities (see, for example, Côté 2002; Côté & Bynner 2008; Evans 2002, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel 2007; Roberts 2007; Roberts 2010; Schwartz, Côté & Arnett 2005; Threadgold 2011; Woodman 2009,
2010). Social scientists often gravitate towards one ‘side’ depending on whether, from their perspective, patterns in the lives of young people reflect the influence of structure (and therefore social reproduction) or agency (and thus reflexivity and social change) (Coffey & Farrugia 2014). This, however, has resulted in scholars being accused of either disregarding agency or unjustifiably celebrating it by ignoring the ongoing importance of structural issues (Coffey & Farrugia 2014).

While the influence of structure may have become obscured by the increased individualisation of experiences, several scholars maintain that the effect of social structures on life chances is not diminishing (Brannen & Nilsen 2005; Furlong & Cartmel 2007; Lehmann 2004). Young people may be growing up in a time of rapid change, face greater risk and uncertainty than their parents and follow non-linear routes but the fact ‘yo-yo’ transitions can be chosen or imposed points to the persistence of ‘old’ inequalities according to social background, education, gender, region and ethnicity (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). It thus remains possible to predict outcomes and experiences fairly accurately based on structural divisions (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). For instance, social scientists recognise that, unlike middle-class youth with greater resources, young people from working-class backgrounds are not necessarily afforded the same options; they are not able to spend extended time on self-exploration (Benson & Furstenberg Jr. 2007; Silva 2012) and may therefore find themselves with less choice in terms of their biographies and experiences of ‘adulthood’ (Allan, Taylor & Borlagdan 2013; Du Bois-Reymond 1998).

Although recognising that structures remain influential, and inequalities persist, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) suggest modern society is characterised by the ‘epistemological fallacy’. That is, people’s life chances are highly structured, yet they increasingly seek solutions on an individual, rather than a collective, basis. As such, risks have become ‘individualised’ and people are more likely to consider setbacks and crises as personal shortcomings, rather than as outcomes of processes that are beyond their control. Of course, this may also depend on
the desirability of the outcome, with individuals more likely to blame external conditions for negative results and credit themselves in situations where consequences are more favourable (Furlong & Cartmel 2007).

Despite often being accused of over-emphasising the influence of structure, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) do not deny the importance of subjectivity. Individualised youth biographies are a response to, and contribute to the creation of, classed and gendered inequalities in specific social contexts (Farrugia 2013). Thus, in order for researchers to understand the effect of structural conditions, they must equally account for agency and the ways young people can alter their place within social structures (Furlong & Cartmel 2007).

Likewise, those scholars in favour of a greater role for personal agency do not refute the opposing argument that structures affect the life experiences of young adults. However, they suggest that this influence is not wholly deterministic, particularly as young adults have increased ability to actively shape important dimensions of their experiences (Evans 2002). Scholars tend to draw on the individualisation thesis (Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and, in doing so, often suggest that structures have declined in significance and thus freed all young people to reflexively create their own identities and lives without constraint.

Woodman (2009), however, suggests that this is a misinterpretation. Rather than being free of constraints, young people are actually faced with increasing structures that have expanded the possible options for them to respond to (Woodman & Wyn 2011). These structures have also changed, from being stable to partial, changeable and inconsistent, meaning individuals must exert their agency and be more proactive in shaping their lives. In other words, young adults are required to determine structures for themselves, not necessarily

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5 How the work of Beck should be interpreted has, itself, been the subject of debate within youth research in recent times (Roberts 2010; Threadgold 2011; Woodman 2009, 2010).
because the influence of these structures has waned but because inconsistencies exist (Woodman 2009).

There is thus a need to reconsider both structural forces and the sense of agency and control young people demonstrate as they progress towards adulthood and various stages and forms of independence (Evans 2002; Wyn & Dwyer 1999). One approach, proposed by Evans (2002, 2007), attempts to encompass both perspectives. ‘Bounded agency’ aims to examine the influence of agency (in terms of individual responses from young adults themselves) and structure (the influence of national and local organisations, labour markets and social characteristics, including gender and social class) in shaping life and work transitions (Behrens & Evans 2002). In other words, advocates of this perspective consider agency as something young people possess, but which is ‘bounded’ by society, thereby placing limits on individual’s identities and biographies (Coffey & Farrugia 2014).

Accordingly, young people’s patterns depend on the mobilisation of structural resources (such as economic, social and cultural capital) as well as capacities typically considered to represent agency (such as motivation and effort) (Furlong et al. 2003). Young Australians find themselves negotiating increased casualisation within a service economy, greater credentialism and changes in family formation and dissolution not only according to their individual aspirations and capacities but also (more importantly) their resources (Taylor, Borlagdan & Allan 2012). For instance, the decision by some young people\(^6\) to spend longer in higher education does not necessarily reflect a ‘rejection’ of adult responsibilities but the need to maximise the chances of gaining access to employment within a more competitive labour market characterised by poorer entry-level jobs (Côté & Bynner 2008). Likewise, young people are not

\(^6\) It is important to note that, although the proportion of young people participating in tertiary education has increased relative to previous generations, they are not necessarily in the majority. For instance, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013b) suggested that 41.1 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds and 14.5 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds were enrolled at a tertiary institution in 2013.
necessarily choosing to evade adult commitments in terms of family formation. Their limited earning power means it would be economically difficult for them to establish a family, let alone go on to have children, without living in poverty. Thus, demonstrating how a structural disincentive can impede unrestrained choice, they make the logical decision to delay family formation until such commitments can be made in the context of greater financial security (Côté & Bynner 2008).

While the influence of both structure and agency reinforces the importance of research which considers young adults’ individual subjectivities (motivations to make one decision over another) and biographical perspectives (assessments of their own life courses) more closely (Walther 2006), attention must equally be paid to the influence of the resources they have at their disposal (Côté & Bynner 2008). This includes the support young adults can receive from their parents, which is arguably now more important than ever (Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011).

**Young adults and their parents**

The transition to adulthood is rarely a solo venture, with the majority of young people accompanied by their parents during this period (Fingerman et al. 2012a). As a source of security in an uncertain world, one which presents a multitude of options yet demands individuals actively create and manage their personal biographies (Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991), the parent-child tie is taking on increased significance for young people negotiating the present and positioning themselves for the future (Mørch & Andersen 2006; Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011).

Obviously not all young adults have the same relationship with their parents or are in a position to call on them for support. This has the potential to result in significant disadvantage (Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011), particularly as parents can enhance life opportunities and wellbeing, as well as influence development in terms of adjustment to new roles, health and risk-taking behaviour, capacity for
intimacy and identity (Aquilino 2006). In turn, these new interests, abilities, behaviours and transitions alter the family system, leading to new styles of relating between young adults and their parents (Aquilino 2006).

**A changing relationship**

The parent-child relationship is therefore characterised by both continuity and change during this stage (Whitman, McHale & Crouter 2011). Having usually spent at least two decades together already, the quality of their tie is influenced by earlier patterns of interaction as well as the history of family composition and transitions (Aquilino 1994, 1997, 2006; Fingerman et al. 2012a). However, change is also evident. Young people, albeit wanting to achieve independence and self-reliance, simultaneously seek to maintain strong emotional bonds with their parents (Aquilino 1997, 2006; Nelson et al. 2011). Even where they want changes to their relationship, as in to be treated as equal adults (Nelson et al. 2007), young people want this to lead to more of a relationship, not less. Parents also appear to know that their parenting style needs to change in order to elicit the key milestones (child independence, an equal relationship between parent and child), though may not always be sure on how best to do this (Nelson et al. 2011).

Similarly, Gower, Dowling and Gersch (2005) explored parenting of adult children. While these authors did not specify the ages of their respondents (meaning it is not known whether children were considered young adults or older), findings suggested that offspring worried about ‘growing up’ and how to renegotiate the parent-child relationship. Nevertheless, they expressed relief that they could turn to their parents whatever their age and identified how they enjoyed having ‘adult’ conversations with their parents, receiving advice on major life events and being watched over (Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005). For the parents, working out if continuing guidance was still appropriate and how best to honour attachments, communicate ideas and resolve issues around financial dependence were the most challenging aspects. Some parents identified the importance of not interfering too much in their adult children’s
lives and friendships but being available when needed and invited (Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005).

Thus, while some parents are able to readily accept their children’s increasing independence and life choices, and can adopt more of a mentoring role in which they relate to their children as peers and offer guidance instead of dictating behaviour and establishing rules (Proulx & Helms 2008), others can experience regret/ambivalence. Despite understanding their children’s inevitable need for independence, these parents can encounter difficulties coming to terms with losing their role and their declining knowledge of their children’s lives and power to intervene (Kloep & Hendry 2010). They may also worry about their children and miss them, particularly in situations where they had moved out and intimacy was lost due to less time spent together. Parents may therefore act, either consciously or unconsciously, in ways that maintain their control and delay their children’s autonomy, including providing services and continuing to spoil them in the hope it would keep them at home longer or encourage them to visit (Kloep & Hendry 2010). The desire for independence might then become a power struggle, with conflict the result.

Parents often perceive the parent-child relationship differently compared to young adults (Thornton, Orbuch & Axinn 1995). For instance, parents generally report higher relationship quality, greater ease and humour, less tension, and more shared leisure activities (Aquilino 1999b). Nonetheless, they also rate their disapproval of children’s decisions more highly than do their offspring (Aquilino 1999b). This suggests the latter may not be fully aware of how their parents feel about their lives and that parents perhaps keep feelings of disapproval to themselves. Findings also identified parents report significantly more open disagreements than their children. On the one hand, this may indicate a tendency for parents to take the opportunity to mention areas of contention that they did not openly discuss with their offspring. Alternatively, it could also reflect children’s assumptions that parental silence on an issue is indicative of approval or acceptance (Aquilino 1999b).
Researchers argue that being between the ages of 18 and 30 years old is associated with an increased likelihood of having an ambivalent relationship with one’s parents, one that is characterised by both harmony and conflict (van Gaalen & Dykstra 2006). Tension in the parent-young adult relationship often results when the child’s attainment of adult status in certain domains contradicts with their continued dependence in others (Aquilino 2006). In fact, parents are said to feel more ambivalent when they report greater contact frequency and financial support of their offspring, and when the latter have not attained roles indicative of independence (Fingerman et al. 2006; Pillemer & Suitor 2002; Willson et al. 2006). While such feelings were observed in relation to grown children over the age of 30, Birditt, Fingerman and Zarit (2010) also found parents felt more ambivalent towards children aged 18-29 who experienced problems or were considered less successful.

The parental tendency to react to the achievements and problems of their offspring means that although they want to launch their children into adulthood, they also want to support them when they are in need (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit 2010; Fingerman et al. 2012c). Parents are therefore said to think about the future and look at ways of creating environments that address the impending developmental needs of their offspring, while also attempting to adjust their children’s behaviour to ensure congruity with the environment, including pressing for change when their offspring do not meet expectations (Marshall et al. 2011).

However, parents may have different expectations depending on the gender of their offspring. For instance, theorists suggest that because girls are socialised to maintain and value close emotional ties with their family members (Lefkowitz & Fingerman 2003), parents might value, cultivate and anticipate continually high levels of closeness with daughters as they transition to adulthood. Similarly, because males are socialised to seek separation from their parents, mothers and fathers may value this trait more highly among their young adult sons compared
to their daughters (Proulx & Helms 2008). Literature suggests that, although daughters report their parents as encouraging independence, they also remain affectively close to their mothers and fathers during the transition to adulthood (Kenny & Donaldson 1992; Sneed et al. 2006). Young adult sons, in contrast, consistently report higher levels of functional, emotional, and attitudinal independence from their parents (Kenny & Donaldson 1992).

Research from the parental perspective found those with daughters were more likely to report peer-like relationships, whereas parents of sons tended to identify more of a mentoring role (Proulx & Helms 2008). Parents with daughters discussed their ability to treat their offspring more as equal adults, whereas parents mentoring sons discussed giving advice. They acknowledged that their sons were often active in seeking guidance but that the advice they provided was not always taken. The authors had anticipated that expectations for sons to be independent would result in parents giving less advice and support (Proulx & Helms 2008). However, becoming a mentor was seen as a change in their relationship and, given they were no longer dictating rules or making final decisions, was still seen as stepping back and allowing more independence. Thus, they concluded that parents of daughters might encourage relational connectedness, whereas parents of sons might emphasise the more instrumental components of parent-child relationships (Proulx & Helms 2008).

**Parental support**

The goal for young adults to achieve independence is a ‘joint enterprise’ for many families (Scabini, Marta & Lanz 2006). Parents, rather than the state (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011), are increasingly asked to provide those in their twenties with assistance (Aquilino 2005; Fingerman et al. 2009; Schoeni & Ross 2005; Yelowitz 2007). This includes housing and financial support as well as non-material giving in terms of guidance, emotional nurturance and practical help (Descartes 2006; Fingerman et al. 2009).
Young people’s greater need for support has been attributed to their ‘delayed’ attainment of adult independence and responsibility, as well as changes in cultural norms and social conditions (including increased costs of housing and reduced employment opportunities) (Bucx, van Wel & Knijn 2012; Heath & Calvert 2013). However, parents also have greater economic resources, improved health and generally fewer children than previous generations, meaning they can invest more in each child and thus allow them to extend their dependence (Bucx, van Wel & Knijn 2012). The increase in dual-income households and the time pressures this creates for parents may also mean that they have had less time for their offspring’s earlier years and therefore experience less of an urge to see them leave home. They may also feel that they have not had enough of their children by the time they reach the age of 18 and are thus not as ready as previous generations might have been to let them go (Newman & Aptekar 2007).

Parents are also more likely than their predecessors to see their children as their legacy and may offer support in the belief that such assistance will contribute to their offspring’s success. Research suggests that parents provide more support to offspring they consider to be high achieving, in addition to those experiencing difficult circumstances (Fingerman et al. 2009). In this way, parents are said to act as ‘safety nets’ or ‘scaffolds’ for their young adult offspring (Ploeg et al. 2004; Swartz et al. 2011).

Much of the existing literature focuses on the familial and individual characteristics of those more likely to receive parental support. For example, young adults from two-parent families and smaller families are more likely to receive economic support (Aquilino 2005; Fingerman et al. 2009; Swartz et al. 2011). Similarly, those from middle and upper class backgrounds (compared to poor or working class families) are more likely to receive financial assistance (Fingerman et al. 2012a; Schoeni & Ross 2005; Swartz 2008), with an Australian analysis finding young people receive more support if their families have no prior interaction with the income support system (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011).
The amount and type of assistance given is also shaped by the individual’s experiences of past support, as well as the quality of the parent-child relationship currently and over its history (Goldscheider, Thornton & Yang 2001; Sage & Johnson 2012; Swartz & Bengston O’Brien 2009). For instance, young adults with better relationships with their parents are said to receive greater financial assistance than those with relationships of lesser quality (Amato, Rezac & Booth 1995; Swartz et al. 2011).

Nevertheless, other researchers argue that parents respond in terms of need, regardless of relationship quality (Ward & Spitze 2007). Support appears to decline with age and progress in the transition to adulthood, with those who work full-time or have married receiving less than those engaged in higher education (Fingerman et al. 2012a; Fingerman et al. 2009; Swartz et al. 2011). Young people who continue to live with their parents also receive fewer financial transfers than those who live apart (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011). While offspring who are parents themselves may receive assistance, this depends on their age and marital status (Sage & Johnson 2012). Parents seemingly give more financial support to their disadvantaged offspring, rather than focusing on those who are most able to give financial aid in return (Berry 2008).

Support appears to flow more from parents to young adult children during this stage in the lifespan (Aquilino 2005; Bucx, van Wel & Knijn 2012; Eggebeen 2005; Fingerman et al. 2009), though parents do not appear to harbour deep resentments (Kirkpatrick Johnson 2013; Settersten & Ray 2010). Research has found parents report fewer symptoms of depression when their adult children (aged 25-39) rely on them for instrumental, emotional and financial support, an association said to reflect their belief that they matter in the lives of their offspring (Byers et al. 2008). Similarly, an Australian quantitative analysis found the majority of parents considered it their role to provide advice and guidance (Vassallo, Smart & Price-Robertson 2009). Despite few believing they should provide tangible, practical types of aid, direct financial assistance was more
common than not, with close to two-thirds of parents reporting the transfer of financial assistance to their child in the previous year (Vassallo, Smart & Price-Robertson 2009).

Despite its focus, this Australian research did not examine whether parents’ characteristics led to different expectations regarding the provision of support, or if their young adult offspring anticipated the same degree of assistance. Nevertheless, a study conducted in the United States has explored expectations of support from the perspective of certain mothers and their offspring (Goldscheider, Thornton & Yang 2001). Albeit based on data collected in 1980 and therefore not necessarily reflective of contemporary relationships, the authors found the expectations of mothers differed from those of their offspring. Compared to the proportion of mothers who expressed willingness to provide support, a greater number of offspring expected parental assistance. Sons were also more likely to anticipate assistance, yet the mothers’ expectations did not differ according to the gender of their child (Goldscheider, Thornton & Yang 2001). Mothers who were more highly educated and earned greater incomes expected to provide more support, though not of children living at home. While those who value college education expect to assist, mothers with offspring who were not students varied in their expectations; many anticipated helping a married child but not an unmarried one, though others expressed the reverse (Goldscheider, Thornton & Yang 2001).

Further reinforcing the need to explore the more subjective perceptions of parents, other researchers have focused on parents’ actual feelings towards the provision of support. While most parents appraise the support their offspring require as appropriate and similar to what other young people need (Fingerman et al. 2012b), earlier research suggests the provision of assistance may be accompanied by a sense of dissatisfaction (Descartes 2006; Levitski 2009). Giving help meant parents did not experience the guilt they anticipated had they abandoned their child to unstable economic circumstances, though it also raised
fears that they had nurtured an inappropriately dependent adult as compared to traditional norms (Descartes 2006).

Nevertheless, some suggest parents have very few guidelines around how to interact with their offspring during this stage of the lifespan, especially in terms of how to integrate contrasting needs for independence and support (Kins, De Mol & Beyers 2014). With independence and separation often seen as evidence of achievement, the inability of young adults to separate from their parents is automatically linked to the notion of parental failure (Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005). It is therefore not unexpected that parents would experience ambivalence, both about pushing their offspring to attain full independence and also whether or not the extension of dependency contributes positively to offspring wellbeing or the wellbeing of society as a whole (Cohen et al. 2003).

Journalists, scholars and public commentators often argue that parents should not be too involved in the lives of their offspring, voicing concerns that parental support may prolong dependence (e.g. Côté 2000). However, others posit that assistance from parents plays an essential role in maximising opportunities (Settersten & Ray 2010). For instance, financial support from parents is said to be particularly important in facilitating children’s success in the transition to adult roles, assisting with the pursuit of higher education, career-related employment and independent living (Aquilino 2005, 2006; Cobb-Clark & Ribar 2009; Johnson & Benson 2012; Schoeni & Ross 2005; Swartz & Bengston O’Brien 2009). Those with ample support, it is argued, are able to take time to explore and pursue education. In contrast, young adults from disadvantaged families may not experience the same path; they may find themselves moving back and forth between work and education, combining both while they gradually attain credentials or curtailing their schooling altogether (Furstenberg Jr. 2010; Settersten & Ray 2010). Likewise, working in jobs with irregular hours and no benefits or opportunities for promotion, they may be forced to wait for employment that can support the families they hope to create or perhaps have
already started, all the while lacking control over their lives (Furstenberg Jr. 2010; Settersten & Ray 2010).

Support from parents, in the form of frequent advice, emotional support, an attentive ear, companionship and financial aid, has also been associated with improved goal clarity and higher life satisfaction, although only among young adult students (Fingerman et al. 2012a). It thus enables young people to negotiate the challenges of early adulthood, through the development of the skills and experiences needed for success in adult roles (Aquilino 1999a) and self-sufficiency (Aquilino 2005; Eggebeen 2005).

The receiving of financial support, albeit associated with increases in closeness with parents, has also been linked to increases in depressive symptoms amongst young people in more adult roles. Similarly, financial support was linked to lowered self-esteem, but only amongst young people living separately from their parents (Kirkpatrick Johnson 2013).

The majority of studies, in assuming support is usually exchanged between rather than within households, typically focus on those who live separately from their parents (see Berry 2008; Bucx, van Wel & Knijn 2012; Heath & Calvert 2013; Hillcoat-Nallétamby & Dharmalingam 2003). Understanding the transfers between parents and children who live apart is important, though research into the support exchanged among those who co-reside is equally needed. Co-residence is not only a key form of interfamilial transfer similar to other exchanges of support (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011) but an increasing number of young adults are living with their parents (Hartnett et al. 2012).

Co-residence

Living in the parental home, often considered a highly visible indication of adult children’s dependence or semi-dependence, is the subject of many jokes, comedic scenarios and also societal complaints (Swartz 2008). Young people
who continue to live at home are often ridiculed\(^7\) (Liu & Easthope 2012), with nicknames including ‘kippers’ (kids in parents’ pockets eroding retirement savings) (Salt 2006)\(^8\). Although it is argued that the greater prevalence and recognition of this living arrangement has the potential to diminish social anxiety and ensure the stay-at-home pattern is no longer seen as a sign of personal failure, co-residence continues to be defined culturally and publicly as a default on the social contract (Newman & Aptekar 2007).

Nevertheless, researchers Settersten and Ray (2010) argue that, for the majority of young adults and their parents, co-residence is particularly beneficial. It serves as an important avenue through which parents can offer resources (Cobb-Clark 2008), with young adults who co-reside more likely to receive intense parental support in the form of advice, a listening ear and emotional, practical and financial assistance (Fingerman et al. 2012b). Living at home is thus thought to enable young people to negotiate the complicated and often contradictory demands of their transitions (Goldscheider 1997, 2000), providing support while they complete education, enter the labour market and establish their own families (Cobb-Clark 2008; Settersten & Ray 2010).

Co-residence between young adults and their parents often results from a delayed departure (Mitchell 2000a). Among these non-leavers, according to Coles, Rugg and Seavers (1999), there are three classifications: pre-decision stayers, referring to those who have not given thought to the idea of leaving nor questioned their continual residence in the parental home, as there has been no real reason to do so; willing stayers, namely individuals who have actively decided to remain in the parental home, either because the alternative is not

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\(^7\) The popular media often portrays co-residence negatively, with examples of article titles including ‘Home is where the help is’ (Morton 2013) and ‘Leave luxury for a shoebox? Why, oh, Y’ (Lewis 2013).

\(^8\) Additional nicknames are used within popular culture internationally (Liu & Easthope 2012). ‘Mammone’ refers to young adults who ‘won’t give up Mamma’s cooking’, whereas ‘freeters’ are unmarried adults who live at home and cannot maintain steady employment (van Dyk cited in Liu & Easthope 2012). Young people who are employed and financially independent yet remain living at home are coined ‘parasite singles’, after a horror movie in which aliens fed off unsuspecting human hosts (Orenstein cited in Liu & Easthope 2012).
financially plausible or they value living close to their family; or reluctant stayers, young people who remain at home because they cannot find alternative accommodation. Consequently, while some may argue that individuals are exercising agency and choosing to live at home, others posit that societal conditions give young people no other option but to co-reside (Easthope et al. 2013; Kins, De Mol & Beyers 2014; Mitchell 2000b).

Factors impacting on co-residence

Social factors

Patterns of co-residence are influenced by broader educational, labour market and housing conditions (Beer et al. 2011; Flatau et al. 2007). Young people increasingly need credentials in order to secure well-paid employment, though the education this demands inevitably results in a prolonged lack of economic independence and thus postponement of role transitions such as residential autonomy (Settersten & Ray 2010). Although young adults in Australia can finance the direct costs of tertiary study through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)9, they still need to cover their living expenses using their own earnings (Cobb-Clark 2008); this is difficult when, by virtue of their stage in the lifecycle, they typically earn lower incomes (Burke, Pinkney & Ewing 2002; Waulff & Baum 2002).

Co-residence is more common in societies where young adults have weaker employment prospects; there is a reliance on owner-occupied housing, despite employees often holding temporary contracts and not having access to the

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9 HECS, established in 1989 by the Australian Government, required students to contribute towards the cost of higher education. Now known as HECS-HELP, this scheme helps students enrolled in a Commonwealth-Supported Place (CSP) (a university place where the fees are partly covered by the Government and the student pays the remainder through a ‘student contribution’ amount) pay their contributions. Eligible students can use a HECS-HELP loan for part or all of their student contributions, repaying their debt when they earn above the minimum threshold (Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education 2013). This universal deferred payment policy is similarly adopted in most of the United Kingdom. However, in other countries (including Canada and the United States) students are expected to pay fees upfront and their eligibility for government loans is means-tested, meaning they may need to rely on parents and private loans to cover the (increasing) costs of university.
required capital; and elders have the financial capacity to afford to shelter the younger generation (Newman 2008). Reflecting on the Australian context, Pusey (2007) suggests the deregulation of the labour market has meant young adults are more likely than in the past to hold part-time, casual or otherwise insecure jobs that could see them unemployed.

In addition, young adults with university qualifications may find it takes longer than expected to secure full-time employment after course completion (Pusey 2007; Woodman 2013). Graduate recruiters appear to be cautious in their hiring plans given the uncertainty in the labour market, with findings from a survey of recent Australian graduates revealing that fewer new bachelor degree graduates seeking full-time employment had found a full-time position within four months of course completion in 2013 (71.3 per cent) compared to 2012 (76.1 per cent) (Graduate Careers Australia 2013b). New graduates were also more likely to continue with full-time studies rather than enter the workforce in 2013. While this does appear to be a short-term delay, in that the majority of graduates become permanently established in the labour market within three years of graduating (Graduate Careers Australia 2013a), it does suggest that young adults are not in the best position to access independent housing. They are not only in a financially insecure position to service housing loans (Pusey 2007) but the requirement for borrowers to have a relatively stable and long employment history also makes securing a deposit for a home increasingly difficult (Bessant & Johnson 2013).

Housing market conditions are recognised in the international literature as shaping whether or not young adults continue to co-reside in the parental home (Mandic 2008). For instance, higher housing prices have been shown to delay home leaving in Britain (Ermisch 1999). Furthermore, earlier Australian analyses, from 1985 and 1988 respectively, also found increased housing prices and higher rental costs reduced the probability that young Australians lived apart from their parents (Bourassa et al. 1994; Haurin et al. 1997). More recent Australian literature, albeit focusing on the impact of the housing market on the
great ‘dream’ of homeownership, nevertheless acknowledges that the increase in housing prices is forcing more and more young people to remain in the parental home or in the rental market (Bessant & Johnson 2013).

The past decade has seen Australia earn the dubious honour of having the lowest housing affordability of all the OECD countries (Colic-Peisker & Johnson 2012). Consequently, increases in the purchasing price and rental costs again make it difficult for young adults to pay for housing and also save for a deposit (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (DFHCSIA) 2009). Given heightened costs outside the home increase an individual’s likelihood of remaining in the parental home (Flatau et al. 2003), it is not unexpected that young adults live with their parents for longer periods.

**Familial factors**

While some argue that parental characteristics have little influence and it is the child’s characteristics that are the more important predictors of co-residence (Ward, Logan & Spitze 1992), others have found both to be influential. For instance, less-educated parents are more likely to provide residential support in the form of co-residence than highly educated parents (Aquilino 1991b; Swartz et al. 2011; White & Rogers 1997). The resources of parents are said to be important determinants of individuals’ housing decisions (Avery, Goldscheider & Speare 1992; Blaauboer & Mulder 2010; De Jong Gierveld, Liebfroer & Beekink 1991; Ermisch & Di Salvo 1997; Holdsworth 2000; Mulder, Clark & Wagner 2002; Whittington & Peters 1996). For instance, greater levels of non-transferable assistance, including household duties, family care and rent-free accommodation, are said to encourage co-residence whereas higher levels of transferable resources, such as cash payments, can make home leaving easier (De Jong Gierveld, Liebfroer & Beekink 1991; Holdsworth 2000). However, whereas family income has been found to have no impact on the likelihood of co-residence in the United States (Swartz et al. 2011), young Australians who grow up in families with a history of receiving income support payments are less likely to live at home (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011).
Parental divorce and remarriage have previously been found to reduce the likelihood of co-residence (Aquilino 1990; Ward, Logan & Spitze 1992; White & Rogers 1997), though recent research identified family structure did not significantly predict the receiving of housing support in the form of co-residence (Swartz et al. 2011). The total number of children in the family is unrelated to the probability of co-residence (Aquilino 1990), though the presence of other adult children (aged 19 or older) increases the likelihood of children living at home (Ward & Spitze 2007) according to analyses of data collected in 1987-88 and 1992-93 as part of the United States’ National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH)\(^\text{10}\) (see Sweet, Bumpass & Call 1988).

The quality of past family life, as well as direct measures in terms of whether or not parents wanted their children to live elsewhere, were not found to be associated with co-residence (White & Rogers 1997). Nevertheless, an earlier published analysis suggested parents who reported positive relationships with all their children or who agreed with the statement ‘parents should let adult children live with them when they need a place to stay’ were more likely to have co-resident children (Aquilino 1991b). Whether or not co-residence occurs, however, also depends on the characteristics of the individual young adults.

**Individual factors**

Co-residence was, in the past, indicative of the needs of parents, though is now driven primarily by the needs of the younger generation (Kahn, Goldscheider & Garcia-Manglano 2013)\(^\text{11}\). Research from the United States suggests young men...

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\(^{10}\) Data from the NSFHis frequently used to analyze patterns of co-residence (see Aquilino 1990, 1991a; Aquilino 1991b; Aquilino & Supple 1991; Ward & Spitze 1996a, 1996b, 2004, 2007). However, it is worth noting that the survey aimed to oversample single parents, step-families and specific ethnic groups, including African Americans, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans (Sweet, Bumpass & Call 1988). Although Australia does have diverse family forms and is considered multi-cultural, the results may not necessarily be entirely generalizable to young adults and their family members in this setting.

\(^{11}\) While this form of co-residence is the focus of the current study, it is acknowledged that it is possible for older parents to move into the home of their adult children. The formation of multi-generational households in this way is increasingly recognised within Australia (Judd et al. 2010; Liu & Easthope 2012), though has been quite common in Eastern contexts due to cultural values associated with family relations and filial piety (see, for example, Chui 2008; Mehio-Sibai, Beydoun & Tohme 2009; Yasuda et al. 2011).
are more likely to receive housing support through co-residence than women, as are those young Americans participating in higher education (Swartz et al. 2011). Young adults from Australia have also been found more likely to continue to live in the parental home if they had never left full-time education compared to those who had (Flatau et al. 2007; Young 1987, 1989), highlighting that the importance placed on tertiary education and comparably high participation rates in both countries are influential.

Some suggest it is young people with fewer resources who are more likely to live at home, namely because they need the support their parents can offer (Kahn, Goldscheider & Garcia-Manglano 2013). For instance, young adults experiencing negative events (such as divorce, serious illness, or death of a spouse) are more likely to co-reside compared to those experiencing changes in employment or issues with full-time work (Swartz et al. 2011). Never-married children, and to a lesser extent divorced/separated children, are more likely to co-reside, whereas the presence of grandchildren decreases the likelihood of this arrangement (Ward, Logan & Spitze 1992).

The likelihood of continued co-residence, specifically beyond the age of 25, is higher among Canadians who indicated that they strongly agreed (compared to strongly disagreed) with the sentiment that they had close relationships with their mothers and fathers whilst growing up (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2002). The support of both mother and father was also found to encourage Australian young people to stay at home longer (Kilmartin 2000). However, perhaps reflecting differences between countries in regards to family relationships and expectations of independence, only closeness to mother increased the likelihood of co-residence in the United States (closeness to father decreased the odds) (Swartz et al. 2011).

While Swartz and colleagues (2011) did not find any association between race and co-residence, an Australian analysis found males and females whose mothers were of Southern-European decent were more likely to delay their
departure from the parental home compared to Anglo-Australians (Young 1987). More recent studies also identified that young people were less likely to leave home if their parents were born in any non-English speaking country (Flatau et al. 2004; Hillman & Marks 2002). Similarly, an analysis of young adults in Canada found those of Indo, Chinese and Southern-European origins tended to remain in the parental home longer than their British counterparts (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2004). Studies such as this contribute to understanding who among young people are more likely to co-reside. While this knowledge is obviously significant given the prevalence of research in this area, it remains equally important to comprehend how this living arrangement is actually experienced by the young people involved.

Experiences of co-residence

Young adults

The impact of co-residence on young adults varies significantly, depending on individual characteristics and how they are transitioning to adulthood (White & Rogers 1997). While it also depends on how they are able to negotiate time and space within the household (Holdsworth & Morgan 2005), much of the research into the effects of co-residence from the young adults’ perspective focuses on their relationships with their parents. Co-resident offspring rate the parent-child relationship highly and report low levels of disagreements (Ward & Spitze 1996a). Living in the parental home, compared to living elsewhere, may also enhance relationships; young adults in Germany who continued to live in the parental home reported less conflict with their parents over time, whereas those who left home reported almost the same number of conflicts as before (Masche 2008).

However, co-residence may also correspond to less positive relationships with one’s parents. Sullivan and Sullivan (1980), considered the pioneers in this area of research, identified that young adults who resided in the parental home and commuted to college reported less affection, communication and satisfaction in their relationships with their parents compared to those who left home to
attend school. Furthermore, living at home as an undergraduate student, as opposed to living elsewhere, had a negative effect on the parent-child relationship in terms of mutual respect, decision-making autonomy, perceived affection and support, acceptance of parents as role models, ability to resolve conflicts and feeling appreciated and understood (Flanagan, Schulenberg & Fuligni 1993). While White and Rogers’ (1997) analysis of data collected in 1992 found co-residence increased the amount of parental support exchanged and perceived, the young adults living with their parents generally evaluated their relationships more negatively than those who lived apart. Compared to non-resident children, those living at home reported receiving less respect and fairness and less trust in terms of their relationships with their mothers (White & Rogers 1997).

Young adults who co-reside may equally experience the same relationship dynamics as their counterparts who live separately from their parents. Co-residence status was shown to have no impact on perceptions of closeness to parents among young Americans (Aquilino 1999b). Similarly, a qualitative study of Belgian emerging adults identified that, regardless of their place of residence, all were trying to work out what their relationship with parents should resemble and most had not yet reached a state of equilibrium (Kins, De Mol & Beyers 2014). As such, they all wanted to remain connected to their parents but also reported a strong desire for independence. The realisation of this independence, however, differed depending on residential status. Participants who did not co-reside identified how they could be independent in their own place, whereas those still living in the parental home expressed their wish for increased independence. These emerging adults wanted to have sufficient privacy and the capacity to make one’s own decisions, yet at the same time acknowledged that co-residence meant showing some consideration for parental rules (Kins, De Mol & Beyers 2014).

Young people may resent control over their movements whilst living in the parental home (Holdsworth & Morgan 2005). Indeed, the way young people use
phrases such as ‘living at home’, ‘my parent’s roof’, ‘their house’ and ‘their household’ when describing co-residence suggests that home is a zone of limited autonomy and restricted action where parental views prevail (White 2002). However, this summation by White (2002) did not reflect the broader, more accepting views of the young Australians she interviewed; these young people, aged between 18 and 25, tolerated the limits on their control of domestic spaces and autonomy within their parents’ homes as part of an unspoken exchange for physical shelter and material support (White 2002).

This study, one of few to explore co-residence in the Australian context, included 17 young adults who had returned home after living away. However, like much of the research into co-residence, White (2002) failed to adequately differentiate those who returned from the continuing co-residents. Her only reference to home returners was that they referred to their parents’ house as home and spoke about ‘coming home’ to live (White 2002). This is significant, particularly given suggestions the two have qualitatively different experiences (Mitchell 2000b).

Young adults who return home may be similar to those who have never departed, in that they are less likely than their peers who live outside the parental home to have achieved financial independence, lifelong commitments and role transitions (Kins & Beyers 2010). However, return co-residents differ in the sense that they retain the adult criteria they achieved during autonomous living (Kins & Beyers 2010). Ward and Spitze (1996b) used quantitative data from the NSFH to compare co-residence between those who had not yet departed and those who had returned. These authors found that return co-residents were older, more likely to have ever been married (especially at older ages), better educated and more likely to have attended college compared to continuing co-residents (Ward & Spitze 1996b).

While their backgrounds were more similar than different, young adults who returned expressed lower satisfaction with their living arrangement, expected
shorter stays and reported more definite plans to leave than their counterparts who had never departed (Ward & Spitze 1996b). The authors concluded that, whereas co-residence appears to be more of a lifestyle choice for continuing co-residents, in that they are less likely to have plans to leave, returning is more transitional (Ward & Spitze 1996b). While it is thus important to distinguish between continuing co-residents and returners, it is equally imperative that their parents’ experiences are adequately understood.

**Parents**

Parents’ experiences of living with their children have predominantly been explored using quantitative research. The exception is a study into leaving home among young people in Britain, Norway and Spain, which included interviews with a selection of parents (Holdsworth & Morgan 2005). The older family members recognised it was harder for young people to establish an independent residence, both in terms of the cost of leaving home and also the precarious nature of the youth labour market. While some parents could still jokingly suggest that young people might be using the cost of housing or the state of the labour market as an excuse for staying at home, they were always willing to provide food, accommodation and support to their offspring regardless of age (Holdsworth & Morgan 2005).

Parents who co-reside, albeit reporting greater levels of conflict and control issues than parents with children living outside the home, indicate higher levels of closeness, shared activities and support from their children (Aquilino 1997, 1999b). Using data collected as part of the NSFH from parents with adult children aged 19-34 living at home, Aquilino and Supple (1991) found the majority of parents were pleased with the presence of their adult children at home. Parents’ satisfaction was not strongly predicted by child age or sex and children’s payment of room or board had no impact. Nevertheless, responses to co-residence were more positive when children were financially independent and contributed to the household by paying for their own transportation, clothing, and entertainment. On the contrary, conflict and dissatisfaction did
increase when children were not employed or studying or when they were divorced/separated (compared to never married) (Aquilino 1991b; Aquilino & Supple 1991). Conflict has been found to be the most important predictor of parental satisfaction with co-residence. While heated arguments and shouting were associated with maternal satisfaction and lowered levels of shared leisure and enjoyable time, the occurrence of disagreements affected fathers’ satisfaction negatively, regardless of whether they led to open hostilities (Aquilino & Supple 1991).

From an Australian perspective, studies of overall parental satisfaction with co-residence are limited. While Tarrant’s (2011) pilot study found parents experienced lower adjustment to co-residence and higher parent-child conflict if they were disappointed with their offspring’s lifestyle and decisions, the author did not measure overall parental satisfaction with this living arrangement. An earlier study, albeit sampling parents who were co-residing and those living apart, focused on parental perceptions of their role in their offspring’s lives rather than satisfaction with their living arrangement. Parents with co-resident offspring were more likely to believe it was their role to provide material assistance and advice or guidance and also give higher levels of financial assistance (Vassallo, Smart & Price-Robertson 2009). The authors concluded that they may therefore maintain more of a ‘parent-like’ relationship with their children and be moving more slowly towards an egalitarian relationship compared to parents whose children had left home (Vassallo, Smart & Price-Robertson 2009). However, considering these differences and their implications for wellbeing, the non-existent discussion of parental satisfaction, either with regards to one’s role or living arrangement, is noteworthy.

It is also worth highlighting that, despite examining co-residence, none of the aforementioned studies clearly distinguished whether this living arrangement was the result of delayed home leaving or returning (see Aquilino 1990; Aquilino & Supple 1991; Vassallo, Smart & Price-Robertson 2009). Ward and Spitze (2007), in contrast, used NSFH data to investigate the impact of co-residence on
parents’ reports of the quality of parent-child relationships and their marriages by examining households with home leavers versus co-residents as well as continuing co-residents versus those who had left and returned. Co-residence, compared to living separately to one’s offspring, did not alter overall parent-child relationship quality or marital quality but was associated with increased disagreements with children and marital disputes about children. Although prior relationships were found to be more negative with adult children who left and then returned (compared to those who never left), no difference between continuous and return co-resident children was found in relation to subsequent parent-child relationship or marital quality (Ward & Spitze 2007).

The aforementioned study, like much of the literature on co-residence, has relied on quantitative data. Some of these studies were published after White (1994) undertook a review of the co-residence literature, however, her suggestions for further research continue to remain inadequately addressed. Despite some 15 years having passed, there is still a need to complement the structural secondary data sets already in existence by increasing the number of qualitative studies that probe meanings and interpretations (White 1994). For example, although Ward and Spitze (2007) attempted to explain their findings by suggesting norms about parental obligation may be stronger than those concerning young adults’ independence and that periods of return to dependency are perhaps sufficiently common not to cause significant strains on relationships, the authors still recognised the need for qualitative research as a means of capturing the role of normative expectations held by both generations (Ward & Spitze 2007). They also acknowledge that such research could be utilised to better understand whether parents and their young adult offspring share consensus as to the reasons for co-residence and whether this has implications for the climate within the household. This is particularly relevant in terms of research into co-residence arrangements resulting explicitly from a young adult’s return home, given these have their own contributing factors and unique implications for both young adults and their parents (Mitchell 2000b).
Returning to co-residence

Returning home, often referred to as the ‘boomerang effect’ (Flatau et al. 2007, p. 55), is represented in an Australian context by “individuals who (are) currently residing in the parental home but who had left at some time in the past” (Flatau et al. 2007, p. 56). Yet, returning as a ‘boomerang kid’ is widely measured internationally as a return that consists of at least a four month stay after at least four months spent outside the parental home (Mitchell 1998, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Mitchell & Gee 1996a; Tytel 2007).

As this definition suggests, returning home cannot occur without a young person first departing the parental household. Leaving home, albeit a physical move from under one sheltering roof to another, often holds significant meaning in the lives of young adults and their parents (Baanders 1996; Holdsworth 2013; Holdsworth & Morgan 2005; Lahelma & Gordon 2003; Löfgren 1997; Mulder 2009). For instance, it can be said to coincide with a shift from dependency to independence\(^\text{12}\), the achievement of adult status and changes in the parent-child relationship (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999; Holdsworth & Morgan 2005; Jones 1995; Mulder 2009).

Consequently, leaving home has long been the subject of scholarly interest\(^\text{13}\). It can occur ‘early’, ‘on time’ or ‘late’ (Settersten 1998), though young people will generally leave home for reasons related to a desire for independence; the pursuit of higher education or work commitments; household formation with a partner; or to flee family conflict (ABS 2008; Heath 1999; Holdsworth 2000; Mulder 2009). In doing so, they may subsequently find themselves living alone,

\(^{12}\) Some actually suggest this be conceptualised as inter-dependence (or semi-autonomy), as many parents continue to support their offspring even after they have left the parental home (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999; Holdsworth & Morgan 2005).

\(^{13}\) As is the case with co-residence (refer page 29), much of the literature uses quantitative analyses to determine which personal and familial characteristics predict the likelihood a young adult will leave home (see, for example, Aquilino 1991a; Billari & Liefbroer 2007; Buck & Scott 1993; Flatau et al. 2007; Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1989, 1998; Mitchell 1994; Mitchell, Wister & Burch 1989; Mulder 2009; Ravanera, Rajulton & Burch 1995; Young 1987; Zhao, Rajulton & Ravanera 1995).
cohabiting with a partner or co-residing with other young people in either student accommodation or (more commonly) share households (ABS 2008; Heath 2008, 2009; Heath & Cleaver 2003; Mulder 2003; Mulder 2009; Natalier 2007).

The housing pathways young people pursue once leaving home appear to be dictated by their ability to plan for and control their entry to independent living; the extent and form of constraints (including income, access to benefits and local housing markets); and the family support available (Ford, Rugg & Burrows 2002). How these dimensions intersect has implications for young people’s progress in the housing market and, in turn, the likelihood their departure will be reversed at some stage (Ford, Rugg & Burrows 2002). For instance, whereas some young people may be forced down chaotic pathways with no option to return, others may pursue pathways in response to the ‘right’ opportunities, all the while knowing that they have the support of their parents and can return home if needed (Roberts 2013).

While the possibility a young adult will move back to the parental home means the leaving transition is recognised as being “more renewable, less a one-way street and more like circular migration” nowadays (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999, p. 54), there continues to be a distinct lack of research into returning to co-residence within Australia. Census data remains unable to differentiate returners from their non-leaving counterparts (Heath & Cleaver 2003) and therefore the most contemporary data on home returning in Australia comes from the Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey (ABS 2008). According to the ABS (2008), in 2006-07, 31% of people aged 20-34 years had left and returned to live with their parents at some stage. This included 25% of those aged between 20 to 24 years, 36% of those aged 25-29 and 32% of those aged 30-34 (ABS 2008, 2009a). Aside from examining the number of young adults who had ever moved home, the survey also identified those who were currently living with their parents as a result of returning; these included 12% of those
aged 20-24, nine per cent of the 25-29 year olds and five per cent of those aged 30 to 34 (ABS 2008, 2009a).

These results were not replicated in the earlier Household, Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) Survey, with an analysis by Flatau et al. (2007) identifying around seven per cent of those aged 20-24 at the time of the survey in 2001 were currently living in the parental home as a result of a return. Offering an explanation, Flatau et al. (2007) proposed that some respondents who had returned may have misinterpreted the question on patterns of home leaving. The authors argued that they may have focused exclusively on whether they still lived with their parents and ignored the part of the question asking if they had left home and at what age; consequently, they wrongly supplied a never left home response (Flatau et al. 2007). As a result, this analysis was not necessarily an entirely accurate representation of home returning.

Although not comparable because of differences in the age groups, sample sizes and definitions of returning (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999), earlier analyses of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) 1990 Becoming Adult study and 1998 Young Adults’ Aspirations Survey found half of respondents had returned home (Hartley 1993; Kilmartin 2000). Similarly, Young’s (1987, 1989) analysis of the 1982 AIFS Family Survey found that half of all men and 40% of women aged 18-34 who had left home had returned at least once.

The work of Young (1987, 1989), despite now being over two decades old, remains the most often cited when reference is made in the wider literature to Australian young adults returning home. This reflects the tendency for similar analyses, based on survey data collected during the late 1980s and 1990s, to constitute the primary sources of information on home returning in the United States (DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990), the United Kingdom (Jones 1995) and Canada (Mitchell 1998; Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000, 2004). Most of the research to date has consequently focused on the analysis of trends, identifying the common reasons for returning and predicting factors conditioning the move
home rather than focusing on young adults’ lived experiences (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008).

**Reasons for returning home**

Young adults have been classified as returning reluctantly or willingly. ‘Reluctant returners’ have been classified as those who move out of the parental home for a range of reasons but have had to return, often because of a failure to sustain an independent tenancy (Coles, Rugg & Seavers 1999). This reflects the earlier findings of Hartung and Sweeney (1991), which identified young adults return home out of economic necessity having failed by their own definition as adults due to divorce or job loss. Issues related to difficulties in maintaining independent living have also been cited as reasons for returning by young Australian adults in past surveys (Hartley 1993; Young 1987). In the case of the analysis of Young (1987), the most often cited reason for returning among all young people over age 26 related to convenience. However, among males, the next most often reasons (in order of significance) were end of a job, finances, completion of travel and illness of self. In contrast, females’ reasons were illness, finances, end of travel, requests from their parents and the break-up of their marriage (Young 1987).

Similar findings were obtained in the 1990 Becoming Adult Study. Although the reasons for returning were self-defined and therefore could have included a wide range of circumstances, financial problems, job or education decisions, housing problems and broken relationships predominated (Hartley 1993). Hartley (1993) suggested that it was not unexpected that many had returned, as the young adults’ tendency to leave home to try living away from parents, to experiment and see what it was like indicated their departure was always intended to be a trial.

Returning to the parental home, in some cases, consequently acts as a comfortable retreat from adulthood and its responsibilities (Hartung & Sweeney 1991). For these young adults, the return might be deemed as occurring
voluntarily. ‘Willing returners’, according to Coles, Rugg and Seavers (1999), include those whose leaving was always intended to be temporary (perhaps because of short-term contract work away from home) and those whose ‘problematic’ reasons for leaving had become resolved. Often young people who leave because of difficulties with their parents return because their parents have asked them to do so, suggesting that the family carries emotional values that young adults take into account when deciding where to live (Jones 1995).

While moving home may be about connecting with family, and thus restoring a sense of wellbeing, returning seems to be more commonly determined by turning points in an individual’s life course (Heath 2008; Stone, Berrington & Falkingham 2014). It is often linked to stationary or downward mobility, with recent research from Britain identifying young adults returned due to leaving full-time education, unemployment or partnership dissolution (Sage, Evandrou & Falkingham 2013; Stone, Berrington & Falkingham 2014). Similarly, passing reference to ‘boomerang’ children in an Australian analysis of older parents’ housing found adult offspring returned home after travelling or working overseas for a number of years or when a partnership ended (Judd et al. 2010). The decision to move home, however, is not only determined by young adults’ immediate circumstances but also their perception of large-scale norms, previous familial experiences and broader social changes (Messineo 2005).

**Factors impacting on returning home**

*Societal factors*

Broader socio-demographic changes, including increased enrolment in higher education and later ages of marriage, as well as economic conditions, such as housing costs, income and employment, should be considered in relation to trends in home returning (Mitchell 2006b, 2007). Indeed, some suggest that increased debt among young people, as a result of prolonged time in education, contributes to higher rates of returning home (Heath & Cleaver 2003). However, very few studies have systematically examined the influence of broader societal trends on patterns of returning home. Goldscheider and colleagues (1999)
examined changes in patterns of returning home in the United States from 1925 to 1985. While these authors had anticipated that leaving home for employment might have contributed to trends in returning home, as insecure jobs have become more predominant over recent times, they found no evidence of this. The greatest contribution to the increase in returning home was the leaving home transition itself, namely increases in leaving home to be independent and decreases in leaving home for marriage (Goldscheider et al. 1999).

While these authors did not examine broader economic conditions, higher housing prices and spells of unemployment in the past year were found to significantly predict increases in returning home in Britain (Ermisch 1999). More recently, an American analysis identified that moves back home were not only predicted by unemployment but also broader labour market shocks (in the form of job offers, job destruction and productivity changes) (Kaplan 2009, 2010). Nevertheless, the lack of available studies means that, although Mitchell (2000b) posits individuals and their families cannot be held totally responsible for their so-called ‘failure’ to secure and maintain permanent residential independence, much of the focus remains on the characteristics of families and young adults that increase the likelihood of returning to co-residence.

**Familial factors**

The quality of young adults’ family relations, a key component of wellbeing, along with family structure and size are implicated in returning home. Young (1987, 1989) identified that a higher proportion of Australian young adults with positive relationships with their parents, measured by increased psychological closeness and engagement in activities with parents during adolescence, had returned home. In contrast, an analysis of data from the United States collected in 1987-1988 and 1992-1993 demonstrated that young people who experienced a lower overall quality of prior parent-child relationships and more frequent disagreements were more likely to be co-residing as a result of a return home (Ward & Spitze 2007). Interpreting these findings, Ward and Spitze (2007) argue that parents accommodate their children in spite of problematic relationships.
They also suggest that offspring are decision-makers; they may leave home due to problems with parents but will nevertheless return when their circumstances create a housing need (Ward & Spitze 2007).

Despite these results, Mitchell, Wister and Gee (2000) reasoned that young adults would still be more likely to return to a family with close-knit bonds. Nevertheless, their analysis of the 1995 Canadian General Social Survey found the emotional closeness variables (individuals’ closeness to their mother and father, and their childhood happiness) to be statistically insignificant (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000). These findings, albeit surprising the authors, were not interpreted; it therefore remains unclear whether the inability for closeness to parents to predict returning home supports earlier research, in that those who are not as close to their parents are more likely to move home, or if the living arrangement occurs in spite of relationship quality.

Nevertheless, familial bonds remain implicated in the association between family structure and returning home. Non-intact family structures have been shown to lead to early home leaving (Aquilino 1990, 1991a; Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1989, 1998; Mitchell 1994; Mitchell, Wister & Burch 1989; White & Booth 1985; Young 1989; Zhao, Rajulton & Ravanera 1995). Tang (1997) used information from the NSFH to study returning in terms of repeated home leaving behaviour. Results found those from single-parent and step-families were less likely to be repeat home leavers; given they needed to have moved home in order to then leave again, the young adults from non-intact families were also less likely to have returned (Tang 1997).

Based on these conclusions and their own earlier finding (Gee, Mitchell & Wister 1995), namely that children whose parent(s) had remarried were less likely to return home, Mitchell, Wister and Gee (2000) hypothesised that reduced closeness in step-families and increased monitoring within lone parent households would deter young adults from returning. However, these authors subsequently found that family structure, whether a two-parent adopted or
biological, step-parent or single-parent family, was not significant in the propensity to return home (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000). They suggested the discrepancy between this result and their earlier findings was likely due to measurement error (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000). Young people’s family structure was based on the men and women who raised them while growing up, not those at home at the time of return; changes in family structure between childhood and the time of the survey may have affected the propensity to return home (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000).

Family size also affects the probability of returning home. In an analysis of childhood family size on leaving and returning home using data from the 1987-1988 NSFH, the presence of siblings was the strongest deterrent of returning home among American young people aged 15 to 25 (Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1998). A subsequent Canadian analysis found that for each sibling, individuals were three per cent less likely to return (Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000). It has been suggested that this is likely because of limits to, and competition over, parental resources or due to household crowding (Mitchell 2006a).

Although Hartung and Sweeney (1991) suggest that children from lower income families may have no option to return, as their parents are unable to afford to help them live independently, family income has not been found to predict the likelihood of returning (Gee, Mitchell & Wister 1995). Poor and non-poor young adults have been found to return home at similar rates (De Marco & Berzin 2008). Therefore, while young adults’ family situations may have some influence on whether they leave and later return, the decision is typically related to their own individual needs (Messineo 2005; Ward & Spitze 1996b).

**Individual factors**

There are a range of individual factors which have been associated with returning home, including age at, and reasons for, moving out; gender; relationship status; and attitudes to living with parents. The probability a young
adult will return is strongly associated with the age at which they first left the parental home (DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990; Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000; Young 1987, 1989). Young (1987, 1989) found that those who left home between the ages of 22 and 24 were less likely to return home than those young adults who left at earlier ages.

Apart from age at first home leaving, young adults’ reasons for leaving also predict the likelihood they will return home. For instance, educational and employment transitions at the time of home leaving are associated with an increased probability of returning home whereas leaving for marriage reduces the likelihood (Aquilino 1996; Gee, Mitchell & Wister 1995; Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999). Young (1987, 1989) found that a smaller proportion of those who left to marry returned home within ten years compared with a significantly larger proportion of those who left for other reasons. Specifically, males who left because of conflict or to travel had a higher probability of returning compared to those who left home for employment, to study, to be independent or to reside with a partner (Young 1987, 1989). Among women, those who left to be independent or to travel were more likely to return than those who moved out for work, to study, to escape conflict or to cohabit (Young 1987, 1989).

The likelihood a young adult will return varies according to gender. Earlier studies have consistently identified women to have a lower probability of returning than their male counterparts (Aquilino 1996; Buck & Scott 1993; DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990; Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000; Young 1987). Common explanations for this trend have been based on the proposition that those who depart the parental home for marriage are unlikely to return (Young 1987, 1989). With women tending to marry at earlier ages than men (Mitchell 2006a), their return home was considered less probable (DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990; Young 1987, 1989).
Yet recent Australian data found that a higher proportion of young women than men identified themselves as having returned home (ABS 2009a). While this may reflect the contemporary trend that has seen young adults delay the age of marriage and therefore leave home for other reasons (ABS 2009a), relationship status is still influential in home returning. In Australia, returning home was more common among those young adults who had never been married or formed a de facto relationship compared with those who had (Kilmartin 2000). However, relationship dissolution was also found to contribute to returning, with higher proportions of young adults who had experienced a break up moving home (Kilmartin 2000).

Kilmartin (2000) also identified that a greater proportion of Australian young adults who considered themselves economically insecure had returned home compared to those who felt economically secure. Not unexpectedly, both employment and income are important factors impacting on returning home. Young adults who were unemployed were more likely to return home than those who have never been unemployed (Young 1987, 1989), as were those with lower incomes (DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990).

Based on their multivariate analysis of 1974 and 1976 data from the United States, DaVanzo and Goldscheider (1990) also identified that those young adults who were dependent on their parents financially and living semi-autonomously during their absence were more likely to return than those who were financially independent. They concluded overall that those experiencing a need for resources, whether as a consequence of reduced income, job loss, divorce, marriage, parenthood or a return to school, were more likely to return home (DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990).

In addition to resources, returning home is influenced by individuals’ attitudes. Messineo (2005), who hypothesised young adults who support the notion of parents allowing their adult children to live at home will be more likely to apply this belief to their own personal experiences, found young adults who expected
parental support were more likely to return home compared to those without such expectations. Individuals with strongly negative attitudes to living at home and those with strongly positive views are also more likely to return (Young 1987). Young (1987) speculated that those who were least happy at home were more likely to be asked to return home after a stormy departure, while those with positive attitudes probably had a supportive relationship with their parents and were therefore willing to return when their parents needed them. However, the reliance on numerical data, albeit identifying who was more likely to return home, generally failed to represent the true complexities of young adults’ housing decisions and how these were experienced (Coles, Rugg & Seavers 1999).

Experiences of returning to co-residence

Young adults

Previous research has examined young adults’ satisfaction with returning home. For instance, a retrospective survey of university students from the United Kingdom found that, among those who had returned home, the majority (75.6%) were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with their living arrangement (compared to 15% who were ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’ and 9.4% who were ‘dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied’) (Sage, Evandrou & Falkingham 2013). The authors pointed to the high proportion of returners who received some support from their parents as the reason why most recalled their experiences in positive ways (Sage, Evandrou & Falkingham 2013).

Similarly, data from the ‘Cluttered Nest Project’ (CNP), conducted in 1993-94, found the majority (78%) of Canadian young adults who returned home were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ (Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997). However, certain characteristics were significant predictors of their satisfaction, with multivariate analyses revealing young adults were less likely to be satisfied if they returned on multiple occasions (three or more) compared to once; reported higher personal incomes (more than $20,000); and were co-residing with higher income parents; a step-parent rather than a biological parent; or
parents who attended religious services once per week compared to never or rarely (Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997).

An additional analysis of this same data set revealed the aspects young adults liked about living at home once they returned. They enjoyed the financial benefits, companionship, the comforts of home and safety and security, though disliked the lack of privacy and independence, the potential for conflict and stress, as well as parental rules and regulations (Mitchell 2000b). Ultimately, they weighted the positive aspects against the negatives in order to reach an overall appraisal of their living arrangements (Mitchell 2000b).

While the use of telephone interviews in the CNP did result in some qualitative comments from young adults, there have been few purely qualitative studies undertaken into young adults’ experiences of returning to the parental home. The most recently published study explored the views of returners independent of non-leavers, focusing on how returning affected young peoples’ sense of themselves as adults (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008). In this study, Sassler, Ciambrone and Benway (2008) conducted open-ended interviews with a non-representative sample of 30 young adults from southern New England, recruited because they had lived out of home for at least six months and been back for nine or more. The researchers were not surprised to find that the informants did not view the achievement of adult status as the achievement of demographic markers (namely leaving home) (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008). Instead, adulthood was seen as the mastery of individual goals- assuming responsibility for their own actions and decision making, as well as learning how to interact with adults, particularly their parents, from a more equal position rather than as a dependent (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008).

Furthermore, those who contributed to the household economy were stronger in their views of themselves as adults, although this varied by age (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008). Those in their mid-20s were better able to act in ways that enhanced their status as adults, including financially contributing to
the household, making independent decisions and attempting to alter the relationships with their parents, than were those in their early twenties and the few in their early thirties (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008).

However, the returners generally felt their parents perceived them as children and were trying to recreate childhood patterns in order to keep them in a dependent state (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008). Guidelines and limits, particularly in the areas of career and romance, were largely resented, as respondents interpreted these as attempts by parents to remain in control (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008). Yet, while the interviewees desired adult status and independence, their narratives indicated that the ways they interacted with their parents after returning home often re-established many of their earlier childhood patterns as dependents (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008). While this study began to explore how returners attain adulthood, the authors acknowledged that the use of data collected from the mid-1990s meant additional studies of how young adults experience lives in their family of origin, particularly during the transition to adulthood, were needed (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008).

A further qualitative study into the experiences of home returning, also undertaken in the 1990s, has additional limitations. Based on interviews with 15 female returners from Canada, Paseluikho (2000) theorised that returning home was a time of ‘regrouping’, enabling the young women to reenergise, recuperate and contemplate their lives and, ultimately, prepare to move out on their own again. However, the focus on females’ experiences does have its limitations. Firstly, although Paseluikho (2000) acknowledged that results could not be generalised to all those who return home, it was suggested that the potential for transferability exists. However, this typically only facilitates the application of results to situations that are similar to the contexts in which they were first derived; findings, therefore, are not necessarily applicable to young men or indeed women in other settings, meaning the need for studies still remains.
Secondly, limiting the eligibility age to 24 years and older may have restricted the development of the grounded theory used in Paseluikho’s (2000) study. It is acknowledged in the literature that many of those who return leave home at younger ages (Young 1987, 1989). Consequently, there may have been young women who left home at younger ages (18) and returned before the age of 24 but were not included in the study. Given the aim was to develop a theory to explain experiences, a group of females with as much diversity as possible should have been recruited to participate.

Furthermore, the young women were privy to the researcher’s background in counselling psychology. Several participants indicated that the interview was a chance to ‘vent and process’ challenging co-resident experiences, with a few also admitting that they had sought professional counselling in order to learn how to better manage their parents and figure out how to move on with their lives (Paseluikho 2000). Given their satisfaction with co-residing was also rated quite low (Paseluikho 2000), the young women were likely to be experiencing problems with their arrangement and may have been more willing to discuss returning home in order to alleviate or resolve such difficulties. The results obtained, therefore, may have been biased toward the negative aspects associated with the move home.

A more recent qualitative study found Australian young adults were not detrimentally affected by their return home (Warner, Henderson-Wilson & Andrews 2012). The nine young adults’ continued achievement of personal goals suggests that the return home may not always be a ‘failure’ as past research has proposed. Instead, the authors argue returning home should be considered as one potentially positive alternative living arrangement (Warner, Henderson-Wilson & Andrews 2012).

Unfortunately, none of the aforementioned studies included a detailed description of parental perspectives. Although Paseluikho (2000) intended to interview parents, requesting joint interviews meant women were only willing
to participate if their parents did not. They considered it to be too difficult to discuss their experiences in the presence of their parents, suggesting that the arrangement at home could become worse if negative aspects were to arise during the interviews (Paseluikho 2000). Nevertheless, it would have been beneficial to attempt to rectify these issues and include parents, especially given the general lack of qualitative research into their perspectives.

Parents

It has in the past been assumed that the presence of ‘boomerang kids’ in the household causes conflict and tension (Clemens & Axelson 1985; Schnaiberg & Goldenberg 1989). Conflict may occur when young adult children return because parents’ personal independence and development, opportunities which they had come to expect once their children had matured and left home, are reduced (Schnaiberg & Goldenberg 1989). Alternatively, parents may view the situation as a negative reflection on their child-rearing skills, as they ask themselves where they went wrong in not preparing their adult children for life on their own (Aldous 1996).

For the parents interviewed by Clemens and Axelson (1985), the presence of their adult children at home was a negative experience, as they did not contribute rent or board, failed to assist around the house and lived in ways that directly clashed with their own lifestyles. Although consequences for wellbeing were not explored explicitly, the results were likely to have been biased by the sample, which was conveniently drawn from a workshop on ‘Parenting the Young Adult’ (Clemens & Axelson 1985). Participants’ attendance at this session suggests they were experiencing difficulties with their children; they would, therefore, be more likely to view their living arrangements as unfavourable.

Other research supports these findings. For instance, an analysis of parental responses collected as part of the NSFH in 1987-1988 and 1992-1993 found return co-residence was associated with more frequent disagreements (Ward & Spitze 2007). Specifically, parents’ relationships with young adult children who
returned home were more negative than those with children who had never left (Ward & Spitze 2007).

While this has led some to suggest parents who have their children return to co-residence are ‘baby gloomers’ rather than baby boomers (Beer et al. 2011), the living arrangement can equally be a positive experience. Research suggests parents who share the household as a consequence of their child’s return are highly satisfied with this living arrangement (Aquilino 1996; Mitchell 1998). According to a study conducted in 1993-1994, which interviewed Canadian families with an adult child who had returned home for at least six months in the past five years, the majority of parents (79%) reported that their living arrangement worked out ‘moderately’ or ‘very well’, with less than ten per cent suggesting it worked out ‘somewhat’ or ‘very poorly’ (Mitchell 1998).

It is possible, however, that those who were dissatisfied with the co-residence arrangement elected not to participate or felt inhibited about expressing their true responses during the telephone interview, particularly if other family members were present in the household. The use of close-ended questions was suggested to minimise the impact on validity (Mitchell 1998), though this form of data collection compromises the level of detail obtained from participants. While the survey attempted to elaborate key findings through the inclusion of open-ended questions (Mitchell 1998), these also had limitations. Just three questions were proposed, with the final question only deployed when parents responded affirmatively to the one prior. Thus, the research limited responses to those that could be easily analysed instead of allowing the diverse parental experiences to emerge.

While this constitutes a gap in knowledge that warrants further research, the study was nevertheless able to identify the characteristics which increased the probability parents were satisfied with a young adult’s return home (Mitchell 1998). Mothers, of which there were a far greater number, were twice as likely as fathers to be ‘very satisfied’ (compared to less than very satisfied), though
both were able to identify positive and negative aspects related to the living arrangement (Mitchell 1998).

For fathers, the positive aspects associated with the return home of their children were companionship/friendship, ‘having the family together’, help/emotional support from the child and ‘other’ reasons, such as seeing grandchildren on a daily basis (Mitchell 1998). Mothers were more likely than fathers to select companionship/friendship as a positive aspect, though fewer viewed ‘having the family together’ in the same way (Mitchell 1998). They were also less likely to select ‘child helps out/emotional support’ and ‘other’ reasons as positive. In terms of negative appraisals of the return home, both fathers and mothers reported that they did not like the lack of privacy and independence; the child’s messiness/lack of help; personality/attitude; lifestyle and dependence and fights/arguments/stress (Mitchell 1998).

Parents interviewed by Mitchell (1998) were thus more likely to state that the living arrangement was working out very well if they experienced shared enjoyment of activities, their child contributed high levels of instrumental support around the house and they never or rarely engaged in heated arguments with their children as a means of resolving their disagreements. They were also more likely to view the arrangement as favourable if their marriages remained intact (compared to parents who were single, divorced or widowed) (Mitchell 1998).

While other variables, including parental educational attainment, household income and the number of other children in the home, were not significant predictors, parents were more likely to be satisfied with ‘boomerang kid’ living arrangements if the co-residing child was a son compared to a daughter (Mitchell 1998). Parental satisfaction was also higher with children who returned for the second time compared to those returning the first time, and when the child initially departed to attend school or for ‘other’ reasons (such as travel) compared to leaving for independence (Mitchell 1998). The likelihood of parents
being satisfied with how well the living arrangement was working out was higher if the child’s main activity at the time of co-residence was full-time employment compared to part-time employment, looking for work or attending school (Mitchell 1998).

In contrast, when assessing parental marital satisfaction during co-residence more specifically, Mitchell and Gee (1996a) identified that parents were more dissatisfied when children returned on multiple occasions (three or more times) and initially left home either to work or to attend school (compared with leaving for independence). However, parents were more likely to be ‘very satisfied’ when they were experiencing their first marriage (not remarried) and reported being in very good or excellent health (compared to poorer health status) (Mitchell & Gee 1996a). Ward and Spitze (2004) more recently hypothesised that returns to the nest would affect parents’ evaluation of the success of their marriage, as well as disrupt marital roles and routines, though these authors failed to find any effects of return co-residence beyond a marginal decrease in parental time together (Ward & Spitze 2004). While this supports earlier work by Dennerstein, Dudley and Guthrie (2002), who found a child’s return had no effect on feelings for partner or measurements of specific health issues, including hot flushes, moods, well-being, number of bothersome symptoms or hassles, among Australian mothers aged 45-55, the collection of additional qualitative comments in both studies would have no doubt offered greater insight into how this arrangement is experienced by parents day-to-day.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined literature pertaining to the return to co-residence. Commencing with a discussion of young adulthood, it highlighted the pathways being pursued and how these are often considered different from previous generations. In doing so, several of the key discussions within the field were examined, including how this stage in the lifespan is conceptualised, the changing definitions of adulthood and whether young adults’ patterns are influenced more by social structures or reflect the increasing need for agency. While achieving definitive conclusions as to the most accurate approaches to
use when exploring this lifespan stage was never my aim, the latter discussion did reinforce the importance of paying attention to young adults’ subjectivities and experiences.

It also highlighted the integral role families are playing in the lives of young adults today. They are providing the resources and support needed to negotiate challenges brought about by changes in labour and education marketplaces, with co-residence especially offered by parents as a means of assistance.

In reviewing the literature pertaining to co-residence, the distinction between young people who delay their departure from the parental home and those who return after moving out was made. The current study focuses on this latter phenomenon, meaning the chapter highlighted the range of factors that contribute to the trend in returning to co-residence within both international and Australian contexts. It also identified that our knowledge of returning home has primarily relied on statistical analyses rather than in-depth explorations of the experiences of young adults or their parents and that, while these studies have proven informative, the data upon which they were based was collected in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, in highlighting the need for more contemporary qualitative research into the returning home phenomenon, this chapter has provided the rationale for the current study. The next chapter, which outlines the methodology employed in this work, thereby explores the value of qualitative research and hermeneutical phenomenology for exploring the meaning of the return to co-residence in more detail.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Earlier studies of home returning have provided, through the use of existing quantitative data sets, important information on the associated demographics of the phenomena (Mitchell 2000a). However, the limited study of the experiences of home returning indicates a need for the use of diverse methodologies as a means of enhancing how the nuances of home leaving and returning behaviour are understood. For example, Mitchell (2000a) suggests that using qualitative research to explore more subjective elements of returning home, including the underlying decision-making processes, the types of negotiations which occur between parents and their children and the influence of other family members, could further contextualise the phenomenon. This chapter, in outlining the specific methodology employed in this exploration of returning home, commences with a discussion of qualitative research, including its underlying assumptions and related constructivist worldview. It goes on to briefly explore the phenomenological tradition and its application to the study.

Qualitative research

The meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of family members can be understood through the adoption of a qualitative approach (Daly 1992). This interpretive form of inquiry, which aims to explore how people make sense of phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, 2011; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005), suits the study of families, particularly as they are considered groups who construct both individual and shared meanings (Daly 1992). Furthermore, qualitative research, in exploring exchanges, dynamics and contexts instead of variables, provides an opportunity to investigate the processes through which families create, sustain and discuss their realities, together with patterns of interaction and the negotiation of family roles and relationships (Daly 1992).

In addition, qualitative research also aligns with my own philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of reality (ontology), the way knowledge is
obtained (epistemology) and the role of values (axiology) (Creswell 2007). Ontologically, I embrace the concept of multiple realities, recognising that researchers, participants and readers each have different, subjective perceptions of what constitutes reality that warrant reporting (Creswell 2007). In order to present these realities, it is epistemologically assumed that I must get to know the participants by lessening the distance between us (Creswell 2007). It is also important, in an axiological sense, that I ‘position’ myself in the study by reporting on my values and their influence on the information gathered (Creswell 2007).

Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007), begins with these assumptions, as well as a worldview and the potential use of a theoretical lens. It seeks to inquire into the meanings individuals ascribe to a social or human problem through the use of an emerging line of inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting and analysis techniques that are inductive and establish patterns and themes (Creswell 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 2011). Qualitative writing includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher and a complex description and interpretation of the problem in order to extend the literature (Creswell 2007). Therefore, in adopting a qualitative approach, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the worldview and theoretical lenses adopted in the current study; Chapter Five will explore the data collection and analysis procedures.

**Constructivist worldview**

Acknowledging the different realities existing in families, the study was undertaken within the constructivist paradigm. This approach, which holds a belief in relativist ontology, transactional/subjectivist epistemology and need for a hermeneutical/dialectical methodology (refer Table 1) (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2011), is primarily interested in the subjective and inter-subjective social knowledge produced by human consciousness and how this is actively constructed and co-created by human agents (Guba & Lincoln 2008). In other words, the constructivist paradigm assumes that individuals construct meanings
as they engage with the world they are interpreting; human beings are born into a world of meaning, though each person makes sense of it based on their social and historical perspectives; and the generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction within the human community (Crotty 1998).

Table 1: Summary of the basic beliefs of the constructivist paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Belief</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relativist ontology</td>
<td>Multiple realities exist in the form of mental constructions created inter-subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially; these realities are thus dependent on the lived experiences of the persons who hold them (Guba 1990; Guba &amp; Lincoln 2005; Lincoln, Lynham &amp; Guba 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional/subjectivist epistemology</td>
<td>Individuals are shaped by their lived experiences and these will always come out in the knowledge of researchers and in the data generated by subjects, such that findings are literally co-created through the process of interaction between both parties (Guba &amp; Lincoln 2005; Snape &amp; Spencer 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutical/dialectical methodology</td>
<td>Naturalistic methods (such as interviews) are used to facilitate dialogue between the researcher and those being studied in order to collaboratively construct meaningful realities (Angen 2000). Individual constructions are refined through hermeneutics (interpretation) and dialectic comparison/contrast (resolution through rational discussion) (Guba 1990).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011))

Creswell (2007) suggests that the constructivist worldview is manifest in both phenomenological studies and the grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2006). Although this latter approach, known as constructivist grounded theory, aims to discover the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences as a way to develop a conceptual analysis of them (Charmaz 2003), previous research, albeit mostly quantitative, has already attempted to provide explanations as to why young adults return home. Therefore, given the aim of the current study was to explore families’ lived experiences of returning home, including the “meaning they give to (these) experiences in terms of...thoughts, feelings,
understandings or interpretations” (Andrews, Sullivan & Minichiello 2004, p. 63), it was deemed more appropriate to adopt a phenomenological approach.

Ray (1994) highlights that researchers need an understanding of the philosophical foundations in order to enhance the credibility of the study. Therefore, the following section provides a brief overview of the philosophy of phenomenology in terms of its most influential contributors, Husserl and Heidegger, before outlining how this tradition was applied in the current study.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a “methodological approach with a strong and dynamic philosophical and epistemological foundation” (Carpenter 2010, p. 125). Arguably the major philosophical movement of the twentieth century (Starks & Trinidad 2007), with underpinnings in the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Mach, Brentano, Dilthey, James and others, it was formally announced by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s as a radically new way of doing philosophy, an approach that was intended to reinvigorate the tradition and return its focus to the life of the living human subject (Embree et al. 1997; Moran 1999).

**Phenomenology by Husserl**

Phenomenology, in the Husserlian sense, is epistemological and considers experience to be the fundamental source of knowledge (Racher & Robinson 2003). It emphasises a return to reflective intuition, as a means of describing and clarifying experience as it is lived and constituted in consciousness (awareness) (Ray 1994). Husserl believed that, in accordance with the principle of intentionality, the consciousness is always directed at something; it is because it is in the world and always intentional (is always ‘consciousness of’ something) that it can be revealed through the study of experiences (Cohen & Omery 1994).

The world of lived experience, conceptualised by Husserl as the *life-world*, refers to what individuals experience pre-reflectively, without resorting to
interpretations (Dowling 2007). Husserl believed that lived experiences have essential eidetic structures, or essences, that are common among all those who have the experience (Lopez & Willis 2004). These commonalities, which are believed to represent the true nature of the phenomenon being studied, must be identified in order for a generalised description of the lived experiences to be developed (Lopez & Willis 2004). The assumption that these essences result in one correct interpretation of participants’ experiences and could be abstracted with no consideration of wider contexts reflected the idea that reality is objective; this traditional value was shared by Husserl and underpinned his unwavering attempts to make phenomenology a rigorous science (Lopez & Willis 2004).

In order to achieve rigour, Husserl required one return to the beginnings of knowledge ‘in the things themselves’ (Cohen & Omery 1994). To do this, he proposed the method of *epoche* (or phenomenological reduction), whereby all prior beliefs, knowledge and biases concerning the origins of phenomena must be suspended (or ‘bracketed’) in order to focus exclusively on the essential structures of consciousness (Cerbone 2006).

**Heidegger and hermeneutical phenomenology**

Albeit collectively inspired by, and indebted to, Husserl, subsequent phenomenologists have each branched off in different directions, often in ways that challenge his seminal works (Cerbone 2006; Grbich 2007). One such scholar, Martin Heidegger, was a student of Husserl who moved away from the mere description of core concepts and essences to reinterpret phenomenology as interpretive/hermeneutical (Ray 1994). In doing so, Heidegger challenged Husserl’s view that individuals were detached subjects existing in a world of objects, instead using the term *life-world* to express the idea that individuals are invariably influenced by the world in which they live (Lopez & Willis 2004; Walters 1995).
Philosophical underpinnings

Heidegger's phenomenology is ontological, in that it focuses on the meaning of ‘Being’ (Cohen & Omery 1994). Being, in this context, is the presence in the world through which truth is self-determined; it is understood by people (beings), who are signified by ‘being there’ (Dasein) (Cohen & Omery 1994). Heidegger’s notion of Being-in-the-world recognises that people are always already caught up in the world in which they find themselves (Moran 1999). A structure of this being-in-the-world is pre-understanding, such that people always come to a situation with a background understanding they have inherited from their culture (Koch 1995). The person and the world are therefore co-constituted; an indissoluble unity, as a person makes sense of the world from within existence and not while detached from it (Annells 1996; Koch 1995).

Heidegger, therefore, posited that understanding of being, as an ongoing engagement with and responsiveness to the entities encountered, cannot be detached from those very entities (Cerbone 2006). Therefore, because understanding of being is not so much contained within consciousness but rather manifest in people’s everyday activities, the focus of phenomenology should turn to the interpretation of these activities rather than the pure conscious events referred to by Husserl (Cerbone 2006).

Based on the ontological thesis that lived experience is an interpretive process, Heidegger advocated the use of hermeneutics as a research method (Racher & Robinson 2003). Hermeneutics, according to Hans-George Gadamer, is a theoretical attitude toward the practice of interpretation, not only the interpretation of texts but also the relation to the experiences interpreted in them and in individuals’ communicatively unfolded orientations to the world (Annells 1996).

Gadamer, whom Heidegger mentored, introduced evolutionary changes to hermeneutic philosophy based on the notion that both understanding and
interpretation are indissolubly bound up with each other (Annells 1996; Schwandt 2000). He articulated a hermeneutic approach in the context of both temporality and historicity of human existence, as well as advancing the notions of prejudgment and universality, whereby understanding is made possible because of a person’s preconceptions and the consciousness they share with both those who express themselves and those who understand (Cohen & Omery 1994). Gadamer used the metaphor fusion of horizons to represent the intersecting of horizons, or the various assumptions, ideas, meanings and experiences one has, that occurs when people interact in the act of understanding (Lopez & Willis 2004).

In relation to the study of human experience, hermeneutics goes beyond description to look for meanings embedded in common life practices (Lopez & Willis 2004). It focuses on individuals’ narratives, in order to explore the implications of these meanings for their everyday experiences and the choices they make (Lopez & Willis 2004). Therefore, hermeneutics, in recognising that understanding is the fundamental way people be in the world (Ray 1994), is inherently connected with phenomenology.

Applying hermeneutical phenomenology
Hermeneutical phenomenology, therefore, aims to identify and provide an understanding of the variety of constructions that exist about a phenomenon and to bring them into consensus (Annells 1996). From a methodological standpoint, hermeneutical phenomenology encompasses an interpretive component to the descriptive account of the lived experience (van Manen 1990, 1997). To engage with this methodology, however, is to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than lived explication of meaning can reveal.

This approach was considered relevant to the current study for several reasons. Firstly, parents and their young adult children were anticipated to have different understandings and experiences of the returning home phenomenon. Secondly, this form of phenomenology is particularly suited to studying the family, as it
admits and embraces families’ central qualities, namely the capacity for shared meanings and issues of significance in family life (Chesla 1995). Four of the concepts posited by Heidegger are especially poignant to the study of families: how people are situated in their worlds, constituted by their worlds, engaged in everyday activity and moved by their concerns in day-to-day life (Chesla 1995) (refer Table 2).

**Table 2: Relevance of Heidegger to family research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heideggerian concept</th>
<th>Relevance to families</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Humans are situated</em></td>
<td>Human lives are located within meaningful activities, relationships, commitments and involvements, which set up both possibilities and constraints for living. Being part of a family, located within a particular time in history and culture, not only provides the world in which individuals find themselves but also enables them to understand this world and the ways of being and acting within it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Humans are constituted</em></td>
<td>Being constituted means that the world of meanings and practices into which one arrives establishes who they are and how they understand themselves and their possibilities. Thus, the family is understood as being integral to shaping each person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Humans are engaged</em></td>
<td>A family’s way of being in the world is engaged in practical activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Humans are concerned</em></td>
<td>The ways individuals engage in the world are bounded by their concerns, or what matters to them. These concerns, in turn, guide their actions and those of their families.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Chesla (1995))

In addition, hermeneutical phenomenology, with its ontological, epistemological and methodological basis in the constructivist paradigm (Annells 1996), was also felt to align with my own views. Heidegger’s notion of co-constitutionality, along with the Gadamerian concept of the fusion of horizons, reflect the constructivist assumption of co-created meanings, in that the meanings derived during interpretive research are a blend of those articulated by both participant and
researcher (Lopez & Willis 2004). Thus, the interpretation of the narratives in hermeneutical phenomenology, considered dialectical in nature, may be one of many and open to re-interpretation (Annells 1996; Tan, Wilson & Olver 2009).

This phenomenological approach is also underpinned by the philosophical assumption that the inquirer’s presuppositions and knowledge are valuable guides that contribute to the inquiry and actually make it a meaningful activity. According to Heidegger, the notion of being-in-the-world means that it is impossible for the researcher to rid their mind of, or bracket out, any pre-understanding, particularly as it is this knowledge of the topic which leads to its identification as an area of research in need of further study (Koch 1995; Lopez & Willis 2004). Bracketing would have been difficult to undertake in the context of the current study, given the extent of my previous engagement in research with young adults who had returned to the parental home (Warner, Henderson-Wilson & Andrews 2012). However, as it is still expected in hermeneutical phenomenology that the researcher will explicitly identify preconceptions and outline how they are being used in the context of the inquiry (Lopez & Willis 2004), I remained reflexive throughout the research process (refer page 80).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is also different from the descriptive phenomenological approach, in that it does not disapprove of the use of a theoretical approach to focus the inquiry and assist with decision-making about the sample, subjects and research questions (Lopez & Willis 2004). It also permits the use of a conceptual framework as a means of interpreting the findings, provided the researcher makes clear how it was applied (Lopez & Willis 2004). This was deemed to be particularly important in the current study, given knowledge of a range of theoretical perspectives was brought to the research.

**Theoretical perspectives**

A number of theoretical perspectives have the potential to offer insight into returning home, including how it is experienced by young adults and their family
members. These theories relate to human development, in terms of the life course perspective, family development theory and individual lifespan development; family interactions, including social capital, social exchange theory, symbolic interactionism and the relational-intergenerational perspective; or the settings in which the family exists, such as the ecological perspective and systems theory.

My knowledge of each of these theories means they would have all, in some way, influenced my interpretations of the findings. However, the emergent themes in the data, as well as differences in their expression between young adults and their parents, suggested that four, namely the life course perspective, family development theory, individual life span theory and social exchange theory, would be particularly pertinent to participants’ experiences. The need to consider wellbeing also emerged, particularly in terms of understanding the implications of the return to co-residence for both parents and their offspring.

These theoretical perspectives also align with the philosophies of hermeneutical phenomenology. For instance, in congruence with the ideas that development is ongoing and ‘multicontextual’ (Berger 2008), Heidegger posits that individuals are temporal- they are ‘thrown’ into the world and continue to strive for forward movement until their finite end (Cerbone 2006; Munhall 2013). Being ‘thrown’ means the options available to a person are not infinite but shaped by their particular stage in the lifespan and the certain society and culture in which they find themselves. Being in this world, according to Heidegger, inherently involves being with others, a notion particularly relevant to theories and frameworks pertaining to the family and the interactions between its members.

**Life course perspective**

The life course perspective examines the event history of an individual and how earlier events shape later outcomes (Hutchison 2003; White & Klein 2008). In doing so, it draws on four major themes, including the interplay of human lives and historical time, timing of lives, human agency and linked lives (Elder Jr.
Accordingly, individuals are said to construct their life courses by planning and making decisions within the constraints of their worlds, influenced in this process by the different restrictions and options they are exposed to as a consequence of being born within a particular cohort and also their age at the specific time (Elder Jr. 1994). In this way, significant differences exist in pathways because of variations in the cohort, social class, gender and agency of individuals (Elder Jr. 1998; Shanahan 2000).

Although individuals who occupy different positions, family members are connected to each other in a myriad of ways (Perlesz & Lindsay 2003). The concept of ‘linked lives’ acknowledges that societal and individual experiences are connected through the family and its networks, and how these, in turn, offer access to important resources (Elder Jr. 1994; MacMillan & Copher 2005; Mitchell 2000a). As family members, the lives of parents and their offspring are therefore inherently entwined; their respective developmental paths and life course transitions impact on family relationships and, in turn, changes in interactions affect each individual (MacMillan & Copher 2005).

Inherent in this perspective are the concepts of pathways, trajectories and transitions. Pathways are interconnected trajectories of social roles, including education, work, family, and residence, that are pursued by individuals and groups and aggregate in a given society to define the overall structure of the life course (MacMillan & Copher 2005). Trajectories occur over an extended period of time and indicate temporal involvement in major institutions, including schooling, paid employment, marriage and parenthood. These are marked at the beginning and end by transitions, which are typically life events that involve moving from one role to another, beginning or ceasing a course of activity or changing states in a more or less abrupt manner (MacMillan & Copher 2005). Consequently, experiences within one life transition impact on subsequent events, either protecting or altering the life course trajectory.
This perspective is often reflected in studies of young adulthood, particularly given the importance placed on the transitions of finishing school, leaving home, entering full-time employment, marrying and becoming a parent (Leopold 2012; Shanahan, Porfeli & Mortimer 2005). However, as noted earlier in Chapter Two, the idea of transition has come under scrutiny in recent times, namely because it focuses on the supposed ‘failings’ of young people (see, for example, EGRIS 2001; te Riele 2004; Wyn & Woodman 2007). Furthermore, the overriding focus of much research on youth transitions as an essentially individualised experience tends to reinforce the idea that these occur independently of the family, with no apparent repercussions for other members (Gillies 2000; White & Wyn 2013; Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011).

Despite these shortcomings, previous research into returning to co-residence has drawn predominantly on the life course perspective (see, for example, Aquilino & Supple 1991; DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990; Gee, Mitchell & Wister 1995; Mitchell 1998; Mitchell & Gee 1996a; Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2002). This perspective, in facilitating the study of events in terms of their sequence and timing, suits the quantitative nature of these earlier analyses. Its key themes also offer a way of understanding the links between macro-level structures and family change, as well as the consequences of returning home in terms of future life course trajectories and individual/family wellbeing and development (Mitchell 2000a).

**Family life course development framework**

The family life course development framework is designed for understanding families rather than social groups or social interaction in general, focuses on the systematic and patterned changes experienced by families as they move through the stages and events of their life course (White & Klein 2008). It acknowledges the development of the family as a group process, one that is regulated by both internal rules and social timing and sequencing norms.
Consequently, this theory proposes that the norms associated with family transitions do not exist in isolation from other significant social institutions; both individuals and families deviate from their own family norms in order to adapt their behaviour to suit other institutional norms, such as work and education (White & Klein 2008). However, in cases where a family or individual becomes ‘out of sequence’ with the normative ordering associated with one institution, they are more likely to become desynchronised with other institutions (White & Klein 2008). Being ‘off time’, as in transitioning too early or late, is typically associated with negative consequences, including an increased likelihood of experiencing later life disruption.

The framework can be criticised for holding on to its more traditional assumptions of a ‘standardised’ life course (Lamanna & Riedmann 2012). However, it is counter-argued that, when pursued by successive cohorts who accept the consequences of being ‘off time’, norms and roles considered ‘deviant’ can come to represent the new dominant norm (White & Klein 2008). This is worth considering in relation to the transition to adulthood and returning home; young people are taking longer to enter into the ‘family life course’, with the return to co-residence often implicated.

The notion of the family life cycle is also relevant because returning to co-residence may ‘prolong’ the launching phase. Stages in the family life cycle are characterised by the addition or subtraction of family members and changes in the family’s connections with other social institutions (Lamanna & Riedmann 2012; Strong, DeVault & Cohen 2011). Beginning with the single adult, the next stage of the family life cycle involves finding a partner and forming a new couple. They then become a couple with children and, as their offspring mature, a couple with teenagers. Parents then enter the launching of children stage, after which they are said to experience an empty nest (Strong, DeVault & Cohen 2011). As they enter later life, they may then experience grandchildren. However, as is the case with individual lifespan theory, each stage in the family
life cycle has specific developmental tasks that must be mastered before transitioning to the next stage (Lamanna & Riedmann 2012).

**Individual life span theory**

Individual life span theory focuses primarily on the development of a person and the factors affecting their progress throughout the life span. Since many of these factors are found within a familial context, this approach cannot ignore their influence on individual development (White & Klein 2008).

Berger (2008) proposes that development is multidisciplinary, multicultural, multicontextual, multidirectional and plastic. While each of these is applicable to the study of returning home, the latter three notions are particularly pertinent; these acknowledge that change occurs in all directions (multidirectional), in different situations (multicontextual) and is ongoing (plasticity) (Berger 2008). There has been a decline in relatively predictable, linear pathways, with the leaving home transition no exception (Beer, Faulkner & Gabriel 2006; Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1999). Departures have become disconnected from other life events to which they have previously been associated; young adults who leave are increasingly likely to return home rather than progress to continuing independence, such as marriage and home ownership (Winter & Stone 1999).

Moving back and forth between the parental home and one’s own place of residence is often labeled an incomplete or unstable transition within the academic literature (Natalier 2007). As noted in Chapter Two, the use of the ‘transition’ metaphor has been challenged for this very reason. It is argued that such an approach is underpinned by the assumption that the pathway to adulthood is determined by psychosocial processes that can be ‘brought back on track’ in order to conform to the more ‘normal’ (universal) set of behaviours (Wyn & Woodman 2006). For instance, returning home has been suggested as a consequence of the delayed development of young adults, in terms of lack of direction, dependency on their parents and an inability to establish relationships
outside the home (Young 1987). With those in the early adult years, according to Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development, striving for ‘intimacy’ in terms of the formation of healthy friendships and a romantic relationship with another person in order to avoid isolation (Santrock 2008), these propositions imply a negative association between young adults’ development and returning home.

The assumptions of linearity posited by psychosocial theorists also mean the act of returning home itself is often seen to cause a ‘delay’ in ongoing development. However, a quantitative study in the United States challenges these assertions, suggesting that ‘boomerang’ living arrangements do not hinder psychosocial development in ‘emerging adulthood’ (Patterson 2012). Instead, emerging adults aged 18 to 25 were more likely to boomerang to the parental home as they successfully resolved the crisis of incarnation versus impudence proposed by Erikson in relation to this lifespan stage. Incarnation is seen when a young person accepts (especially financial) responsibility for their actions and makes choices in regards to, but not as a result of, parental guidance. Patterson (2012) therefore suggests that incarnation and ‘boomeranging’ are correlated because emerging adults’ primary reason for returning relates to finances. They feel they do not have the resources to continue to maintain their residential independence and therefore take advantage of an opportunity to live with their parents and save money (Patterson 2012). While this may be the case, the correlational nature of the study means further research is necessary in order to determine the causal relationship between returning home and psychosocial development.

It is nevertheless also worth considering the later stage of Erikson’s theory, generativity versus stagnation, as this relates to those aged 25 to 65 and thereby encompasses both the young adults who return home and their parents. Individuals in this stage supposedly aim to be productive and creative, in the hope of achieving a sense of personal fulfilment and of trying to make the world a better place for both one’s own children and the younger generations as a group (Dacey, Travers & Fiore 2009). Considering parents, as middle-aged
adults, must not only feel that they have produced something that will outlive them but also show genuine care for younger generations in order to avoid self-preoccupation (Sigelman & Rider 2012; Sigelman, Rider & De George-Walker 2013), this is particularly pertinent to the perspectives of parents who accept their children back home.

As such, it is also worth noting that development during middle age is often synonymous with the ‘emptying of the nest’. Parents are said to experience a sense of loss when their children become independent and leave home (Dare 2011), with mothers felt to encounter greater distress because they traditionally invest more time and effort into child rearing and therefore have a stronger relationship with their offspring (Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009). The idea that the empty nest challenges women’s coping skills persists in the literature, despite conflicting evidence (see Bouchard 2014). While research suggests mothers can express a degree of ambivalence about what an empty nest means for their lives, they also recognise and welcome this period as a new and exciting time (Dare 2011). It is seen as an important stage in their child’s move to increased independence and also a chance to pursue their own personal goals and interests (Dare 2011), with most women considering the launching of children a growth opportunity for both parties (Guthrie et al. 2004; Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009). Indeed, the majority highlight positive psychological effects once their offspring move out, including enhanced personal growth, better-quality marital relations and more leisure time, and feelings of mastery in successfully raising and launching their offspring (Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009).

Whereas the physical distance created through the departure of children often provides the impetus for young adults to develop their own identities away from the family and for parents to shift their attention from their children to their marriage (Johnson & Wilkinson 1995), it is important to recognise that parenting does not simply end once children leave home (Dillaway 2006). An analysis of narrative from parents of adult children, although collected as part of clinical practice, suggested that parenting is a lifelong process, characterised by both
joys and anxieties (Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005). In relation to offspring success, dominant themes included ‘it doesn’t matter what they do so long as they are happy’ as well as ‘the need for independence’ and ‘returning home represents failure’. While they recognised that ‘adult children have obligations to parents’, the narratives also reflected the themes ‘it is not fair to worry the children, they have lives of their own’ and ‘protecting the children through keeping secrets’. In terms of their relationship, the themes included ‘the need to be ill in order to remain connected’ and ‘parents need to be free’ (Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005). This last theme related to the construction of the relationship in terms of dependence; it was as if remaining connected was somehow incompatible with the freedom to pursue new interests, such that a rigid ‘either-or’ position developed whereby the only choices are total sacrifice of parental wishes or a distancing process which would result in a fractured relationship. The authors concluded that it is time to study a shift in pattern away from ‘independence’ towards a paradigm of the continuous connectedness of parents and children throughout the lifecycle (Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005).

This is particularly pertinent when it comes to the return to co-residence. Johnson and Wilkinson (1995) argue that most families can cope with the return to a shared living arrangement and actually use it as an opportunity to address their developmental goals in a more direct way, though family members need to openly discuss a clear set of boundaries and guidelines in order to continue developing normally.

As this study explores the experiences of parents and children within families, it is also important to consider how the developmental stages of each individual may influence the other. The intergenerational stake hypothesis, albeit used primarily to explain discrepancies in reports of the parent-child relationship, purports that each generation has different concerns and therefore holds a different ‘stake’ in their relationship with the other (Bengston & Kuypers 1971; Giarruso, Stallings & Bengston 1995). For instance, parents are more concerned
with continuing the values they believe are important in life and maintaining close relationships in the family they have created, meaning they tend to minimise conflict and overstate solidarity with their children (Giarruso, Stallings & Bengston 1995; Shapiro 2004). Young adults, in contrast, are more driven to establish independence from their parents, both in terms of values and social relationships, and have less commitment to the parent-child relationship, such that they tend to understate solidarity and overstate contrasts and conflict. These differences also explain variance in opinions and orientations between the generations, regardless of the issues in focus. For instance, it is the older generation’s interest in continuity and transmission, compared to the stake of the younger generation in autonomy and innovation, that underpins differences between parents and young adult children (Giarruso, Stallings & Bengston 1995). By extension, it is this investment that may also explain why parents extend support to their grown children during the transition to adulthood (Fingerman et al. 2012a).

**Social exchange theory**

This theory assumes that social behaviours involve a series of exchanges through which individuals attempt to maximise benefits and minimise costs (Vogl-Bauer 2009). In certain situations, particularly those in which individuals are given rewards from others, reciprocity becomes important; individuals are expected to provide benefits to the other party in exchange (Vogl-Bauer 2009).

Both DaVanzo and Goldscheider (1990) and Veevers and Mitchell (1998) considered the costs and benefits in their respective analyses, the former in their prediction of the factors contributing to a return and the latter in terms of the levels of support and exchanges between parents and boomerang children. It was found that children obtain more frequent instrumental and emotional support than their parents, while parents consider that they receive more emotional support than their children admit giving (Veevers & Mitchell 1998).
Perceptions of rewards and costs, therefore, vary for parents and their adult children. Both parties may view the return home as highly rewarding, one may view the return as positive while the other does not or both parties may view the return home as very costly (Mitchell 2006b). Those external to the family may also perceive the rewards and costs for parents and adult children differently; some may view a young adult’s return as a positive event for the both them and their parents, while others may see it as an indicator of a failure by the parents and/or children (Vogl-Bauer 2009).

The roles that parents and adult-children adopt may also be viewed in relation to costs and rewards. Some parents and children may be unwilling to revert to previously held roles, while others may be happier to discuss issues that were once problematic in their relationships (Vogl-Bauer 2009).

Social exchange theory, like the previous two theoretical perspectives encompasses connections to wellbeing. Ryff (1989) identifies that dimensions of wellbeing not only draw on developmental theories but these theories also emphasise wellbeing in terms of individuals’ abilities to manipulate and control complex environments. It is therefore worth noting this concept, as it also influenced my interpretation of the participants’ experiences.

**Wellbeing**

Defining wellbeing is complex, as it requires consideration be given to many aspects of people’s lives as well as an understanding of their relative importance (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2011). Wellbeing is also a social construct, meaning the concept can be reinvented anywhere and at any time (Manderson 2005). Therefore, while there is no unified definition of wellbeing, both experts and lay people worldwide suggest it involves meaningful engagement with life (Seligman 2002). It requires meeting various human needs, some of which are essential (such as being in good health), as well as the ability to pursue one’s goals, to thrive and feel satisfied and content with life (OECD 2011).
Drawing on earlier work from the OECD, published in the 1970s, the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest that wellbeing involves sufficiency in all aspects of life, including physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions (Trewin 2001). It includes having support from family and the community; freedom from disability and illness; the capacity to realise personal potential through education; participation in satisfying and rewarding work; control over economic resources; shelter, security and privacy through housing; personal safety; and time for and access to culture and leisure activities. Consequently, wellbeing is influenced by life events and transitions, as well as transactions between the individual and society (Trewin 2001).

Also acknowledging that a sense of wellbeing involves more than happiness and life satisfaction, Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed a multifaceted model of wellbeing. This model identified six dimensions that illustrate the meaning of being well (Ryff & Keyes 1995). These include environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth (Ryff & Keyes 1995) (refer Table 3).
Table 3: The definitions of the theory-guided dimensions of wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental mastery</strong></td>
<td>Ability to manage the environment, make effective use of surrounding opportunities and choose/create contexts that suit personal needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-acceptance</strong></td>
<td>Having positive attitudes towards oneself, acknowledging and accepting all personal qualities and feeling positive about past life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive relations with others</strong></td>
<td>Having warm, satisfying, trusting relationships and the capacity for empathy and affection; appreciating give and take in relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomy</strong></td>
<td>The ability to self-determine and resist social pressures, be independent, self-regulate behaviour and evaluate oneself by personal standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose in life</strong></td>
<td>Having goals and a sense of direction, feeling there is meaning to present and past life and holding beliefs that give life purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal growth</strong></td>
<td>Feeling as though one is continually growing and developing, improving in self and behaviour over time and realising their potential.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Adapted from Ryff and Keyes (1995, p. 727))

These six criteria of wellbeing are traditionally used as self-report scales, administered to individuals in order to assess each of the separate dimensions (Ryff 1989). Respondents rate themselves on each item according to a six-point scale; the scores obtained within each dimension are added together to give six dimension scores (Clarke et al. 2001). Higher scores indicate greater agreement within the dimension being assessed, though the scores from each dimension should not be added to generate an overall wellbeing rating (Clarke et al. 2001).

With a focus on measurement, quantitative conceptualisations of wellbeing are common in the literature. Dodge and colleagues (2012) also suggest that researchers have predominantly focused on dimensions or descriptions of wellbeing rather than definitions (see Charlemagne-Badal et al. 2014). They therefore propose that wellbeing is a state occurring when “individuals have the
psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge” (Dodge et al. 2012, p. 230). These authors argue that because wellbeing is the balance point between one’s resource pool and the challenges they face, it dips when individuals have more challenges than resources and vice versa.

Given its links to resources, the family environment can have important implications for individual wellbeing (Trewin 2001). It is therefore worth considering what constitutes family wellbeing. Family wellbeing refers to the health, happiness and prosperity of the family unit as a whole in addition to its individual members (Babington 2006). According to Babington (2006), family wellbeing encompasses elements of safety, physical and mental health; supportive intra-family relationships, including possession of effective conflict resolution skills, opportunities to learn values, traditions, languages and ideas deemed important to the family, along with receipt of assistance and encouragement from family members; social connections outside the family, including in the local community; and economic security and independence. In addition, Karakas, Lee and MacDermid (2004) identified family wellbeing as involving emotionally healthy and happy family members; spending high quality time with family members and enjoying each other’s company; having opportunities for leisure activities and to relax in free time; high quality communication and support; and high quality child care and education.

The concept of wellbeing, in relation to both individuals and families, forms part of the pre-understanding that I brought to this research. Acknowledging this understanding is integral to the methodology employed in this study, as is identifying my position as the researcher.

**Researcher position**

Reflexivity, the process whereby researchers acknowledge “both (their) own effect on the data generation as a participant in the field, and on the social and
cultural processes of the research itself” (Green & Thorogood 2009, p. 286), is
an essential component of qualitative research. Those who adopt a
constructivist approach are encouraged to be reflexive about the constructions
(including preconceptions and assumptions) that have informed their inquiry
(Charmaz 2003). Likewise, the hermeneutical phenomenological approach
requires the researcher to give considerable thought to their personal
experience and to explicitly identify how this position relates to the issues being
researched (Laverty 2003).

Drawing on Heidegger’s concept of being constituted, I acknowledge that my
understanding is influenced by my background and the possibilities and
constraints it creates. My own family experiences, including the close
relationships I have with my parents and my role as a daughter, had the
potential to create difficulties when encountering other families. However, given
my previous work in the area of Family Studies, I recognise there are multiple
ways to encounter ‘family’; I thus remained open to this challenge and the
possibility the current study would offer new ways of understanding (Chesla
1995).

This research builds upon my Honours project, which adopted a
phenomenological approach to explore young adults’ decisions about returning
home from a wellbeing perspective (Warner, Henderson-Wilson & Andrews
2010). While this earlier work meant I came to the current study with previous
knowledge of the returning home phenomenon, this was of great assistance.
The results of this previous research, albeit offering an in-depth snapshot of the
young adults’ experiences, highlighted that a more holistic approach was needed
to fully understand the returning home phenomenon. This, together with my
ongoing interest in family relationships, ultimately prompted the decision to
undertake further research, inclusive of both young adults and their family
members.
The previous research also assisted with the identification of appropriate methodologies in qualitative research and phenomenology and the selection of interviews as a suitable data collection method. It further aided in the development of the interview guide (refer Appendix 1), a list of pre-conceived questions deemed relevant in light of the study aims and engagement in the returning home literature. Although potentially influencing responses, the guide was used flexibly to reduce the potential impact of my preconceptions; participants were given the opportunity to share their unique experiences and the different aspects of their situations they deemed meaningful.

In terms of data collection, it is important to recognise that the complex and variable nature of experiences, as well as the influence of social interactions during the interview process, can create different accounts. Changes in interviews, whether related to time, place, gender or age of the interviewed, can also result in different versions of events, each with their own inflections, interpretations and claims (Adler & Adler 2001). Therefore, I acknowledge that my similarity in age to the young adult participants may have influenced their willingness to share their personal experiences. While each provided rich information about their return home, there was the potential that some may have felt reluctant to open up for fear of being judged, particularly given their comments regarding the negative feedback they received about living with their parents from members of wider society. However, on the contrary, they may have felt that our likeness in age meant that I was better able to appreciate aspects of their experiences, including the challenges they encountered, and thus their need to return home.

With regards to the parents interviewed, several recognised similarities between their children and myself. They often suggested that we were of like age, making reference to my circumstances when discussing young adulthood. One mother, when describing the propensity for young people to take longer than her generation to start working full-time, suggested that “probably you’re in that boat, you are that person so you know, you’re not starting out doing stuff
"independently by yourself until you’re a lot older”. Making comparisons may have helped the parents relate to me, as they potentially would to one of their child’s friends whom they met for the first time. However, it was equally possible that their perceptions of me as a young person affected what they shared; considering one mother’s inferences about my age (she commented that she had been parenting “more years than you’ve been alive, isn’t it?”), they may have felt I was ill equipped to understand their parental perspective. In an attempt to attend to this, I highlighted that I was not a parent and was therefore interested in what they could offer in terms of their experiences when their young adult offspring returned home.

The data analysis phase provided additional opportunities for reflexivity. The thorough and in-depth coding techniques, including the revision of transcripts from each participant individually, in relation to others in the same cohort as well as the other member of their dyad (refer page 101), enabled reflection on how the data were coded. Moving between the ‘parts’ and ‘whole’ of the texts, as part of the hermeneutic circle, was also enabled by the use of a reflective journal (Laverty 2003). I documented my thoughts and notes throughout the study, though particularly during data collection and analysis to assist in the process of reflection and interpretation (Laverty 2003) (refer page 104).

In terms of the writing stage, Creswell (2007) recognises that how researchers write reflects their own interpretations, which are, in turn, based on the cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics they bring to the research. As such, it is necessary to recognise myself as a young adult, middle class woman. I was aware of the possibility, given I consider myself a young adult, of either emphasising the younger family members’ experiences or to over-compensate by focusing more on the parents’ perspective. I was therefore acutely conscious of the need to present the findings in such a way that the accounts of both the young adults and their parents were not prioritised one over the other.

Ultimately, the interaction between the text and the world of the interpreter means my interpretation is likely to differ from others. Furthermore, my account
may differ to one made at a later stage, as my world may have changed in the interim (Tan, Wilson & Olver 2009). Consequently, although it is important to remain reflexive, a definitive interpretation is never possible (Annells 1996).

In summary, this chapter has outlined the methodology applied in this study. Adopting a qualitative approach, and more specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, offered the opportunity to explore the phenomenon of returning to co-residence with both parents and young adults. It ensured I remained open to all possibilities but also allowed me to bring my own particular knowledge to the research. This included an understanding of returning home and relevant theoretical perspectives, specifically the life course perspective, family development framework, individual lifespan and social exchange theories as well as the concept of wellbeing. However, most importantly, this methodology offered my participants the chance to be genuinely heard, as they shared their thoughts, concerns and experiences of returning home. The following chapter identifies the methods used to gain access to these experiences.
Chapter Four: Methods

“Anyone who writes about a research method, other than the original author, is writing about his or her interpretation of that method because it is method as filtered through the eyes of that second person” (Corbin 2009, p. 35). Therefore, this chapter will describe the methods as I applied them in the context of the current study. It commences with an overview of the ethical considerations before outlining the participants in terms of their eligibility and recruitment and proceeding with a discussion of how their accounts of their experiences were collected. The techniques used for analysis will then be described in order to provide an understanding of the processes used to explore the phenomenon of returning home and thereby generate the findings offered in later chapters.

Ethical considerations and approval

Maxwell (2009) suggests that ethical considerations should be involved in every aspect of the research design. This study was therefore undertaken in accordance with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 2007).

Ethical approval for this study was sought from Deakin University and was obtained from the Human Ethics Advisory Group-Health (HEAG-H) on 27 July 2011. Each participant was sent a Plain Language Statement (PLS) detailing the study in appropriate terms (refer Appendix 2). Written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of the interview.

The emergent nature of the qualitative research design can create challenges when attempting to obtain informed consent (Daly 1992). In particular, discussions involving family life have the potential to cover a diverse range of topics, making it difficult for researchers to fully inform participants of the precise scope of the research at the outset (Daly 1992). Consequently,
qualitative researchers are encouraged to inform participants of their rights to dictate their own boundaries in terms of their privacy and to withdraw at any stage (Daly 1992). In the current study, participants were informed of their rights via their respective PLS.

It was also acknowledged at the outset that participants might disclose more during the interviews than they originally anticipated. While this potentially extended beyond the researcher’s control, it was imperative that participants’ privacy was respected. Researchers need to offer to withdraw segments of data from the record and also check participants are not experiencing discomfort (Daly 1992). Participants were encouraged to determine their own boundaries in terms of what they discussed during the interview and were given the option to identify segments to be excluded from the record when reviewing their transcripts. Access to counselling services was also offered to individuals if they became distressed as a result of participation, though no one contacted the researcher regarding this matter.

Issues with disclosure may be further compounded in cases where more than one family member is interviewed. In the context of the current study, the paucity of research into family members’ perspectives of returning home meant it was considered beneficial to highlight similarities and differences within families. However, while the use of linked interviews with related family members provides a unique opportunity to explore different perspectives, this method also raises important ethical issues (Daly 1992; Holdsworth & Morgan 2005). In such situations, the juxtaposition of individuals’ comments with those of their family members may have meant that each participant, in being able to recall their own comments, would potentially be made aware of what was disclosed by their child or parent(s) (Eisikovits & Koren 2010; Forbat & Henderson 2003).

Social researchers acknowledge the importance of careful consideration about respecting anonymity and its implications for the presentation of data in such
situations, though often suggest they ultimately make the decisions about how these should be managed (Wiles et al. 2008). In the context of the current study, consultation was undertaken with the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Office to devise several techniques aimed at minimising the impact of this approach to the presentation of the findings. Participants were informed via the PLS that their confidentiality may not be assured in such situations where comments were presented together. They were given the option to either agree or refuse to have their results published within family case studies, with consent required from all family members involved before the approach was adopted. While all participants gave their consent, they were also given access to their transcripts after the interviews in order to ensure any comments they no longer wanted to be included as part of the case studies were identified. Participants were further asked to confirm they agreed to the approach at the time of their second interviews. From my standpoint as the researcher, I also worked in consultation with my supervisors to review the comments of family members before publication to ensure the use of family cases did not increase the likelihood of discomfort for the individuals or family as a whole.

All data collected was stored in a safe and secure manner at Deakin University in accordance with protocol (Office of Research Integrity 2010). Identifying information was removed during the transcription process. Participants’ real names are replaced by pseudonyms in this thesis. It is important to note, however, that in Chapter Six, when biographies of the ten families are outlined, false surnames are used. The decision to keep the details of the parents and young adults separate from their pseudonyms was felt to assist with the protection of their anonymity.

Participants

Eligibility of study participants
As previously outlined, researchers generally define ‘boomerang kids’ as those who have left home for a period of four months, returned home and lived with
their parents for at least four months (Mitchell 2006a, 2006b). Therefore, young adult participants were eligible had they returned to reside with their parents after previously living out of home for a period of at least four months. It is recognised that those who spend less than this period out of home are more likely to have temporarily left; their reasons for returning could be very different from those of individuals who return after more definite transitions out of home (Mitchell 2006a).

According to the definition of ‘boomerang kids’, individuals would have only been eligible to participate had they been living back in the parental home for at least four months (Mitchell 2006a, 2006b). However, it was decided not to impose this restriction on participants, instead recruiting those who had returned and were currently living with their parents. The rationale behind this criterion was two-fold. Firstly, it was identified that returners were defined in a recent Australian analysis as those who had previously left home but were currently living in the parental home (Flatau et al. 2007). Secondly, given the focus of the study was to explore individuals’ diverse experiences of returning home, using a more stringent definition would have potentially restricted data generation. Incidentally, the young adults recruited had been living back in the parental home for an average of 11 months, with the shortest duration two months and the longest three years.

Participation was open to both males and females between the ages of 18 and 35 years. This age range had been defined as young adulthood in a previous Australian study of home returning (Kilmartin 2000) and was considered the period when most young adults were likely to return (ABS 2008). It also took into account that home returning peaks between one and two years after leaving (ABS 2008; Young 1987, 1989); considering the propensity for young adults to remain at home into their twenties (ABS 2008, 2009a, 2009b), this range was inclusive of those who may have left home at later ages and then returned.
This study aimed to obtain multiple perspectives of the returning home phenomenon. Therefore, parents were also invited to participate, provided they were currently living with a young adult who met the aforementioned criteria. It was decided, given the diversity of Australian families (Poole 2007; Robinson 2009), not to impose additional eligibility requirements on parents; they could be related to the young adults biologically or through step-relationships, adoption or fostering. As such, no family types were excluded from being involved in this study.

**Sampling and recruitment**

In accordance with qualitative methods, non-probability sampling techniques were employed in the current study (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam 2003). Purposive sampling enabled the selection of individuals who met the eligibility criteria and were willing and able to provide detailed information about returning home as the central phenomenon under investigation (Patton 2002; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam 2003).

The recruitment of participants commenced in late July 2011, with flyers outlining the study (including the eligibility criteria) positioned in a range of locales, including noticeboards in public libraries, churches and university campuses (refer Appendix 3). Written advertisements were also published in school and university newsletters, as well as online university forums.

The lack of interest generated through these outlets resulted in a revision of the recruitment strategy, with the focus turning to newspaper advertisements given their wider audience. After consultation with the Media Coordinator at Deakin University, a small advertisement was prepared (refer Appendix 4). This was submitted to a well-circulated Victorian newspaper and appeared in the section targeted towards recruiting volunteers for health-related research. It was first published on August 13 2011 and appeared in several Saturday editions during late August and early September.
However, the nature of this section of the newspaper—where items were printed at no cost and therefore advertising space was in high demand—meant that publication of the advertisement was not ongoing. This meant that the interest in study participation was again limited, with only three individuals coming forward.

Subsequent revisions of the recruitment strategy resulted in further consultations with the Media Coordinator and the development and dissemination of a media release (see Deakin University 2011). This document briefly outlined the results of the researcher’s previous Honours work regarding the experiences of young adults, before highlighting the current interest in families’ perspectives of the returning home transition. A request for participants was subsequently incorporated, with the eligibility criteria and researcher’s contact details stipulated.

The media release resulted in newspaper articles in one regional and two state-wide Victorian newspapers (see, for example, Doherty 2011). These articles adopted a similar approach to the media release and encouraged individuals who met the eligibility criteria to make contact with the researcher, either by telephone or email, if they were interested in being involved.

During subsequent discussions about the study, arrangements were made for a PLS and consent form (refer Appendix 2) to be distributed electronically via email. As part of this communication, it was also explained that, having received and read the PLS, if individuals agreed to take part in the study, they needed to re-contact the researcher to arrange a time for interview.

In summary, recruitment of eligible individuals was targeted through two approaches (refer Figure 1). The first aimed to recruit young adults who had returned home, while the second approach focused on the parents of young adult returners; once involved, it was anticipated that these participants would
assist in the recruitment of their other family members (either parents or offspring) in a process similar to snowball sampling.

Figure 1: Approach to sampling and recruitment

Participants were also encouraged to pass the details of the research onto individuals in their personal networks that may have been suitable for the study, as a means of snowball sampling (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008; Morse & Richards 2002). Although several of the mothers and the young adults identified in their interviews that they knew of others who had experienced returning home and would inform them of the study, this did not appear to lead to additional participants.

It is worth noting that smaller sample sizes are common in qualitative studies (Llewellyn, Sullivan & Minichiello 2004; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam 2003), particularly given the aim is to explore meaning rather than make generalisations (Crouch & McKenzie 2006). However, the question of exactly how many participants is often debated within the literature and seemingly depends on a number of factors, including data quality, the amount of useful information generated by each participant, the use of shadowed data, the focus of the study and its aims as well as the qualitative method and study design (Morse 2000). In phenomenological research, the key question to ask when making decisions regarding the sample size is whether it offers access to sufficient, appropriately focused data and therefore enables the research aim to be thoroughly addressed (Carpenter 2010). Generally, the large amount of material obtained from each participant means researchers will need fewer in the study to achieve
a rich data set (Carpenter 2010; Morse 2000). Recommendations regarding sample size vary, with Morse (2000) suggesting between six and 10 participants and Creswell (2007) arguing for a sample between five and 25. With both recommendations widely adhered to by phenomenological doctoral studies (Mason 2010), the sample size of 10 families (21 participants) utilised in the current study was deemed methodologically appropriate. It was also considered to provide sufficient data in relation to families’ experiences of the return to co-residence, particularly given the length of conversations with participants (refer page 95); the commonality of the key themes among the participants; the inclusion of follow-up interviews (refer page 98) and the in-depth nature of the dyadic analysis process (refer page 99).

While more detailed biographies of these families are provided in Chapter Five (refer page 108), it is worth noting that the sample includes seven dual-parent families (including one step-parent) and three headed by single women. The families ranged in size from two \( (n=2) \) through to five members \( (n=2) \), though a family of four was the most common \( (n=5) \).

The 21 participants included 11 parents (10 mothers and one father) mostly aged in their 50s and 10 young adult offspring (six sons and four daughters), who were on average 24 years and eight months of age. Three of the young adults were lone children; of the remaining seven, five were one of two children and two were one of three offspring. In terms of birth order, most of the young adults were the oldest \( (n=6) \); three were the youngest and one was the middle child in their family.

In terms of relationship status, eight of the 11 parents were married; of the remaining three, one had a partner who lived elsewhere and the other two described themselves as single. None of their young adult offspring were married, though five were in relationships at the time of the first interview. The remaining five were not partnered, though two of these ended up forming
relationships in the six months between interviews. All participants described their relationships as heterosexual in nature.

Both the parents and young adults were highly educated. Six parents had completed tertiary studies, while the remaining five had undertaken vocational training after leaving school. All of the young adults had completed, or were in the process of completing, a post-school qualification. Seven attended university (including two who were currently enrolled), while the remaining three were all undertaking courses at vocational training institutions at the time of their interviews.

With regards to employment, five of the 11 parents were working full-time. Of the remaining six, two worked part-time, three were retired and one described themselves as a stay-at-home parent. Two of the retirees had left employment due to disabilities and relied on Government support payments. Three of the young adults were employed full-time, five worked on a part-time or casual basis and two were unemployed. Two of those who worked part-time, together with the two who were unemployed, also described receiving financial support from the Government.

In terms of living arrangements, four of the seven families with multiple children had other offspring living in the household at the time of the young adult’s return. The young adult participants had spent, on average, 19 months living separately and, having returned home, been co-residing with their parents for 11 months.

**Data generation**

Individual interviews offer thorough subject coverage, including the opportunity for comprehensive investigations of individuals’ personal perspectives (Maxwell 2009; Ritchie 2003; Taylor & Bogdan 1998). Due to this depth of focus, interviews are particularly useful in research that requires an understanding of
deeply embedded phenomena or responses to complex systems, processes and experiences (Ritchie 2003).

Interviewing is a common method employed in qualitative and, more specifically, phenomenological studies, as it allows participants to raise and discuss issues that are important to them in their own words (Denscombe 2010; Heath et al. 2009). As it was therefore important that each person was given the opportunity to tell their story from their own perspective, without concern for how others would react to their experiences and the potential issues they raised, it was decided to conduct interviews with each person individually (Eisikovits & Koren 2010).

**Interview setting**

The parental home would have been the logical location for the interviews, given suggestions that qualitative research be undertaken within participants’ natural settings (Creswell 2007). Adler and Adler (2001), albeit suggesting that the friendliness of the home offers a suitable setting in which to raise potentially emotional, sensitive or private issues, also acknowledge that some topics are better discussed elsewhere, especially when respondents do not want to talk around other people in their homes. In the current study, the participants may have discussed confidential information when describing their personal experiences. This, together with the possibility participants would not consent to the use of family case studies (refer page 87), meant that I decided to minimise the potential for conversations to be overheard by others in the household by conducting interviews outside the parental home.

Consequently, participants were asked to identify a neutral location where the interview could take place, with options including cafes, local libraries or workplaces. The majority of the interviews were conducted at cafes near to participants’ homes; a few of the interviews were undertaken in common areas within participants’ workplaces, as these were more suitable. The date and time of the interview was also selected by the participants in order to minimise any
inconvenience. As such, interviews occurred on various days of the week and at
different times of the day during the months of October, November and
December 2011. The interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes and two
hours.

**Interview procedure**

Phenomenological interviews, according to Moustakas (1994), ask two broad,
general questions of participants (What have you experienced in terms of the
phenomenon? What contexts have influenced these experiences?). However,
according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), phenomenological interviews are
semi-structured, with an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and
includes a list of proposed questions.

The lack of consensus in regards to the most appropriate interview structure
meant alternatives were explored. The narrative interview was felt to offer a
useful solution, mediating between the freedom to unfold subjective viewpoints
and the thematic direction of what is discussed (Flick 2009). This form of
interview commences with a generative question, one that encompasses the
topic of the study and aims to encourage the participant to reveal their story
(Flick 2009). However, in order to maintain congruency between the narrative
and the research question, it is important that this question being asked is both
broad, to elicit a participant’s story, and specific enough to enable an interesting
domain to be taken up later as a central theme (Flick 2009). This occurs,
according to Flick (2009), in the subsequent stage of probing, whereby the
researcher questions each participant more directly about fragments that were
not previously discussed in exhaustive detail. The application of this technique in
the current study will now be discussed.

During all sessions, I adopted the role of an active listener, allowing participants
to discuss their experiences in detail. The tone of the interviews remained
reasonably conversational and informal (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008). This
facilitated the development of positive rapport; a critical requirement for participants to open up and discuss their experiences (Minichiello et al. 2004).

Interviews commenced with the presentation of the PLS, with participants given the option to clarify any aspects of the study before their willingness to proceed was confirmed. In cases where individuals had not previously sent a signed consent form, I made a request for one to be signed.

Conversations were digitally recorded where consent was provided by the participant. This allowed me to commit my full attention to participants without distraction (Charmaz 2006). Audio-recording also avoided the potential influence of note-taking, whereby participants may have taken my engagement in writing (or not) to indicate that they were talking too fast or had said sufficient (Legard, Keegan & Ward 2003).

In accordance with Flick (2009), the interview began with an open-ended question. For example, the young adult participants were asked “Could you please tell me about your experiences of returning to the parental home, starting with the time you left home up until this point?” Parents were asked a similar generative question, though they reflected on the return of their child. In doing so, they were asked to start from the time when their child left home and then to describe their related experiences up to the time of the interview.

It was my belief that this open-ended question would allow narratives to unfold. However, participants appeared to be influenced by their own pre-understandings of interviews and what they involve, with many seeming to have difficulty with the open-ended nature of our conversation and asking for more direction. The inherent variation in the ability of individuals to articulate their perspectives has been acknowledged in relation to research involving young people, with Heath and colleagues (2009) suggesting some are simply more adept at narrating their lives than others. However, in the case of the current study, this applied to both the young adults and their parents. For example, one
mother, after providing a fairly brief summary of her current living arrangement with her young adult child, indicated ‘you might need to give me some guidance as to the sorts of questions that you’d like’. Consequently, in several interviews, the unfolding of the narrative was quite limited. This meant that, in accordance with Flick’s (2009) suggestion that the unfolding of the narrative be followed by a stage of probing, I questioned each participant more directly about fragments they had raised (Flick 2009).

It was therefore at this stage that the interviews became more semi-structured in nature. Although the conversation continued to be guided by what had previously been discussed, I referred to the interview schedule for guidance (refer Appendix 1). This was developed in advance and highlighted some of the issues considered potentially relevant to the research questions. The discussion was elicited through the use of open-ended questions, as these were thought to avoid simple responses yet also allow participants the utmost flexibility in choosing how to answer (Gravetter & Foranzo 2003; Heath et al. 2009). Using this schedule meant that the data I obtained was more comprehensive than if no structure had been employed in the latter part of the session (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008).

At the completion of each interview, participants were invited to pass general comment on their experiences of returning home. They were thanked for their time before being informed that they would be sent a copy of their transcript for review and a summary of results on completion of the project.

Participants were given a movie ticket as a token of appreciation for their involvement in the research. Although the benefits of providing goods, services, payment or gifts to respondents in order to gain their involvement are debated within the literature (Adler & Adler 2001), it was anticipated that the receipt of a movie ticket was not likely to represent a substantial incentive that would overwrite individuals’ perceptions of the personal costs and benefits when deciding to take part. Incidentally, several parents indicated they would pass the
movie ticket on to their offspring rather than use it themselves, while other participants declined to accept the token altogether.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with participants during June, July and August 2012, approximately six months after the timing of the initial meeting. Earthy and Cronin (2008) suggest that interviewing a research participant on more than one occasion is advantageous in that the gap between meetings can provide time for both parties to reflect, with subsequent conversations also allowing aspects to be clarified and explored in greater depth. Therefore, in the current study, the second interview provided an opportunity to discover any changes that had occurred in participants’ living arrangements and also seek clarification and validation of the developing themes from the first round of conversations. These interviews were therefore more structured in nature, with specific questions used to focus the conversations on the particular themes and concepts deemed to have importance. This process of returning to the participants, considered an important part of hermeneutics (Streubert Speziale & Carpenter 2007), thus allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of those involved.

Transcribing audiotaped interviews, as a means of converting data into text for coding and analysis, is widespread in qualitative research (Poland 2001). In the context of the current study, transcription generated detailed records not obtainable from memory or written notes (Johnson 2001; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005; Maxwell 2009). However, it is acknowledged that data ready for analysis is removed from the actual event and should be interpreted in this context. Transcripts of interviews should not be evaluated based on how well participants recall the actual phenomena but instead “the accuracy of their recall of how they felt or experienced or perceived the event at the time” (Morse & Richards 2002, p. 119). With this in mind, the following section outlines how the data was analysed and interpreted.
Data analysis and interpretation

Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis focuses on bringing to life the experience under exploration, through the use of imagination, the hermeneutic circle and attention to language and writing (Laverty 2003). Unlike other methodologies, however, this process cannot be structured by a finite set of procedures, as analysis and interpretation arises from the researcher’s pre-understandings and a dialectical movement between the parts and the whole of the texts of those involved (Koch 1995; Laverty 2003).

This, together with the notion that approaches documented in the literature are like any other text and thus open to interpretation, meant I used a combination of approaches for the analysis and interpretation of the participants’ transcripts. The main approach, ‘interpretive phenomenological analysis’, has intellectual connections to hermeneutics and is concerned with trying to understand, from participants’ own points of view, what it is like to be in their position (Smith & Osborn 2003). Although not prescriptive, Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that the analysis commence with the identification of themes in the first transcript (refer Figure 2). In this study, the initial transcript, incidentally from a parent’s interview, was read a number of times; the underlying patterns and themes, as evidenced by common words, phrases and concepts within the material, were then identified (Coffey & Atkinson 1996; Creswell 2009).
Comments were made in the page margins at this stage, with the left side used for annotations on points of significance, associations, contradictions and preliminary interpretations and the right for the documentation of emerging theme titles (Smith & Osborn 2003). In order to assist with the development of these titles, the statements ‘The return of my child is...’ and ‘The return of my child means...’ were utilised. These were adapted from a phenomenological study of belonging described by Saldaña (2009, p. 139), in which the ‘theming’ of...
the data involved using the phrases ‘belonging means...’ and ‘belonging is...’", where the latter generally referred to concrete details or action and the former to more conceptual ideas. In the context of the current study, examples of these titles included ‘The return of my child is...not a negative thing at all’ and ‘The return of my child means...re-organising space’ (refer Table 4).

These concise titles, which needed to capture both the essential quality of what was said but also allow theoretical connections within and across cases (Smith & Osborn 2003), were then listed in a separate document. This was referred to when reviewing the transcripts of subsequent parents, though additional titles were added to the document as appropriate. Once each transcript from this cohort had been reviewed, the connections between the titles were explored; those that were similar were grouped together and at times collapsed in order to arrive at clusters of themes that effectively encapsulated participants’ perspectives on the topic (Creswell 2009; Smith & Osborn 2003).

The same process was undertaken in regards to the young adults’ transcripts. However, given their more active role as the family member moving home, the statements ‘Returning home is...’ and ‘Returning home means...’ were used to generate the emerging theme titles (refer Table 4). Once the young adults’ transcripts were reviewed, the list of themes was then compared with the earlier list obtained from the parents. I then looked for common themes across the two cohorts in order to construct the final super ordinate themes, which became the basis of the written account of participants’ responses (Smith & Osborn 2003).

Although these themes were common across the young adults and their parents, the existence of multiple realities meant that how these were experienced and the meanings they were ascribed were similar in some aspects yet different in others. Moving between the ‘parts’ and ‘wholes’ of the texts in accordance with the hermeneutic circle, I was thus able to return to the transcripts in order to compare the experiences of individuals within the same
cohort and ensure these nuances were explored. Furthermore, employing the hermeneutic circle also meant that, despite separate interviews being conducted with parents and their young adult offspring, dyadic analysis could be used (Eisikovits & Koren 2010). I was able to move between the individual interviews of each family member, allowing the overlaps and contrasts to be explored (Eisikovits & Koren 2010). Reviewing the two transcripts together as a whole also offered further details of the context in which participants’ experiences were occurring and was thus felt to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Eisikovits & Koren 2010).

These themes were explored with parents and young adults as part of their second interviews. This facilitated a further fusion of horizons, ensuring that the themes were a reflection of the participants’ experiences. These original themes were used to analyse the transcripts from the second interviews, with new theme titles added where appropriate.

The three major themes derived from this analysis form the results chapters and, as such, address the key research questions. Each chapter is divided into two sub-themes, with in-vivo statements used as headings in order to capture the lived experiences of the participants (refer Table 4). Thus, Chapter Six explores how the young adults were accepted back into the parental home, not only in terms of both parties’ perceptions of its availability as an option but also their subsequent feelings towards the living arrangement. Chapter Seven involves an examination of the ways the parents and young adults accommodated each other in the household, including the adjustments made by both parties and their negotiations regarding the younger family members’ financial and practical contributions. Finally, Chapter Eight explores the ways the return to co-residence was appreciated by parents and young adults; they acknowledged that this living arrangement offered a number of benefits but also recognised there would come a time for the young adult to move on.
Table 4: Themes and sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples of emerging titles contributing to theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptance</strong></td>
<td>Always thought that was a possibility</td>
<td>Availability of co-residence to the young adults</td>
<td>Returning home is unexpected</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning is ‘an option to fall back on’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child is ‘the natural thing to do’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning to co-residence is ‘an option open to them if need be’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wasn’t against or for it, I just accepted</td>
<td>How participants felt about the return to co-residence</td>
<td>Returning home means ‘you’re a failure’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning home is the sensible option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child is not a ‘negative thing at all’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child is ‘the way it is’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation</strong></td>
<td>You adjust your life accordingly</td>
<td>Changes when the young adults returned home</td>
<td>Returning home is ‘a re-settling, readjustment period’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning home means a ‘change in my lifestyle’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child means re-organising space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s give and take</td>
<td>Negotiating the young adults’ contribution</td>
<td>The return of my child means ‘there’s a bit more work’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning home means considering the other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appreciation</strong></td>
<td>If you’re open, it can only benefit you</td>
<td>Perceived benefits of returning to co-residence</td>
<td>Returning home means getting back on track</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Returning is a way to get ahead</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child means ‘I don’t miss him anymore’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s time to move on</td>
<td>Recognition of temporary nature of return and future plans</td>
<td>Returning home is a ‘transitional phase’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child is temporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The return of my child means I look ‘more forward’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight present the participants’ experiences. However, with suggestions that the final account should offer a layered analysis that not only encompasses a phenomenological description, which conveys an understanding of the participants’ experience, but also a deeper analysis that draws on the interpretative ideas of the researcher (Eatough & Smith 2008; Larkin, Watts & Clifton 2006; Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009), Chapter Nine offers my interpretation of the parents’ and young adults’ experiences of the return to co-residence.

Interpretations arise through a fusion of the text and its context, as well as the interaction between the participants, the researcher and their contexts (Koch 1995; Laverty 2003). My interpretation therefore emerged as a result of moving between the experiences of the parents and their young adult offspring, the existing literature (refer Chapter Two) and the theoretical perspectives (refer page 67), a process that was facilitated through continual engagement in writing and reflection of my own understandings.

The process of memoing, whereby the researcher makes connections and asks questions about why something is the way it is, does not belong to grounded theory but rather is a strategy that is useful across all qualitative theories and methods (Mayan 2009). Within hermeneutical phenomenology, this process involves the use of a reflective journal. It encourages engagement in the hermeneutic circle and ensures researchers continually question how their interpretations emerged from the data (Laverty 2003). Therefore, in my reflective journal, notes were kept throughout the analysis and interpretation process; all emerging questions and ideas, developing themes and potential relationships between concepts were documented.

Team involvement also adds depth and insight to interpretations, encouraging dialogue, debate and brainstorming (Crist & Tanner 2003). This was facilitated in the current study through discussions with my supervisors, who continually
challenged me to explain how I had arrived at the emerging themes and justify their meaning in relation to the young adults’ and parents’ experiences.

The interpretation was refined until it was felt to represent a plausible account of returning to co-residence for both young adults and their parents. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is unlikely to be universal; interpretations are constructions (Crotty 1996; van Manen 1990) and, in line with the hermeneutic circle, are dialectical in nature and open to re-interpretation (Annells 1996). It nevertheless remains important to ensure the research was carried out appropriately.

**Ensuring quality research**

Within the constructivist paradigm, the quality of an inquiry is judged based on its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Guba & Lincoln 2005; Lincoln & Guba 1985). Researchers need to have confidence that the findings are believable; potentially applicable to other contexts; consistent and repeatable; and shaped by the respondents, not researcher bias, motivation or interest (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In terms of the current study, several specific steps were undertaken to enhance these characteristics.

I documented the research process, including the particularly important decisions related to data generation and analysis (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle 2001). During the initial stages of the data generation phase, the interview guide was piloted, as this facilitated the asking of questions that generated appropriate data and consequently supported the study objectives (Seidman 2006).

Interviews were digitally recorded, thus providing accounts with greater accuracy than would be achieved with notes alone on what was thought to be significant (Maxwell 2009). I then prepared transcripts of each interview,
recognising that those who transcribe their own interviews are better able to ‘get inside’ the data than those researchers who employ others to undertake this process (Morse & Richards 2002).

Although this approach was also thought to minimise the potential discrepancies in interpretation that could occur between transcriber and interviewer/investigator if different individuals embodied these roles, it was acknowledged that transcript quality can still be highly variable (Poland 2001). Therefore, the transcribed interviews were also made available to participants for review, with this process of member checking intended to ensure individuals’ experiences were captured as they had intended (Rossman & Rallis 2003).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that triangulation is also a means of establishing credibility. Triangulation, whereby researchers adopt different approaches to the issue under investigation, should produce knowledge on different levels and, in doing so, extend the understanding further than if only one were to be used (Flick 2009). It also acts as a useful tool for understanding both the complementary and opposing ways reality can be constructed (Sands & Roer-Strier 2006). In the current study, the use of interviews with both young adults and their parents offered greater insight into returning home, and thus contributed to the achievement of a quality study.

As noted earlier (refer page 104), memo writing was undertaken. This was particularly useful for retracing the process by which I arrived at my final findings, especially given the qualitative analysis involved complex and cumulative thinking over an extended period of time (Flick 2009).

In terms of the presentation of the results, thick descriptions have been employed, as these give the discussion an element of shared experiences and ensure the results appear more realistic and true to account (Creswell 2009). Participants’ quotations have been used to support my interpretations and offer the reader a clearer sense of the evidence upon which the analysis was based.
(Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005). However, because verbatim quotes can at times make for difficult reading, it was decided to omit some transcription details in the interest of readability. This occurred post-analysis, with care taken to ensure that what was removed did not alter the meaning of what was said (Poland 2001).

This chapter has outlined the data collection methods, including recruitment and the interview procedure, and the analysis processes employed in this hermeneutical phenomenological study. It has also attended to the ethical considerations involved in the study of families, as well as the key techniques employed as a means of ensuring the quality of the research. The focus will now turn to the findings, beginning with an overview of the interviewed families experiencing the returning home phenomenon.
Chapter Five: Introducing the families

This study involved ten families in which a young adult had returned to the parental home after previously moving out. While participation required the young adults to have spent at least four months out of home and be living with their parents at the time of interview, families varied in how they came to experience these two events. I therefore decided it was more appropriate to provide participants’ biographies in addition to describing generalised information on the sample as a whole (refer page 92). These biographies have been constructed using the details that emerged through the course of the interviews and offer a context for the experiences explored in subsequent chapters.

The Morgan family included both parents and their two young adult daughters. Mrs Morgan, aged in her late 40s, and her husband, aged in his early 50s, were both employed full-time. This was also the case for their youngest daughter, though she was residing outside the parental home with her husband at the time of the study. In contrast, their eldest daughter, aged 26, was working part-time due to study and personal family commitments. She was interviewed for the current study having returned home after five years, primarily for financial reasons, and had been co-residing with her parents for four months.

The Walker family included both parents, aged in their 60s, and their three young adult sons. Mr Walker and his wife were self-employed, with two of their sons contributing to the business. Their third son, who was actually the second child in terms of birth order, was employed elsewhere on a part-time basis. In terms of their living arrangements, their youngest son, aged 26, had not yet departed the parental home. However, his older brothers, who were 29 and 27 respectively, had both moved out and returned to the parental home. While the oldest had spent 18 months outside the parental home prior to returning for financial reasons, his brother’s first return occurred because of practical reasons...
after one year of independent living. After 12 months of co-residence, he moved out again for a further 18 months before his latest return. He had since lived at home for 12 months at the time of the interview.

The Thompson family included both parents, aged in their 50s, and their two young adult children, a daughter aged 26 and a son aged 24. All four family members were employed full-time and sharing the parental household, with their daughter returning home after eight years and their son after five years. They both returned for financial reasons and had subsequently been co-residing with their parents for approximately 11 months at the time of the initial interview.

The Kelly family was comprised of both parents, aged in their 50s, and their three children, aged 25, 22 and 11. Mr Kelly was employed full-time, while his wife remained at home. Their two young adult daughters were employed part-time. Although both had returned to the parental home, the younger of the two had moved out for 12 months and been back for the same length of time, whereas her older sister had lived separately for 18 months. She had returned in need of respite and subsequently been living with her family for three years at the time of the interview.

The Jennings family included both parents, aged in their 50s, and their only daughter, aged 22. Mrs Jennings was retired, though both her husband and their daughter were employed full-time. Having spent three years living separately, their co-residence arrangement began approximately 12 months prior to the interview when Miss Jennings’ sought respite after the ending of her major commitments.

The Anderson family included both parents, aged in their early 50s, and their two young adult sons. Mrs Anderson was employed, though she worked part-time rather than full-time like her husband. Their younger son, aged 22, was employed on a casual basis, though had not yet departed the parental home.
While his older brother, aged 26, was in the process of looking for employment, he had moved out of home on two occasions, the first for one year during his university studies and the most recent time for 10 months. Having returned for a combination of practical and financial reasons, he had been co-residing with his parents for approximately two months prior to being interviewed.

The Harrison family was comprised of two parents, inclusive of a stepparent, and two sons. While her husband was employed full-time, Mrs Harrison, aged in her 60s, was retired. Her eldest son, aged 30, had long since departed the parental home. In contrast, his younger brother, aged 27, had returned on several occasions. His most recent return occurred after approximately 12 months living independently and was due to a combination of emotional and financial reasons, including a lack of full-time employment whilst engaged in full-time university study. He had been co-residing in the parental home for eight months at the time of the interview.

The Romans’ were a single-mother, lone-child family. Both Ms Roman, aged in her mid-40s, and her son, aged 23, were employed full-time. Having spent eight months apart, the two began co-residing again approximately five months prior to the time of the initial interview, after he returned home for financial reasons.

The Stephens’ were also a single-mother, lone-child family. Ms Stephens, aged in her 50s, was employed full-time, while her daughter, aged 21, was working on a part-time basis and studying full-time at university. The two lived separately for two years but been co-residing for approximately 11 months, with Miss Stephens’ return occurring primarily for practical reasons.

A single mother also headed the Evans family, though, unlike the other lone-mothers, she was in her 60s and retired. Her two young adult sons, aged 27 and 26, were employed on full and part-time bases respectively. At the time of the interview, both had been sharing the parental home with their mother for 10 months. The elder of the two had returned after five years because of financial
difficulties. However, his younger brother (who was interviewed for the current study) had previously been in and out on various occasions, first moving out for two years before returning for nearly four and then departing for 10 months prior to his most recent return, namely for practical reasons.

These biographies have offered a snapshot of the ten families in relation to the return to co-residence. This constitutes an event in their lives worthy of exploration, though it must be remembered that it occurs within the context of many years of shared experiences. Such histories undoubtedly continue to shape the parents and their young adult offspring in a multitude of ways, yet their rich and detailed nature mean that participants only begin to offer glimpses in their narratives.

While it is therefore beyond the bounds of this research to explore the complex connections between past and present experiences in their entirety, the young adults’ earlier decisions to depart the parental home must be acknowledged. Without these, the very event of returning to co-residence would not have occurred. Consequently, the subsequent two sections describe the young adults’ reasons for leaving home and also why they returned in order to set the context for the three results chapters that follow. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight explore how the young adults and their parents experienced the return to co-residence, based on the three themes of acceptance, accommodation and appreciation that emerged from the analysis of their narratives.

**You have to set up your own life, don’t you?**

Each of the young adults’ narratives revealed that they left home to pursue new opportunities. For instance, Emma and James departed because of their enrolment in tertiary studies, while Kate and Matthew chose to relocate overseas for employment. Although Andrew and David also moved out on a previous occasion to pursue work opportunities, their more recent departures involved starting anew with their respective romantic partners. Nicole and Sarah
also moved out to be with their partners, though in Sarah’s case this was also because she was preparing for the birth of her first child:

Tim was at uni and we just couldn’t afford it, it was, Mum and Dad and Tim’s parents both offered to have us both living at the one house, my sister was still in high school when I fell pregnant so she was still living at Mum and Dad’s so that was kind of a bit, didn’t want to overcrowd their house too much by moving in with a baby, well staying there with a baby and having Tim and I move in, and Tim’s parents had an empty house, empty bungalow cos both his sisters had moved out with their partners by that stage so it was kind of the decision of whose got the more room and it’s going to less impact which household so we moved in there...

In contrast, the departures of both Ben and Luke appeared to eventuate when the opportunity presented itself. With Ben’s tenant vacating his property, and his financial position stable, he was able to move out. However, he was also motivated by a desire for greater independence and his own space, suggesting that there was “a lot of ongoing tension in (their) household, mostly in relation to privacy”. He commented:

I wasn’t able to have as much privacy as I would’ve if I’d moved in by myself so as I said before offering explanations as to where I’m going, what time I’m coming home, what I’m doing, you know I don’t feel as if I had to report to someone at 21 years of age and that may sound bratty but you know at 21 you’re pretty much an independent person, yeah privacy you know wasn’t able to have who I wanted, when I wanted without questions being asked, and whilst I’m not concerned about what my own mother judges that I’m doing with whoever I still don’t want to have excess questions asked...

14 ‘Mum’ is used in Australia (as well as Britain, New Zealand and South Africa) in reference to someone’s mother, in the same way that ‘Mom’ is used in the American and Canadian language.
15 ‘Cos’ is an abbreviation for ‘because’ commonly used in the Australian vernacular. The participants in the current study also used ‘gonna’ in place of ‘going to’ and ‘wanna’ as an abbreviation for ‘want to’.
People just end up responding to circumstances

The young adults sought to return to the parental home when they experienced changes in their respective situations. For instance, James, who had always felt he would move back home at least for a short time when his university degree ended, returned at the completion of his studies. Emma also returned home after finishing her university degree, though in her case she had actually planned to continue with postgraduate studies and her independent living arrangement. Instead, she returned to the parental home when she became “burnt out” after three years of full-time university and full-time work, feeling that she needed the support her parents could provide.

While Emma’s decision was more emotionally driven, several others returned for financial reasons. Sarah and her partner moved back in with her parents when their ability to save was compromised, as they could no longer put money away for their house deposit because of a substantial rent increase by her landlords. Ben, one of the other interviewed young adults, also identified:
I was gonna plan on living there indefinitely, not really come home but circumstances changed...within about three or four months it was clear that my arrangement, living out of home, was not going to work in the long-term, cos I was paying off the new place and not getting rent for it, my going out expenses were into the stratosphere, was still paying off that bloody car, and I was you know assisting with the other loan, with the other property, so it was all getting a bit unsustainable...

Finding himself in this situation, which he labelled “financial gridlock”, Ben ceased to be able to save for his planned overseas holiday and also had to cut back on his social life. He suggested he was not very happy to make these sacrifices and, given the weakening market conditions, subsequently decided to sell his property and return home.

The remaining young adults were similar to Ben in the sense that, although they attributed their returns to one circumstance, their narratives actually revealed a range of factors underpinning their respective moves. For example, Luke returned home primarily because he was planning to spend some time overseas and did not want the financial commitment of rental payments, though he also suggested he was no longer enjoying the space where he was living and therefore wanted to “regroup and start again”. Matthew also returned after his commitments overseas ended, though in his case his lack of funds and secure employment meant he had no other choice but to live back at home with his parents. Kate similarly attributed her return to the ending of an overseas employment opportunity. She suggested:
...at the end of the two years I was probably ready to come home, I didn’t really have that much more of an idea of what I wanted to do... to a degree I would’ve liked to have stayed more but I knew if I stayed any longer, apart from the fact they didn’t have a job for me but you know that’s, that’s okay, I knew I’d become so entrenched in the place that I’d find it impossible to leave when I eventually needed to and at 21, turning 21, I wouldn’t have had a university education, I’d still be in a first time job in a different country, it just, it was screaming, you know alarm bells were ringing really so yeah I left when my contract ended which was at the end of the year...

However, elsewhere in her narrative, Kate identified other circumstances associated with her return. She added:

...my mum’s health deteriorated, oh it didn’t deteriorate but it changed while I was away for the two years, and I just thought that, you know, this would be a good time to come home and I didn’t think it would be really feasible to you know live [interstate] and come back, I just kinda wanted to be here with her, and stuff like that and also the costs were too much, like living on res and things like that and, as a student, I feel you already start your life in so much debt, if there’s a way of not making that debt bigger, you know you should do that so therefore if I could do the same thing at [interstate university] as I could at [local university], why not just go to [local university]...

David, Nicole and Andrew, albeit each suggesting that their primary reason for returning was the ending of their respective romantic relationship, were also similar to Kate and others in that they too revealed additional issues linked to their decisions. David identified:

I was having issues with [my girlfriend] at the time, and that sort of all fell in so then I moved back home, I didn’t have the money to stay out of home, I didn’t have the money to move somewhere else, I had the job with [labour hire company], but that was sort of on and off at that stage so there was no regular income...
Nicole also attributed her return to the ending of her romantic relationship. She commented:

...Heath [my husband] and I were having financial issues and there was me and my own depression sort of issues, suicide issues and stuff and then yeah ultimately the marriage breaking up so I’m sure he wouldn’t have kicked me out, Heath, he would’ve said ‘You know until you find somewhere you can still live here, we’ll just sleep in different rooms or whatever’ but I, I couldn’t, I didn’t want that so I was very lucky I could, yeah, go back home yeah so ultimately it was the marriage break-up was the biggest reason I went home...

However, her narrative revealed that her ongoing difficulties with mental illness were also implicated in her decision to return home; she “wasn’t always stable so it was good to have that support you know every day of the week”. Her illness also necessitated time away from employment, which meant she was unable to afford independent living and felt she needed to rely on her parents financially while her income stagnated.

In addition to the ending of his relationship and thus his cohabitation arrangement, Andrew’s return to the parental home also reflected the pressures of his other commitments and his aversion to living with his friends. He suggested:

I’m nearly 27, you know if I was five years younger yeah sure but not at this age like I’m too busy, I don’t wanna, most of my friends drink too much and party too much, I just, I’m not interested in that so yeah I didn’t, I didn’t really think about [moving in with others] at all and also there was the financial thing, you know I was studying and didn’t have enough money for a bond or anything like that...

In describing the reasons behind his return, Andrew highlighted the role of broader societal constraints. He was one of the few young adults to do so, despite most of their returns to the parental home being underpinned by these factors in some way. Andrew commented:
...the reason why I’ve moved back home and I think the reason why other people move back home is because you know, there are circumstances you know I’m not sure if you’re looking at like the cost of rental properties and stuff like that but it’s, I mean it’s outrageous how expensive it is to rent things now compared to what it was before so there’s those kind of macro conditions I guess and then there’s the, the small stuff about relationships and making career moves and stuff like that and you know those, those things are, I guess what I’m trying to say is it’s just, my sense is that people just end up responding to circumstances and that’s why they end up living with their parents...

While the parents affirmed their offspring’s reasons for their return, they were seemingly more aware of the influence of wider society. Margaret, Jennifer and Christine all recognised the increased costs of living and how it was therefore “just a lot tougher for young people these days to get ahead” (Christine). Deborah also commented:

I suppose in this day and age you tend to sort of think they will return due to the logistics of not having full-time work, partner break-up cos more are tending to live with a partner or whatever so I suppose yeah there is a reality that they will come back at some point and whether it be I suppose in the short-term because it just hasn’t worked out or maybe a break-up with the partnership or something...

Anne and Bernie highlighted changes to society. They suggested:

...this in and out and in and out the whole of their 20s sort of coming and going…it’s a reflection of the way society is at the moment, first of all they’re in education for a lot longer and that’s not cheap, secondly there’s less permanent employment, when people my age went to school we thought it was the end of civilisation as we knew it when unemployment got to 1.5%, we knew that when we left school and if we went to uni when we left there were jobs available, not ‘Were we going to get a job?’, it was ‘Which one will we take?’ These days it’s a whole different ball game, there’s hardly jobs available and if there are, it’s ‘Am I going to get one?’ – Anne
...the general thing of young adult children staying at home longer is just a function of our society, the way it is and the way it’s developed...I think it’s been a practical choice because of people staying at school longer, you no longer have free universities, you’ve got HECS, you’ve got the whole housing market, certainly in Australian society is sort of cramping the ability of young people to go out independently as far as I’m concerned and it’s more a function of just the environment we live in...to me they would be more independent if it were more practical to be out and doing their own thing and away from their family but they’re forced by the very nature of the cost structure of the housing market, the cost structure of tertiary education is forcing us to stay at home longer... – Bernie

The ten families, albeit different, all found themselves co-residing as a result of changing circumstances. The young adults, having left home to pursue new opportunities, returned to the parental home due to emotional difficulties; the ending of their study commitments; the loss of employment; the breakdown of their relationships; changes in their current housing situations and increasing financial pressures. In describing these reasons, the young adults had a tendency to focus on their own decisions rather than the influence of broader society. Their parents, in contrast, were more aware of the wider influences. Nevertheless, they had to ultimately decide whether or not they would accept the young adults back into their respective homes. How they came to do this, as well as their children’s understanding of the availability of the parental home, is integral to understanding the return to co-residence and therefore begins the series of chapters outlining the family members’ experiences.
Chapter Six: Acceptance

This chapter explores how the interviewed young adults and their parents experienced the return to co-residence, including how they often dealt with conflicting thoughts on the pathway to acceptance. It begins, however, with a discussion of family members’ perceptions regarding the possibility the young adults would return to the parental home and whether or not the option was available for them to do so.

Always thought that was a possibility

Although the return to co-residence occurred more often than not in response to unforeseen changes in the young adults’ circumstances, several dyads had considered living together again a likely possibility. Kate felt she “would always come home”, as her plans to attend an interstate university upon returning from work overseas “was a nice fantasy but it wasn’t going to be a reality”. Similarly, Matthew recognised:

...especially coming back from overseas, I’m like ‘I don’t have any money, I have to live at home, ‘there’s no other choice, really’, no other, this is the easiest choice to make cos I knew like I’ve got good parents and stuff and they’ll put me up and support me while I’m there...

The mothers of these two young adults also anticipated the return to co-residence. Like daughter Kate, Helen recognised her inability to afford the residential fees at her preferred interstate university meant she needed to “live at home cos financially it just wasn’t gonna happen any other way”. Similarly, Lisa acknowledged that son Matthew:
...was broke so he had to come home and we knew that he’d come home, I mean that was sort of expected he’d come home initially because you know he, he was hoping to get work but he didn’t really get much work, he got a few weeks but it didn’t, he was hoping to get more work than that and he didn’t so you know that meant that he ended up borrowing money off us... so yeah and he had this debt and he didn’t have a car...

Both Bernie and wife Deborah also felt daughter Nicole’s return was likely given her circumstances, though in their situation this related to the breakdown of her marriage and difficulties with mental illness. They commented:

_I always thought it was a possibility that they’d come back so yeah it was, I always thought that was a possibility, I thought yes, particularly for Nicole I thought that was a strong possibility, particularly yeah when I saw that the marriage wasn’t working... – Bernie_

...you sort of tend to think ‘Well, it’s always a possibility that this might happen’ more I just think because mentally she was ill and just sort of half the person that she had used to be so I suppose from that point then you start to sort of think ‘Well yeah there is a chance that she’ll come back’... – Deborah

Although Nicole supposed that her parents “were surprised when (she) moved back in”, she also recognised that they probably expected it, suggesting that “given that first suicide attempt and us staying there for a while anyway, I guess it wasn’t a huge shock”. Nevertheless, at the time of her departure, she did not expect to be returning home:

_When I moved out with [my now ex-husband] did I think I’d go back to my parents’ house? No, no, even though I rushed it and all this stuff I thought ‘He’s the one and he’ll always look after me’ and I think he still would be looking after me financially even if we were both miserable in the marriage, that’s the kind of person he is but I was the one who couldn’t deal with it..._
Other young adults were similar, in that they had not anticipated returning to live with their parents. However, for Ben, it was more a case of enjoying independent living:

I didn’t want a bar of it to be honest, I absolutely loved living there, just the lifestyle, the nightlife, no-one hassling me, no landlines calling, just being able to waltz in whenever I liked, wearing whatever I like or lack thereof for that matter, I really loved living by myself, so I wasn’t really interested in moving back home then, ever again...

Like Ben, Emma had not envisaged moving back to the parental home. She planned to continue her education after completing her undergraduate studies and, had she not been on the verge of burning out, would have continued to live near to her university. Her parents, Grace and John, also considered the young woman’s return unlikely, especially given her qualification could result in employment anywhere across the country.

Several other parents had not envisaged their offspring would be returning home to live. For instance, Jennifer identified:

I hadn’t actually thought about it, I hadn’t actually thought about it, it’s, basically if they needed us we would do what they needed so it’s, we hadn’t even given it any consideration and we hadn’t had a hard and fast rule about it at all...

Susan had also not considered the possibility her son would return. However, her comments were seemingly underpinned by the ideology that allowing him to do so was part and parcel of being a parent. Susan identified:

I probably didn’t think about it, probably didn’t think about it, not that I can recall anyway but someone said ‘Oh I’d never let mine come back’ and I’m thinking ‘Well, what choices do you have sometimes? Because if they’ve got nowhere else to go, home’s the only place they can go so there’s no point in saying ‘no’ because if they’ve got no money and you don’t want your kids on the street...
Other parents suggested the option was a possibility for their offspring. Helen also felt that not allowing her daughter to move back in “wasn’t something (she) would’ve even considered”, while Grace suggested it was:

...not a decision, it was, it just is, it is nature, nature versus nurture...when she said ‘I wanna come home’ that’s, that was it, there wasn’t any decision, there wasn’t any of this ‘Should we? Shouldn’t her?’ thing, it just was, we didn’t need to talk about it...

Helen and Grace, along with Susan, affirmed their decision as the ‘right’ one by showing disapproval of the alternative, namely not allowing one’s offspring to return home. Grace added:

I just don’t see it as a negative thing at all, it makes it sound like, I can’t believe a parent would have to think about taking their child back...What would be so bad that you wouldn’t let your child come back? That you wouldn’t want to help, I can’t, I can’t, I just, I think even if they were you know a drug-affected child that’s stolen from you and all that sort of stuff you’d still want to help and you just would, it’s just part of being a mother...

Christine shared similar sentiments:

...it would have to be some very extreme reason why I would not have them there, I’ve never thought that I wouldn’t, I just couldn’t say no (laughs), it’s just, yeah, it’d have to be something really extreme for me not to have them at home...I know my brother’s going through a bad time with his step-son who got himself into drugs and bad relationships and owes money everywhere but he said ‘What do we do? You can’t turn him out, there’s nowhere to go’ so it would, I can’t think of anything, you know if, if it was drugs or something like that you would still, always a parent want to help them get through that bad time...

Accepting their offspring back into the household was, for these two women, closely related to obligation to family. Christine, recognising that her “good
strong family background [meant] family’s really important”, commented “I wouldn’t want to break that bond, just say ‘No you can’t come home, I don’t want you home’, I couldn’t do that, that’s just not what I would do”. Similarly, Grace identified:

I come from, I’m one of seven, my husband’s one of four, we’ve all got big families, we all do things as families, we’re very family-orientated...yeah I just, [returning to co-residence] just seems the natural thing to do, it didn’t seem like it had to be discussed, it was nothing to discuss, it just was...

For Bernie, denying his daughter the chance to return home “wasn’t an option”. Although “the desperate circumstances she was in was why (he) sort of readily accepted her coming back again”, he also “suggested “we’re her family and it’s her home and that’s where people come for refuge so we’re not about to push family out into the street because it doesn’t suit us anymore”.

His daughter, Nicole, recognised she could “always rely on (her) family” and therefore assumed if her relationships did not go well she could go back there. Several other young adults, namely Matthew, Sarah, James and Andrew, also related their assumptions regarding the option to return to their familial relationships. James, who felt his parents Christine and Richard had “always said (he) was welcome back home”, commented:

I suppose if people don’t have the relationship like I have with my parents I sort of knew I could always come home, I suppose if some people don’t have that same relationship it might be a bit harder for them...

Likewise, Andrew felt “there was an assumption that (he) would just go back there and try and move out if and when (he) could basically”. He, too, related this to the relationship he had with his parents:
...they’ve been really good, in the sense that you know I have a room there and it’s, I’ve got a lot of things there and they’re, they’ve been pretty supportive as well basically the relationship broke down and they’re like ‘Well you know you’ve gotta get outta there so you know you’ve got no money, you have to live here I guess’ and again that wasn’t something we, well not something I can remember talking about explicitly but it just, it just sort of happened that way...

Similar to Kate, who felt her return “was possibly the unspoken, the unspoken agreement”, Luke suggested that as much as his parents had “never said ‘look Luke you’ll always have a house over your head, we’ll always take you in’, it’s kind of like an unsaid thing I think”. David also assumed that he could return:

Yeah before moving back it was, it was always an option I knew was there, it was something I knew that ‘Well, if things don’t go that well, I know I’ve got somewhere I can go’, yeah, ‘Not I have to make this work until I find a new place to rent or I have to stick it out till the end of this lease or I have to get a second job type thing’, it was always going to be, I wouldn’t say the first option but it was fairly close to the top of the list...

Given these assumptions, it was not surprising that there was often little discussion when it came to organising their moves home with their parents. Like Andrew, Luke recalled:

I must’ve just gone around for dinner one day and said “I’m going overseas do you guys mind if I just move all my stuff back in so I can, you know, I don’t have to pay rent while I’m overseas?’ and they’re like ‘Yeah no worries’ I don’t think they had any issues with that, yeah I don’t, there wasn’t too much discussion about it...

Similarly, when his latest relationship ended, David called his mother. Despite suggesting that his mother “knew the relationship was on its way out”, particularly because they had “sort of casually discussed it”, he said:
'Look, Mum, you know, is it possible, like what would, if I moved back in', I basically said ‘I’m thinking about moving back in, what are your thoughts?’ and she was like ‘Well, what room would you move into? We couldn’t do it straight away, if you needed somewhere to stay straight away I can put a mattress on the floor while we sort this out…’

Anne’s recollection affirmed that David assumed he could return. She commented:

I’d thought there were a few strange things going on and I’d picked up on you know bits of phone conversations and there’d been some sudden changes in arrangements and what have you and next thing David says ‘Um, ahh, it’s all off and I need to come home because the lease is in her name and I don’t have anywhere to live and I can’t stay there’ so here we are...

However, unlike the other young adults who tended to ground their assumptions in their familial relationships, David’s beliefs were seemingly based more on his past experiences. Anne had previously extended the option of returning to David when he changed jobs and his lease expired and, more recently, to her eldest son, who she felt was experiencing a “dire situation”. Consequently, with his brother “being there as well”, David suggested “it was sort of like ‘Oh okay, that option’s open as well’, I sort of felt a bit more comfortable”.

In Sarah’s case, the availability of returning home was less of an assumption, as her parents had “always made it really well known that if we ever got into trouble or needed help that we did have the option of going back to their place”. Her mother Jennifer affirmed this:
...we actually put the idea out there about 12 months ago initially, it might not have been quite 12 but yeah after [our other daughter and her partner] left and we’d seen how well that worked for them so after they moved out last year we sort of toyed with the idea and made the offer so we opened the doors for them to think about it and then when their rent was going up such a huge amount we re-made that offer and that’s when we really started talking about how this would work...

Unlike Jennifer and her husband, most parents did not explicitly offer their offspring the option to return. Instead, they tended to accept their children back into the household when they were approached. Although the parents therefore had mixed responses in terms of whether or not the return to co-residence was considered a possibility, the decision to do so was closely tied to their perceptions of the role of parents and sense of family. The young adults, albeit not necessarily anticipating their need to return home, assumed that moving back was an option. They held this belief even though it had not often been discussed explicitly beforehand, either because of the quality of their relationships with their parents or past experiences of support. While there was thus a tendency to proceed with the return to co-residence without too much discussion, the acceptance of the young adults back into the parental home meant both parties then had to consider how they felt about doing so.

I wasn’t against or for it, I just accepted

The young adults and their parents ultimately reached acceptance of the co-residence arrangement, albeit to varying degrees. For some, this was straightforward, however, for others, it required the negotiation of often-conflicting feelings.

Among the young adults, David “never had bad feelings” about returning and Emma did not see it “as that big an issue”. However, the majority of the young adults had mixed feelings about the return to co-residence. For example, Matthew identified:
I sort of, I wasn’t against or for it, I just accepted that’s what was going to happen...I mean in the back of my mind I’m like ‘this is not ideal, this is not where I want to be’ but obviously I’ve got to work this year to get out of home, I guess I knew there was going to be aspects of being at home that I didn’t like but I had to, I have to deal with them so it didn’t really affect me drastically, no...

Nicole also felt “there wasn’t like there was really another option”, particularly given her difficulties coping with the breakdown of her marriage and mental illness. She was therefore willing to accept her return, despite potential issues:

Even though I could sometimes have a very volatile relationship with my mum specifically and yeah just fight with my parents in general, you know it was the safest option for me and they’d stand by me so yeah I never thought ‘it’s going to be that upsetting it won’t work’ sort of thing, I thought ‘There’ll be issues but it’s the best option and I think they’ll sort of be happy to have me’, yeah...

Often, like Matthew and Nicole, the young adults had to overcome aspects that were not necessarily preferable in order to reach acceptance of returning home. Kate felt returning home was one of her better decisions and she was therefore glad she did so. Interestingly, six months later, she suggested that “whereas last time I was possibly quite keen to move out of home quick, not as quickly as possible but I was keen at looking to move out of home, I’m not so keen now”. She admitted that she was now “a lot happier about living at home”, even though:
...at times it can be really annoying but that’s life, you know, you deal with it, you can’t always, life can’t always be rosy or peachy or anything like that and if that’s the most that I can complain about then I think I’m pretty lucky and you know I’ve got my mum to thank for that. I could choose, I’ve chosen to live at home and these are the things, not that you have to put up with but that kind of thing, I could easily be living somewhere else you know on the street or something like that and not have any of the things that I have to look forward to so I’d much rather have the situation that I’m in now with the small limitations it has than be in a different situation with other limitations which could ultimately be a different relationship with my mum...

For James, who was “quite happy at the minute and quite relaxed living at home”, his feelings towards co-residence were closely tied to its financial benefits. Although he suggested he would probably prefer to be in his own place, his “mindset’s changed now”; he felt being at home was a bit easier, especially “looking at (his) financial situation and (he) can’t really afford to rent a house and pay a loan off as well”.

Other young adults’ feelings also related to the improvements they perceived living at home offered. Ben’s enjoyment of his independent lifestyle meant he was not particularly interested in returning home, especially as it meant he was further out of town and “had to commute more and couldn’t go out as much as (he) wanted”. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the benefits associated with returning to the home his mother was occupying:

...my brain tends to be more logical, I actually wrote down the pros and cons on a piece of paper, and I looked at it from a range of different perspectives and in the end it, although I didn’t want to, it just made so much sense to move back home rather than go and rent...
Similarly, Sarah suggested:

*It was a bit disappointing because I had to move out and back, I don’t know it was a bit like a step backwards but I guess it was, in the end we were both going ‘Oh we really don’t want to leave this nice house that we have but in the end we’ll be able to buy our own place out of it and that’s a really good incentive when it’s our main aim anyway’ so it’s a good incentive to go ‘Okay, we’ll’ it was a comment that we were making quite regularly in the month before we moved in ‘We’ll just suck it up and live with Mum and Dad for a year’...*

Another young adult, Andrew, also had negative feelings about returning home initially. He commented:

*I wouldn’t have been happy about it but I was more concerned about the fact that my relationship had just collapsed and you know more motivated to just get out of there and look after myself basically cos I had to look after myself in a sense but those things, when you’re in that situation they kind of trump any, like for me anyway they really trumped any kind of normative view I might have had about whether I live at home or not, it’s just the situation, you have to respond to it...*

While this suggests Andrew’s feelings were linked to the reality of his circumstances, elsewhere in his narrative he seemed to be influenced by the perceived benefits and costs. He identified the advantages:

*...in reality it, it has been very good for me because I don’t have any money, I wasn’t earning any money this year so I would barely have survived if I tried to move out on my own or with other people, the [university] course that I did was incredibly intense and really stressful, very full-on and I’m just really glad that I didn’t have to work while I was doing it cos I don’t think I would’ve passed if I had to work so there’s that, and it’s easy, you just go there and everything’s there...*
He could, however, also recognise the downsides to living in the parental home:

...then there’s the kind of, you think well it’s a bit depressing, at the same time, it’s like ‘Well I’m 27, I’ve done all these things and here I am again living with my parents’ and you feel a bit bad about that sometimes... there are still you know strange, it has been, you know we have moments when I just, because you’ll always be treated as the child, despite the fact that I’m 27 you’ll always be treated as the child in that situation and that’s really frustrating...

The two sides were then weighed against one another:

...there’s those two aspects I guess, the reality of it is it’s actually pretty beneficial I guess but overall I mean in a practical sense it’s been very beneficial, yeah obviously I don’t like telling people that I’m living with my parents but I don’t know after a while I just get over it and it’s like ‘well that’s the situation, that’s the reality’ and I’ll be out of there pretty soon I guess once I, once I start working and earning money...

Albeit deemed beneficial given his circumstances, Andrew felt that returning to co-residence did not align well with ‘societal’ expectations, particularly of someone his age. He suggested:

I’m 27 and I guess in my mind once you reach that age you know surely you should have a job and be earning money and be living independently and doing all those sorts of things but the reality is if you make a few career changes and like I haven’t been prepared to settle for crappy jobs, just to do things I don’t like, I have to be engaged in what I do so that means that I’ve had to move around a bit and every time you make a move, there’s costs involved in a career-sense or geographically and so being able to move back home is, is a way of I suppose surviving in a sense but yeah I don’t know, there’s still that sense that you should, I think, I assume most people are living independently and that kind of thing...

Despite being influenced by the reality of his situation, the benefits and costs and the views of society, Andrew ultimately suggested that living with his
parents had been his “default position for years” and was therefore “not like, you know, a massive trauma for (him)...it’s not fun necessarily but it’s not such a big deal”. While Luke was similarly able to reach acceptance of his decision to return, he first admitted during his initial interview that moving home was “never really a proud moment”. He suggested, at the time, that his reaction was:

‘This sucks’. Yeah not really, like you know apart from going ‘I’ve failed’ (laughs) ‘I’ve failed at life, I’m no good’ (laughs) yeah I think that’s probably what it was, I was just like ‘Oh’ you know but I probably had an inner dialogue saying ‘It’s okay, it’s only for a little bit, I’ll move out just as soon as I get set up and all that sort of stuff’ yeah that’s probably pretty much it, like I probably would’ve been beating myself up about it at that stage but yeah other than that, I guess that’s pretty, that’s a pretty big feeling that I’ve failed and that I can’t actually live out of home, that’s huge, that’s a huge thing so you know back to the drawing board and, and start learning again, figure out why it is that I did that...

However, despite these negative feelings, he also identified that he enjoyed the experience, as it was helping him to learn about himself. He further elaborated on his acceptance of his return during his follow-up interview, though given he had departed the parental home at that point, it was with the potential benefit of hindsight:

...moving home, like you miss out on that credibility as a young person and you’ve “succeeded” by moving out, I made a little rabbit ears inverted commas there, and it’s a “fail” you know in essence to move back home but you gain that love and affection from those that are closest to you, so your parents and whatever, so you know that’s all got to do with how you feel about it and I believe if you can’t live in a space with your parents and those closest to you like that’s a judge of your character so I don’t see living with your parents as a negative thing, I think it’s actually a really empowering thing for both parties cos as much as I learnt from my parents, because they’re a reflection of me, they also learnt from me as well and so yeah I loved it...
Just as they had mixed feelings themselves about the return home, both Luke and Andrew were unsure of their parents’ views of co-residence. Although Andrew suggested his parents did not “sort of begrudge (him) for being there at all” and were “just like ‘Well, you’ve got nowhere to live, you just live here’ you know they kind of accept that”, he was also “not sure how they feel about that, not sure I wanna know really”. In regards to his parents, Luke commented:

…it’s like the same thing for them like ‘Oh great we’ve got our kids back’, as much as it’s like ‘oh now we’ve gotta do all these extra stuff cos we’ve got kids in the house’ you know they love that experience as well...

He perceived his return home to be “a burden and a blessing all at once” for his parents, commenting during his second interview that “well, yeah at first, it’s like ‘oh welcome home’ you know ‘We’ll make sure you’re safe da da da’, then there’s those little sly comments like ‘Oh well, if you didn’t live here...’”.

While Luke implied dissatisfaction on his parents’ behalf, such feelings were not affirmed by his mother Susan, who felt that “life still goes on, we still go on, so yeah, I don’t think it’s been detrimental to our life having them move back home”. Margaret, on the other hand, was somewhat ambivalent as son Andrew had suggested. While she considered the return to co-residence to be “pretty easy, it’s not a big issue”, she was quick to add “it’s just the issue of you really shouldn’t be living at home, you should be out there in the world surviving”.

Margaret was more affirmative when it came to her perceptions of Andrew’s feelings. She suggested Andrew “doesn’t want to live at home, he finds, I think he finds it a bit pathetic to be living at home”. Susan was not sure whether Luke or his elder brother might have viewed returning home as “like a failure thing too, like coming back home is not achieving what you wanted and you’ve had to come back home”. Lisa also acknowledged her son Matthew’s dissatisfaction with returning home. Matthew commented:
...definitely among I guess people in their 20s even like the stigma ‘oh I live with my parents’...and especially from my experience being a male talking to a female who says ‘Oh what do you do?’ ‘Oh I don’t have a job, I live at home with my parents’, it’s sort of like there’s a stigma, it’s sort of like ‘Okay well you’re not independent, you’re not free, like I couldn’t come back to your house if I want to cos you live with your parents’, it’s something like that, like it’s just more of a negative thing, you’re not as independent I think is the stigma...

Lisa recognised her son’s feelings, though she did not personally perceive there was stigma attached to living with one’s parents at Matthew’s age. She commented:

...he’s keen to move out and I mean I know that and I can understand, perfectly understand that, I mean I wasn’t living at home at his age so and I think it sort of frustrates him a bit that he’s, he’s nearly 26 and he’s still living at home, I think he feels there’s a bit of a stigma or something around it, I don’t know, maybe cos most of his friends don’t live at home...

Although the parents could understand why their offspring might have mixed views about returning home, they did not necessarily share the same feelings. For instance, unlike her son Matthew, Lisa was pleased about returning to co-residence from the outset:

I was really looking forward to him coming home and yeah it hasn’t been, there’s been no where I’ve sort of thought ‘Oh, you know initially it was good and then it’s been like ‘oh well now I’m, now I’m sick of him, off you go”, I don’t feel like that, I mean he can sort of stay as long as he likes...

Likewise, Helen “was perfectly happy about it, looking forward to it and all those things”. Grace, albeit unlike Lisa and Helen in the sense that she was not expecting her daughter to return, also accepted the change in living arrangements:
We did think that [Emma would not return] but then once she said she was coming back it didn’t seem to make any difference either, I’m, I don’t know how to explain it, it just didn’t seem to make any difference, it just was, it just, we didn’t need to discuss it, we didn’t need to set ground rules, we didn’t, it just, it didn’t matter...

The daughters of Helen and Grace had similar perceptions of their mothers’ feelings. Kate, reflecting the close bond she and her mother frequently cited, felt her mother Helen “was perfectly happy that (she’d) wanted to live back at home... [and] thought it’d be nice to see (her) too”. Emma, Grace’s daughter, also suggested that “there was no problem with (her) returning home and at no time did (she) feel like (she) was an imposition on (her) parents”.

James had similar beliefs, suggesting his parents did not have an issue with him returning home, namely because they wanted to see him set up, and would do what they could to help him achieve this. His mother, Christine, shared this view, acknowledging that her children were both very conscious of the costs associated with independent living and was therefore “happy to support them at home so that they can get ahead like that”.

Parents’ feelings towards living with their children, like the decision to allow them to return (refer page 121), seemingly related to their sense of what was expected as part of their roles as parents. Christine commented:

I guess as a parent I’m always their parent and I’ve felt that the home is their home for as long as they want it, it’s not really a motivation it’s just being a parent I think, you know...we certainly wouldn’t kick them out...we always said we would never do that and yeah while we get on well it’s not, I’m happy for them to be there as long as they feel they want to be there, I’m not really sure what the motivation, I suppose was to help them with a good start as well...

In several cases, the parents accepted the return to co-residence because they perceived a lack of alternatives for their respective children. Susan, Bernie and Deborah suggested:
I think we just accepted the fact that they don’t have anywhere else to go so they’re gonna come home so I think we just accepted it and Trevor [her husband] said ‘Well, you know, what else can we do? They’ve got nowhere else’ and I said ‘Yeah okay’. – Susan

Well I felt that she didn’t, well I was quite okay with it, I felt that she didn’t really have, well obviously, the situation was, was bad and wasn’t working so you know I was quite okay with her coming back home again, I didn’t see that as a problem given the, particularly given the circumstances so it wasn’t really an issue to me... – Bernie

I just sort of felt it was probably a sensible thing to do, I suppose I had some insecurities on what’d be like, on whether it’s all going to be full-on and that sort of thing but I just sort of felt she was fairly broken at that time and I think she was sort of ready to come back... – Deborah

Bernie and Deborah’s daughter, Nicole, shared similar sentiments. She felt her parents “were pretty accepting”, allowing her back home because:

...they just know, I suppose, how emotionally weak I am (laughs) but they wouldn’t say it that way, that’s how I see it though yeah that I’ve always been one that’s been close to them and needed their support and whenever I fell down I couldn’t hide it from them, whenever I was having problems so even when I tried to deal with stuff myself I ended up needing them so I suppose yeah there was the feeling that they knew I needed it...

Bernie suggested the love he had for his daughter overtook “the practicality of the situation, you think ‘Well why am I accepting this?’ so you think, yeah, it doesn’t necessarily have to be rational”. He added:

...you did accept, cos again you had no choice, you’d made the decision so therefore you have to accept it and you have to accept it for what it is and you have to accept all the good and the bad that goes with it so, so yeah you knew she had to come back and this, the best place was your house, home, the family home...
For Anne, it was also a case of accepting the negative consequences of her decision to allow her sons to return. While she knew their respective circumstances meant that the return to co-residence was “the only sensible thing at the moment”, it was clear this was not her preferred option:

...you know I say to them ‘Look, yeah it’s, this is not terribly convenient and it really doesn’t suit me and I really, I really would rather it be that you weren’t here but you are so let’s try and make the best of it and not sort of you know muck up each other’s lives any more than it’s absolutely necessary’...

Anne believed her dissatisfaction with the co-residence arrangement was not one-sided, suggesting that she did not “think either of [her sons] really (wanted) to be there”. While her son David was quite okay with living at home, he did recognise his mother was not so pleased. Even though he felt Anne had “been really understanding”, as “she knows what it’s like, you know she’s moved in and out”, he also commented:

I’ve told her a number of times she doesn’t have to sacrifice her life now for me anymore, she’s looked after me for 26 years, she should have her life now, she’s hated the house, she got the house because Dad wanted the house and she had the kids and I don’t think she fully wanted kids to start with anyway and I don’t think that she should hang around there, she should have her freedom cos she’s allowed me to have my freedom so I’m trying to get that message across to her, I think it’s starting to get there but she asks ‘What do you want to do?’ and I’m like ‘Mum, it’s your house, you do what you want to do’ you know by constantly saying that I think she’s sort of realised I’ll be okay...

Anne was at “the stage where you think ‘Oh (sighs) I’ve had 26, 27 years of this, I want my life back, I want my house back, I’m sick of this’”. While it was clear that she wanted to be moving on, she was still able to accept the return to co-residence in the interim. In this way, Anne was very similar to many of the young adults, as they too would have preferred to be living independently but
recognised, in spite of perceptions of failure to meet societal expectations, that the benefits and the lack of feasible alternatives meant being at home was the better option.

Thus, to summarise, the young adults experienced mixed feelings about returning home. Their parents, in contrast, seemed to be more accepting from the outset, with these feelings not only reflecting the lack of alternatives but also their perceptions of their parental role. While members of the same dyad could therefore differ in their experiences, both tended to reach eventual acceptance of the return to co-residence. Their feelings about the living arrangement, however, were also influenced by the need to accommodate each other in the parental household.
Chapter Seven: Accommodation

Whereas Chapter Six focused on the acceptance of the return to co-residence, Chapter Seven explores the family members’ experiences of living together in the parental household. It therefore begins with a discussion of the adjustments undertaken by both parties before describing how they negotiated living together in terms of the young adults’ contribution to the household.

You adjust your life accordingly

Despite continuing to live in their own homes while their children resided elsewhere, the interviewed parents had to make significant adjustments upon the return to co-residence. These varied in degree, meaning and form, ranging from personal sacrifices in terms of their plans and finances and emotional adjustments to their offspring, through to more practical changes related to the spaces and routines within the household.

For Anne, the decision to allow her sons to return was a significant adjustment, as it meant sacrificing her own housing plans. Prior to the recommencement of co-residence she had been working towards selling her house and purchasing a smaller unit, though instead she found herself:

...still living in this bloody house up the sticks that I really don’t want to be in, I want to be much closer into town and do stuff that I want to do pick up things that I was doing 25, 30 years ago that I would, you know now that I’m sort of past the age of working anyway ahh pick up things that I would, you know haven’t done for ages that I’d sort of been thinking ‘Oh, now won’t it be nice when you don’t have to go to work and you’ve got rid of the kids and you’ve got your own life back sort of stuff and you can do things that you want to do’ I was just, just getting everything organised and working out how I could start doing that and where and how and da-di-da and they all come back again...
Bernie also suggested there were significant “adjusting type issues once you’ve got them back in the household”. In his case, accommodating his daughter with a mental illness meant that, although he felt he had to “adjust (his) life accordingly no matter how much it (disrupted)”, returning to co-residence had “made life somewhat more challenging” for both he and wife Deborah. They had to make adjustments across multiple domains, encompassing “both physical [changes] and there was sort of practical things you had to do as well as expense or just dealing with the emotional sort of things”.

From the emotional perspective, Bernie recognised that he was “certainly having to change to accommodate (his daughter Nicole’s) idiosyncrasies”. Aside from adjusting to some of her ways of doing things, their closer proximity meant he also had to deal with the effects of her mental illness more directly, including “the personality changes when (she was) having a bad day versus a good day” and “putting up with some of her erratic behaviours”. He identified:

...because you’re there you get to either experience it or hear about it or things like that whereas if she was away you wouldn’t know about it... you’ve got, I suppose the concerns of a parent with a child who’s prone to mental illness so if you’re living with it, [it] then creates that extra layer of, which you just have to accommodate the best you can...

At the same time, Bernie acknowledged the practicalities of the situation. Finding space had always been an issue in their home and therefore the return to co-residence “meant a lot of adjustments in terms of trying to find unique ways to get around the storage type issues and accommodate Nicole and her sort of needs”. He added:
...physically moving her back into the house, she had that much stuff so we had to look at getting, like we rented a store room for 18 months to put a lot of her surplus furniture and things, eventually we sort of assimilated that into the house after I got her to finally sort through it all but that took several attempts and even then we’ve ended up with this house that’s full of, like we’d built this bungalow for my wife as a craft room but it ended up filled up with Nicole’s stuff...

Bernie also felt Nicole’s return meant the common spaces within their home could “get pretty busy”, especially as she often had her partner over. With the household also including his younger son and daughter, as well as her boyfriend, Bernie found it “difficult to navigate (his) way around and to get things done”. He also suggested there were fewer opportunities “to enjoy just putting on a movie sort of late at night and sitting back and relaxing”. However, while his employment and club involvement provided avenues for personal time, he felt that this was not the case for his wife:

...in the meantime my wife has found far less time to be able to do yeah the sorts of things she’d like to do and spend the time how she’d like to spend so but yeah that has been an issue for her yeah in terms of her coping and things like that she really needs that sort of peace and serenity to be able to enjoy that over and above her usual household management sort of chores...

Bernie’s wife, Deborah, felt at times like she was a “stranger” in her own home, as she was having to change her ways to accommodate her daughter. She too acknowledged that she no longer had as much time for her own interests. She further suggested:

...there’s a lot more work, there’s a lot more trying to cope with emotions and flare-ups and negative thoughts and I suppose there’s still been a fair amount of you know ‘You’re not doing it right’ type thing so yeah so it’s been a bit of a tug-of-war yeah I’d say sort of just trying to sort of cope with your own emotional rides with it all...
While the other parents were not accommodating a child with mental illness and therefore did not focus so much on adjusting to the emotional aspects, they were similar to Bernie and Deborah in that the return to co-residence meant making changes in several areas. For example, Jennifer and her husband Paul not only restructured the set-up of their home and placed half their belongings in storage but also adjusted to the changing routines their daughter and her young family brought to the household:

...the big change for me is I can't sleep in, (my granddaughter) starts screaming at about seven, quarter past seven in the morning so I'm generally awake by half past seven now which is really quite bizarre so I'm finding I'm waking earlier and can't go back to sleep so my body clock's changing a bit and my one thing is when they move out I'll be left with this flipping early morning waking (laughs) and the day to myself if I'm home by myself, so I'm changing my work hours so productively for me it's actually more productive but my body's struggling to adapt to the change so that's been the biggest change for me...

While finding personal space had also proved to be a “challenge” for Jennifer, she further recognised that the decision to bear the costs associated with the return of their daughter and her young family resulted in changes to her and Paul’s financial situation. She identified:

We used to be able to put all my wage away...the change has been now we’re using half my wage added to my husband’s wage to get through each fortnight so it’s costing us probably, probably spending, another 8-900 dollars a fortnight extra it’s costing us so, it could even be a thousand a fortnight extra but you know we’re in a position where we can do that reasonably well at the moment so it’s a bit hard saving to go overseas in amongst it which is causing us a little bit of stress and we’re both getting pressured to increase our work but the reason we’re doing it is what’ll keep us going...
Although the increased household expenses also meant that Jennifer and Paul were unable to pay off their own home loan as quickly, she refused to inform her daughter. According to Jennifer:

*I wouldn’t do that [inform her daughter of the true costs] cos that puts the pressure on them and you know we don’t need to do that, we’re, our philosophy is if we’re happy to do it that’s our business, if we felt burdened by it that would be different but it, you know, it is tougher, we’d sort of got used to having a lot of disposable income but you know that’s, they need us, that’s what’s important...*

Christine and her husband Richard also decided not to ask for financial contributions, as they believed this would help their children pay off their loans and save towards their plans to build. While the extra costs meant it was a little difficult when they were trying to put as much away for their retirement, Christine accepted “that was (their) choice”. Similarly, Lisa’s decision to allow her son to use her car while she caught public transport and walked to and from work was a reflection of her desire to “help him out”. She did not “see it as a big deal, it’s just what you do as a parent to help your children”, adding:

*We will support him no matter what the sacrifices are that we may need to make...at the present time the sacrifices are few and not too onerous, however, in the event that they were, I don’t think it would change our resolve, you know we will do everything to support our son and as his mother, I still feel the need to look after him...*

While they may have been willing to put their respective children’s needs before their own, Jennifer, Christine and Lisa seemed to recognise that they needed to take a step back. Jennifer, albeit suggesting it was difficult given “the automatic response is always to protect your child”, had to learn to reserve her comments, allowing daughter Sarah and her partner Tim to resolve disagreements their own way and also “learn for themselves what works and what doesn’t” in terms of parenting.
While Christine felt “as a mum it’s really hard to let go of doing those motherly duties”, she also recognised that her children were now adults and therefore it was no longer necessary to “be there 24/7” caring for them. She identified:

\[\text{I guess I had to take a step back and start treating them as young adults and not as, you know, ‘I’m your mother, you need to do this, do that, don’t do this, don’t do that’ so, every now and then I let myself go and I go back to being the mother of young teenagers and I have to stop myself and think ‘No, they’re young adults, they can make that decision’ so I guess I’m still learning to take that step back and treat them more as an adult than a child or teenager, getting there, I am getting there...}\]

Part of taking a step back also meant Christine modified her attitudes toward the running of the household. Her preference for a neat and tidy home contrasted with her children’s untidiness, meaning she had “to turn away from that every now and then” and “realise that dirty rooms doesn’t really matter at the end of the day”. She also highlighted:

\[\text{I guess I’m starting to, to relax a bit and enjoy having them around more rather than put pressure on them to do this, do that, ‘Oh you’ve got to be here for tea’, I’m trying not to and I don’t do that anymore, I might just say ‘Oh, are you going to be home tonight?’ and yes or no, it doesn’t matter...}\]

Lisa also highlighted:

\[\text{...well I guess I’ve learnt that you just need to be more focused on your relationship than other things that you might think are important but in the scheme of things aren’t, like the important thing is how well you communicate and get on, everything else is sort of secondary whereas before he went I probably took him for granted a bit and things he did would annoy me and I might nag him a bit but I, I’ve come to sort of think that those things that used to irritate me before were not really that important and that you can talk and you don’t need to let them get under your skin and the important thing is being a good friend and sort of having a positive relationship...}\]
Thus, Jennifer, Christine and Lisa, in positioning their adjustments as part of their parental role, tended to downplay their significance. There were others who also understated their sacrifices, even suggesting they did not make adjustments when their children returned home despite their narratives revealing otherwise. Susan felt that having her sons at home had not “really stopped them from doing anything so, although maybe the bills are more and all that sort of stuff that’s part of (their) life”. Her overall acceptance of her sons’ returns to the parental home meant:

*I don’t think we made adjustments to accommodate them, they just moved back in and they, oh I suppose we probably, oh in Luke’s sense I suppose, maybe we had to accommodate some, like having meals at certain times on nights when we had lessons, but that really didn’t, we still worked around all that stuff…*

However, Susan felt the hardest part about the return to co-residence was establishing who would be home for meals. Her tendency to cook regardless meant that this could, at times, be annoying, though she also suggested she “would get over it cos someone would have that the next night or somebody might take that for lunch the next day”. She added:

...in our case nobody made any sacrifices, I think that they all did their own thing and I used to say, oh you know, probably the only person that made the sacrifice was me who had to do the dishes, do the clean-ups and stuff but that’d be about the only change, doing the actual dishes and stuff, I mean they would all clean the table and here I’d be standing at the sink thinking ‘oh this is lovely, here I am, cooked tea, done the dishes’ so that would be the only thing but there’d be nothing else really that anyone really had to sacrifice to survive at all, we just survived it all...
Another mother, Helen, also suggested:

I don’t really think I’ve had to make that many changes or if there were they’re what I’d call soft changes, little tiny fine-tuning things that you make as you go along as against great huge, there was nothing dramatic, like I hear some people coming home like they’ve used the bedroom as something else and suddenly it has to be used as a bedroom again and they have to re-sort everything, Kate’s bedroom was still there, it’s a hell of a lot more cluttered now cos of all the extra stuff she brought back but it’s still her bedroom, always was and always will be so we didn’t have to make any geographical changes maybe you’d call them, we didn’t have to suddenly get a new dining table so that we could accommodate the extra seat at the table or any of those things that possibly do happen in other families, life just really went on as, a very, very minor variation on what it always has been...

However, elsewhere Helen recognised that adjustments were bound to happen “just as soon as there’s a second person in the house”. She identified her fortnightly income, which easily lasted three weeks when her daughter was out of the house, “certainly (did not) go quite as far as it used to”. Similarly, what she had been “happy to eat” was different to what they ate when the two of them were back living together. In describing “these sorts of little things”, Helen nevertheless felt they did not:

...overly concern me or worry me, they’re not things that are big enough that I would have to stand here with my violin playing ‘I have sacrificed everything for my child, she’s gonna have to make it up to me when I’m old and grey’, no not at all, the pleasures of her being around and her company and all that sort of thing far outweigh absolutely anything else...

Overall, Helen felt her daughter Kate was the “most important person in (her) life” and therefore she “would always do (her) very best to accommodate” whatever she needed. While she was therefore similar to most parents who identified changes to their own lives as a result of the return to co-residence, Helen was also like four other mothers- Grace, Deborah, Christine and Jennifer-
in that she too recognised the adjustments undertaken by her young adult child. Helen felt that because her “life hasn’t really changed, I’m still living at home, I’m still working in the same job, all of those sorts of things for me are still the same”, her daughter had “made the bigger sacrifices coming home”. Grace also believed it was young adults who “after living on their own...then have to be part of a family with rules and expectations...dishes, washing, calls about when they will be home”. Similarly, Deborah acknowledged:

...I think if, if someone’s had their own space and then come back and have to be within the family unit even if it is by their choice you still have that sort of bit of cramping of your own space and re, a lot of re-adjustment because they’ve re-adjusted from being away and their own routines and that and then coming back into routine...

The other two mothers in this group of five acknowledged their children’s adjustments, though felt these changes were equal to their own. Christine suggested there were “a few adjustments on both sides”, as the “mutual respect” meant both parents and young adults “come together and just find that common ground”. Jennifer also felt that in their situation the “adjustments (had) been equal. Sarah has her own family and had lived out of home as a parent herself for nearly five years, she had to pack up a home the same as we have”.

Jennifer and Christine’s respective children agreed with their mothers. For example, Sarah felt co-residence created “a different dynamic that takes consideration and patience between both parties”. She felt a slight loss of independence upon returning, yet also recognised that her parents “lost their clean tidy spacious house to which they had become accustomed to with no grandchildren in the house”. Similarly, James, the son of Christine, indicated during his second interview that “young adults give away a bit of their freedom in regards to doing what they want when they want, but parents also give away their freedom too as they have to consider their children again in what they do”.
These young adults were aware of the adjustments both they and their parents had made in returning to co-residence. However, this perception may have developed over the time spent living in the parental home, as they had previously indicated their personal changes were minimal. For example, in his first interview, James felt he had a “fair bit of freedom and stuff living at home” and the relationship with his parents meant “there’s nothing I really need to put in place to help deal with anything”. However, he had acquired a partner in the six months between interviews and, although she was welcome in the parental home, he subsequently found it “a bit hard to get time to (themselves)”.

Similarly, Sarah suggested in her initial interview she did not have to make many adjustments, as living with her parents was not “really much different apart from I’ve got two kids now, it’s not really much different”. However, even though nothing had changed in regards to her friends coming over, moving in with her parents had made it difficult for her and partner Tim to find time to themselves. It also meant changes for her children. Sarah recognised, more explicitly during her second interview, that living in the parental home and having children required her to make a conscious effort to maintain her own parenting practices to ensure they were raised how she, not her parents, wanted. Similarly, living out of home meant she had developed her own cleaning rituals and habits, making “things feel a bit confined” when she had “to adjust to the way (her parents) (liked) things done” in terms of household management.

Kate recognised, at the time of her first interview, she and her mother initially experienced “a re-settling, a readjustment period”, including the occasional argument. She supposed she was:

…”possibly having trouble getting used to not having the independence I had previously cos I could come and go as I pleased, I could do what I want, I could put things where I wanted to put them whereas when you’re in someone else’s house, even though it’s kind of yours as well, there’s that other person to consider and I was possibly not overly considerate of what she wanted but I changed that hopefully, I hope she thinks I’ve changed that cos I’ve tried to…
Although suggesting these feelings soon dissipated and “it became just like old times again”, she was more aware of the adjustments she had made during her second interview. Kate felt returning home “reorganises your priorities”:

...if I wasn’t living at home I could possibly have different jobs, I’d be closer to town and public transport, I might have a boyfriend or I might be more active in looking for a boyfriend, I’d possibly take better care of myself, be a bit more fit, [but] I think being at home puts those priorities in a different place. If you were living by yourself or away from home they could be at the top of the list because they’re all ‘you’ kind of centric, [but] living at home you have to think of other people so they go further down the list. [For example,] ‘what time’s Mum getting home? What time should I put dinner on the table? What are the things I need to do before she gets home?’, they’re the ones that become top of the list because you have to think of someone else...

Despite this, Kate acknowledged that both she and mother Helen “had to sacrifice little things, nothing big but yeah I’d say it’s a fairly even thing”. Although she differed in this regard from Helen, who believed it was Kate who had made the bigger sacrifices, it was clear that both women were considerate of each other.

Two other dyads were similar, with the mothers and daughters showing consideration of each other through their differing views. Whereas their mothers Grace and Deborah suggested young adults had to make the greater adjustments, the two younger women actually felt it was their parents making the changes. Emma, the daughter of Grace, suggested they “would have been used to not having young adults around anymore and changed their social life accordingly, also it becomes a greater expense to the parents to have a child move home”, while Deborah’s daughter Nicole felt her parents had to “adapt to (her) having a boyfriend stay over which is a bit awkward and coming home late at night and just they had a spare room and then all of a sudden they didn’t”.
Alternatively, the suggestion by these young women that their parents’ sacrifices were more significant may have reflected their own adjustments, which they perceived to be fairly minimal in comparison. For instance, Emma, who had “assumed it was going to the same” as when she lived with her parents previously, “just sort of settled back into the old routines” once she returned. Nicole supposed she still had “as much freedom as if (she) was at a rental or somewhere on (her) own”. She had always been able to have friends and partners sleep over, though the latter required greater consideration given her younger brother was now older:

…it’s alright when I’ve had partners or whatever, they’ve been allowed to sleep over at the house and stuff so that’s pretty good, my family’s pretty okay with that, I mean we did have [an initial discussion about] ‘Would your brother walk in, if you were [being intimate] with a guy?’ but it’s been alright, as long as my family have met the guy, they’re fine to have him at the house and stay over so it hasn’t restricted my relationships I don’t think…

Nicole’s father, Bernie, recognised that the presence of his daughter’s partner required some adjustment. He suggested:

[Having boyfriends stay at the house] doesn’t, yeah at first it was a bit odd (laughs) but now I’ve sort of got used to it, it’s just the way of the modern world, it’s just the way things are these days, sort of you have sex first and ask questions later (laughs) so seems to be the way of the world these days so it’s, but yeah I’ve got quite accustomed to it so it doesn’t sort of bother me…

In the case of James and his mother Christine, the young man identified that, although it was a bit harder for him and his partner to get time to themselves, “that (was) easy to get around”. For his parents, the presence of partners was felt to require some initial adjustment. However, like Bernie, Christine and husband Richard came to accept them into their home:
...they both now have a partner so that was probably a little bit of a different experience again for us as parents, their partners often stay over or vice versa they stay at their place some weekends, I think the first one, one Sunday we got up and both their partners were there and that was all a little bit new for us so we thought ‘oh we think we might just go out and have brekkie this morning’ (laughs) so, but that’s all going all well, I mean they’re adults so it’s not a problem and they’re often there for meals and that as well so we still think it’s kinda nice that they’re comfortable enough to bring them home and yeah that’s all okay...

Theresa also felt son Ben could “bring his girlfriends here and that’s fine with me”. The young man recognised “Mum doesn’t mind that at all but it is a little bit awkward sometimes, especially initially if the partner does stay over you’ve got the awkward breakfast the next morning”. Although Matthew also suggested his parents were “pretty open”, in the sense that “girls can come over and stay in the bedroom”, he was seemingly uncomfortable about doing so. He felt that “having family there, you can’t really, say, bring girls home or whatever”, especially because “my bedroom’s right next to my parents’ room”.

Both young men felt they had to make additional social adjustments upon returning home. Ben recognised “it did mean a change in my lifestyle, couldn’t go out as much as I wanted, couldn’t just be there near my mates”. Matthew also enjoyed the space and freedom of living independently, meaning he had to adjust to living with his parents. He commented:

I mean I’m definitely independent, like I can go out and do what I want, see my friends, I think it’s more the other stuff, yeah I guess having a place where you can have friends over or there’s a bit more freedom, you don’t have your parents saying ‘oh what time are you going to be home?’, you can’t come home and be really loud in the house... in a house where you’re living with your parents I guess there’s more boundaries set than there would be in a house where you’re living with sort of similar like-minded younger people so yeah you’re definitely independent but it’s, I think there’s more independence if you’re out of home...
Returning home, for Matthew, also meant fitting back in with parental expectations; “there is rules more so at home, it’s not so much rules but you’ve gotta clean up after yourself, you’ve got your mum and dad to answer to or they wanna know where you are”. Similarly, Ben also had to adjust to his mother being more involved in his life:

*Mum knows exactly what’s going on and, or thinks that she knows what’s going on, like I don’t really mind but it’s still, I’d rather that information be private and you know not involving my parents, my mum, in any way whatsoever but you know it’s not a deal breaker for sure...*

Living with their parents also meant adjusting their behaviour when interacting. Andrew suggested that, rather than retaliating when his parents were irritating him, he tried to “back away” and retreat to his room. Similarly, when interacting with his mother, David recognised:

*I have to be gentle with her because of her anxiety and all that but if I need something now or I need it in a certain way I know that I need to tell Mum that’s the way it is, I need to actually say ‘This is how I feel, this is what I need, this is what has to happen for me’ and it’s give and take, you know if I need something done I’ll be like ‘Mum, I just need’, and she goes ‘Okay I need’, if she tells me now I can go ‘Okay, we’ll organise some time to do that but be flexible and don’t just spring it on me’ so by putting it out, straight up, no surprises, it’s all about compromise, communication-compromise...*

The return to co-residence required the young adults and their parents to make adjustments, albeit to varying degrees. However, whether this involved making changes to the way their interacted with each other, their spaces, personal plans or social lives, both parties had to compromise their personal preferences in order to accommodate each other and achieve the desired benefits.

The return to co-residence required the young adults and their parents to make adjustments, whether in terms of the way they interacted with each other, their
spaces, personal plans or social lives. Although they adjusted to varying degrees, and at times differed with regards to their acknowledgement of changes made by the other member of their dyad, both parties were compromising their personal preferences in order to accommodate each other and achieve the desired benefits. Nevertheless, this was recognised as part of the give and take agreement entered into upon returning to co-residence.

It’s give and take

In addition to making adjustments, the return to co-residence involved negotiation, particularly in regards to how the young adults would contribute to the household. The young adults were, for the most part, aware of the need to give back to the parental household. For example, David acknowledged he had to “be prepared to offer something”; while Ben felt it was “only fair” that young adults contribute when they return home. Whether it be “doing some of the chores, paying the bills or whatever (their) share may be”, Ben recognised the need to offer parents a hand, especially because, having “already raised (their children) for at least 17, 18 plus years”, they were “not getting younger and (could) get into a bit of trouble now”.

Both young men also recognised the importance of communication when determining their contribution to the household. The two commented:

...don’t leave important stuff in limbo, like ‘Are you expected to do household chores, mow the lawns and things like that? Is that part of you moving back or is that not part of you moving back? Or if you don’t do that are you expected to chip in 20 dollars a month to pay for the lawns to be done?’ and if you, if the family expects you to do lawns and you say ‘No, I’m not doing lawns full stop’, be prepared to offer something, it’s the negotiation side of it so I think you’ve gotta enter into it like an agreement, you’ve got to be prepared to do that, so everybody knows where they stand... – David
...make sure you sit down and in a nice gentle way discuss what your points of tension are and also seek the same, you know so ‘Mum, is there anything I do that annoys you that I can change?’; ‘Can we set up a roster when I wash the dishes and you wash the dishes?’ or ‘Can I mow the lawns and you wash all the dishes?’ so it’s a free trade agreement what everybody does in the house, and although I don’t wanna be mowing the lawns in the first place, I recognise that it’s part of the deal of living back at home and again if I save some money and I get good food out of it, then so be it… — Ben

Like Ben, David was willing to assist his mother around the house despite not necessarily feeling enthused about doing so. In his case, however, his lack of enthusiasm stemmed from a past experience of co-residence, when he was required to act as his mother’s primary carer. David noted:

...because I’ve stood my ground on a number of these things it’s now at a point where if she says ‘Oh, if it’s okay, it’s okay if you don’t want to help me with this, I understand’ and because she gives me that, I can deal with helping her out a lot more, I still don’t enjoy it, like taking her to the shops because of all the [drama] that’s gone with taking her to the shops in the past and doing those kinds of things for her, I don’t enjoy it but the resentment’s not there, the anger about it, the frustration’s not there so this time around it’s been a lot easier...

Kate was similar to the two young men. She noted that returning to live at home:

...made me realise that I needed, when I was younger I didn’t help out in the house anywhere near as much as I could’ve and I should have so I’ve possibly tried to make up for that now, and that’s, I think, been a help for her... although I don’t really like it, I’ve vacuumed and stuff like that cos I know it helps her and I’ve just tried to do as much as I can for things that I know will help her even if I might not want them...
Although Kate was also reluctant initially to assist financially, she came to the realisation that she needed to increase the amount being offered. She acknowledged:

*I get Youth Allowance\(^\text{16}\) and this was the first time that I was getting money for myself kind of thing, I’ll give you some, sure, but you know why do you want me to give you 50 dollars a week? But I soon realised how stupid I was being about that and changed it so I, I now give her considerably more than that…*

Kate’s mother, Helen, also identified that the young woman had realised she should increase her contribution and was therefore now paying more than 50 dollars, however, the two differed slightly in their accounts of how this came about. Helen commented:

*…she gives me a 150 dollars cos we, that was the only thing we had some, not a big fight, it wasn’t anything that major, none of our arguments are that major but she [said] ‘Oh Mum, this is my money, I’ve never had money’, knowing full well she’d blow the whole lot…so we did a big shop that week and she realised how expensive it actually was in the supermarket and at that point she calmed down a fair bit about it and a few weeks later she actually said ‘Oh Mum I think I should give you a 150 dollars’, that was, that was her realising that herself…*

The young adults seemingly intended to contribute, though how they actually did so appeared to be strongly influenced by their mothers. Kate recognised:

*I could offer to pay more and contribute more and I have done that a little but it’s not as fixed as it should be and that’s my fault but my mother wouldn’t, being my darling mother, won’t necessarily pull me up on it so I’m the one that needs to be more regimented about it…*

\(^\text{16}\) Youth Allowance, administered by Centrelink on behalf of the Australian Government, provides financial help for young people between 16 and 24 years who are studying full-time, undertaking apprenticeships or other vocational training, looking for work or sick. Eligibility is based on an individual’s age, their income and assets, whether they are engaged in an approved course or activity, if they are considered independent or dependent and where they reside (Department of Human Services 2014).
In David’s case, his mother allowed him to reduce his financial contribution to the household:

I asked Mum you know ‘Are we able to afford it if I go back to study and I don’t have enough, you know like if I get work, can we still afford it if I can’t pay rent? You know I’ll cover my bills, like my phone and my car but can you still afford to pay all your bills if I’m not paying you rent?’ and she’s like ‘For part of the course, yeah, but keep paying rent while you can’ so I did and when I got to a point where I was running out of money I said ‘Mum, I’m running out of money, can I cut rent out?’ and she’s like ‘Yeah, for sure you know so long as you keep paying your car off’…

Whether in terms of finances or domestic duties, the parents’ tendency to absolve their offspring of their responsibilities influenced the extent to which the young adults offered to help. For example, the propensity for Ben’s mother to take care of most of the cooking and cleaning, as well as the young man’s laundry and ironing, removed the need for him to do so. Ben felt this was a real advantage of living at home and therefore, despite suggesting his experiences whilst living independently meant he could actually do things for himself if he wanted, was seemingly reluctant to volunteer.

Other young adults also put the onus back on their parents, suggesting they would help if asked. Kate commented “I might not do [the household chores] as often as she would like but two out of the three times she’ll ask me, I will do it”. David also suggested he would help out if asked by his mother, Anne:

I said ‘Well, yeah I’ll do it but book me in, make a time and date, an arrangement’ and she says ‘Oh you know can you quickly help me do this?’, if I’m home and I’ve got a couple of hours and she’s ‘Oh can you quickly help me do this?’ I’ll say ‘Yeah, but only this, not this and then do that and do the other and do the other, just that, that thing you’ve asked me to do, I’ll help you with, don’t try and rope me into doing other things, yeah’…
The mothers of David, Kate and Ben recognised the young adults were contributing. However, elsewhere in their narratives, Anne, Helen and Theresa suggested they could receive greater assistance. For example, Anne felt her sons were “there to help out a bit and so forth”, yet also commented:

...they don’t do a lot of work around the place because they’re not there to do it, it’s not that they won’t do it if I ask them but you know you’ve got to ask six times but that’s because they’re family, that applies anyway but you know they’re not there to do it, you can’t mow the lawn at 10 o’clock at night...

Helen felt that Kate had been wonderful, as she had “been trying her very best to take over as much of [the cooking] as she (could) gradually learn to do”. While she could “appreciate the fact that she (was) trying to take over lots of the little jobs that happen at home”, Helen still suggested it would:

...be nice if I could come home and find that the house had been, you know that the housekeeping fairy had magically been instead of knowing that she’d probably spent most of the day in the lounge room curled up on the couch watching television but anyway that’s, that’s her decision, she knows that that means she’ll be left with the dishes and everything else to do but she’s very good, she does most of the dishes anyway...

Theresa confirmed son Ben’s suggestion that the two of them split the bills. In her view, they had “a fair share basically”, highlighting that their situation was in contrast to “the way it is portrayed in the media, [where] children come to sit on the lap of their parents”. She also identified:

...we split the bills, he offered it and I, he thinks we’re doing 50-50 (laughs) of course not but, sort of major bills like electricity, gas we split it, with food he’s giving me some allowance but of course I’m paying much more, doesn’t matter...

She chose not to inform Ben of the difference between their respective contributions, believing her son needed money “because, you know, he’s got a
girlfriend and he needs to save for his holidays and that, that’s fine with me, I don’t mind”. Similarly, she was willing to complete the majority of domestic tasks. She identified:

I do more cooking, basically for him because I come home very late and I do washing, his and mine (laughs) and ah basically that’s it, I do shopping, more than I did on my own, I don’t mind, nah I don’t mind, sometimes it can be more pressure to come home and have to cook for him, cos he’ll also take lunches to work, but ah I don’t mind...

Elsewhere in her narrative, Theresa suggested that she wished Ben would help out a little more and sometimes “had to ask him a few times to do things, get on his back”. However, she also suggested:

...he’s pretty limited with time, I recognise it, I’m not pushy by nature so, sometimes I can get annoyed when the things are not done for weeks but [I’m] not too pushy, I don’t know if it’s a good thing or a bad thing...

Anne was also similar in the sense that, although she wanted David to help out more, she appeared somewhat reluctant to make demands of him. She commented:

I mean he keeps saying ‘I don’t want you to support me, I’ve got to get a job, I’ve got to get the money in’ so he’s going off and doing it but with his work experience and all the assortment of part-time jobs and things I said ‘I’m gonna have to get this guy in and what have you’ and the [gardener] guy came and had a look at what I wanted done around the outside of the house, and he said ‘Oh, you know, why don’t you get David to do it?’ I said ‘He’s just worked 13, 14 days straight, I’m not turning around on the one day that he does have off and saying ‘Yes I know you’re broke and all the rest but do me a favour and mow all the lawns and prune the trees and fix this and fix that and sort out your washing and da, da, da’...
Other parents, including Christine, also expected that their offspring would contribute by completing certain household tasks. However, like Theresa and Anne, Christine was hesitant to harass her children:

...if I ask them to do something, hang the washing out or things like that, they will do it, I don’t have a problem with doing any of the housework or their washing, I just feel if I’m washing I may as well throw a few extra things in, that’s no big deal for me but if I could just ask them to help from time to time, they do... when I do ask them to tidy their rooms they do it but I try not to hound them but every now and then it does get to me a bit...

The parents’ reluctance to make demands, however, meant they were often required to resume their previous roles in terms of household management. This was at times a source of frustration, with Christine and Deborah identifying:

I have at times felt I’ve been taken for granted, ‘Oh Mum’ll do this, do that’ and I did have a meltdown, I’d been to gym and I’d gone home from work and prepared tea but it just needed throwing together and when I got home they were all just sitting on the laptop or watching TV and I thought ‘This is not good, now I’ve got to turn around and get tea when I had three adults who could’ve done that’. had I asked someone they probably would’ve but I just felt I don’t need to ask all the time so that’s one negative, I don’t mind doing the washing because it’s easy just to throw someone else’s washing in the machine, you don’t stand there for hours washing it, it’s probably just around meal times sometimes I think I need a bit of help... – Christine

I tend to get ‘Well that’s your job, just do it’, because I don’t work I think the expectation is I’ve got all day to do it so it doesn’t matter whereas they’re sort of working and studying but then I tend to feel that I’m probably fair in what I ask, I only ask the small things, I might say ‘Can you sweep the floor or do the dishes?’, I’m not saying ‘Clean the whole house’ and at times I have asked and you get a real mixed, depends on the mood, but generally it’s more a negative response so you do get frustrated and go ‘Oh I’ll do it myself’... – Deborah
Both Christine and Deborah, in much the same way as Anne, Theresa and Helen, wanted their offspring to offer a greater contribution to the household, particularly domestically. Deborah acknowledged that, although daughter Nicole was “very clean and that so she’ll put her dishes back in the sink and her dirty washing goes into the thing so all of that’s very, very positive”, she also suggested that “like I say, your workload triples and you think you’re going to get some help but you don’t”. She further commented:

…I think there’s a lot of self-focus now compared to when we did it, we were a bit more liberal and gave a bit, well certainly that’s how I was brought up. I paid board when I started work full-time but I still helped my mum in the house whereas these days it’s like ‘No I’m too busy’. I suppose the ironical part is sometimes they say ‘Oh why don’t you go and do this?’ and I think ‘Well, if someone did the dishes or swept the floor, gee that’d give me another half an hour’ so there’s not the realisation ‘If I did something that would create more time for someone else’, when I say ‘Well can you?’ ‘Oh oh’, like I say a 20 minute project’s like I’ve asked them for four hours of the day...

Deborah felt it was important that young adults made a contribution, whether it be a nominal financial amount or otherwise:

I mean it doesn’t cover much at all but at least it’s something and I think it’s still important that they put in something than it just be this total free ride ticket, I don’t think any parent these days wants to be sort of used up in that way and it’s not realistic, I mean you know nothing in the world is free, you’ve got to pay whether you like it or not and I particularly think if they’re not going to contribute too much in the house with things then they definitely need to pay something...

The young adult offspring of Deborah and Christine appeared to recognise that they could contribute more. Nicole felt that “a lot of other parents would’ve asked for a lot more money earlier on and yeah a lot more just assistance in the house, like I say I think we’ve still got it pretty good, pretty lazy I suppose”. While Christine’s son James was “more than happy to cook and that when
needed so yeah, it’s no problems”, he identified that he probably should clean his room. He recognised that “at this stage I do need to clean it, yeah it’s probably my fault for getting it that way”. However, even though he felt his mother was “a bit of a clean freak so she likes it nice and tidy”, he admitted he had “never made (his) bed which is shocking, I probably should, but that gets up her nose a bit”.

While their mothers’ frustrations would suggest they had not translated these realisations into actions, Nicole had made changes to her financial contribution during the time spent co-residing. She did not recall organising a specific arrangement for paying board at the time of her return home, instead indicating her parents suggested she just assist with routine tasks, such as the washing of dishes and the supervision of her younger brother. While she was paying a bit towards the Internet costs, she identified:

...only now that I’ve just turned 25, I initiated to my parents, I said ‘I want to pay 50 dollars a week and that’s for living expenses and Internet, whatever’ cos I think I’m old enough to be living out of home but given my mental situation and my history [with mental illness] you know I’m not, I’m not on par with all the other people my age, so yeah only now there’s that sort of permanent arrangement...

Both her parents also indicated that they did not establish arrangements for the young woman to financially contribute towards the household upon her return. According to Deborah, they did not require board because Nicole had minimal funds and “at the time she was so sick that it just didn’t seem worth it to put that extra stress on”. While she acknowledged that it was her daughter’s decision to pay towards the Internet costs, her recollection of how Nicole came to increase her contribution was slightly different:
...recently she sort of increased the payment and that came more about from an argument I’d had with my other daughter, oh they were complaining about something [my son] had done, I lost the plot and was sort of like ‘You don’t have to be here’ as it all goes...and I said ‘Well you know, you can start paying board’ or something in the heat of the moment and so she did and then Nicole actually increased hers from 30 to 50 [dollars] around that time as well...

Deborah’s husband, Bernie, also had a slightly different recollection. He identified:

...probably I initiated it but it was a bit of a mutual, it was a mutual thing, yeah originally, well Nicole had been, we’d been giving her a loan to pay for the car and stuff and she was sort of paying that as a regular sort of direct debit and then when that finished she said ‘What, do you want me to sort of pay board?’ cos she wasn’t paying board prior to that so I just, it was sort of just a natural flow on...

Unlike Bernie, Deborah and Nicole, Christine and her son James had not changed the young man’s financial contribution in the time they had been co-residing. Nevertheless, they were both open to the possibility of making adjustments. Christine acknowledged that, although the decision not to charge James rent was “working okay for the moment”, if she were to “ask (him) to contribute, that wouldn’t be a problem”. James recognised that “if it got to a stage where they were struggling (he) would certainly say ‘Look I can chip in’”. Nevertheless, despite earning decent money and being happy to contribute, the young man suggested he was “not going to pay money (he did not) need to, or they (did not) want (him) to”.

In Andrew’s case, he did not offer much in the way of financial or domestic assistance, primarily because his parents were quite laid back in regards to what they expected from him. He suggested:
No they’ve never done that, they’re complete hippies, they’re just like no, they’ve never done that, I’ve, they’ve never, I was never asked to do anything in that house basically, you know every now and again they’re just like ‘Look, can you just do this?’ I’ll do it so if they ask me to do something I’ll do it but it’s not, I’ve never had, they never gave me chores or anything like that (laughs) and certainly not now, it’d just be hilarious, I’d just outright refuse rudely (laughs) you know, well you know I’m joking but no that’s, that’s never been an issue…

His mother, Margaret, confirmed her son did not pay board and did “bugger all housework”. However, she felt Andrew’s general lack of contribution, aside from the occasional load of his own washing, was “not that important”, primarily because “I mean there’s only one kid, I don’t iron or do anything, we’re pretty easy going about housework so it’s not a big issue for me”.

While undertaking household management may not have been a concern, the resumption of the caregiving role seemingly affected the way Margaret perceived her son. She suggested:

I think you just sort of, you know, tend to do it, cos you’re always going to see your children as children in some ways, you know, but I think when you are living together and you’re sort of running the house, you’re gonna be, you’re gonna revert to that role a bit…

Grace, in contrast, did not revert to her mothering role. She suggested:

She doesn’t need mothering now, like if she needed mothering now it would be different, if I was at her the whole time ‘Tidy up your room, take your washing to the laundry, do this, do that’ it would be a mother-child relationship, it’d just be like having a child but because she does it I don’t have to stress about it, it just happens, you know, she’s an adult living with us and she acts like an adult so I don’t need to be a mother to her…

Grace’s daughter, Emma, identified that she would “go shopping, cook a couple of times a week, help with the washing, whatever they (asked), it (didn’t) faze (her)”. Like her mother, the young woman also acknowledged how, in their
household, there was the expectation that everyone would help with the tasks until they were completed. Her mother, Grace, identified:

...things just seemed to fall into place, she helps around the house, it’s always been that way for whenever, I’ve worked full time from when she’s been little so in our family everybody does the jobs until it’s all done and then everybody sits down and so even when she was working part-time she knew if she was there and we had dinner everybody does the dishes till it’s done, till the washing’s brought in and then we all sit down at the same time, it’s just the same, it’s just kept going on so there was no setting down of ground rules or that sort of thing...

While Emma and Grace shared similar aspects when describing the young woman’s practical assistance, the two differed slightly in their recollection of how her financial contribution to the household was negotiated. Emma suggested her mother’s ultimatum (“‘You either need to clean your own bathroom or pay for a cleaning lady’”) and her dislike of cleaning the bathroom meant she decided to pay for it to be cleaned professionally. However, Grace suggested:

...when it came to paying rent she volunteered because the insurance company was taking away my cleaning lady and so she said ‘I’ll just pay for a cleaning lady’ so she pays for the cleaning lady every week and that’s her contribution and she just set it up so the money transfers every week so I don’t have to ask her for it...

Grace felt the amount Emma was paying towards the cleaning service was fine for the moment and they did not need to make adjustments, identifying:

...that’s her board so if we wanted more at that stage over and above that, that point would’ve been where we would’ve said it, that was fine, [but] because she was so generous in saying ‘I’ll just do it’ we just went ‘Well, that was it, that’s what it’s all about, it’s not about the dollar figure, it’s about volunteering’ and she was the one that just put her hand up...
Emma also acknowledged that her parents had not yet asked her to increase her financial contribution, despite nearly 12 months of full-time employment. However, she suggested if they were to ask, she would “be more than happy to contribute part of the rent, [as] why should (she) have the benefit of working a full-time job without having to pay”.

Sarah also recognised that her arrangement, in which her parents Jennifer and Paul bore the brunt of the costs while she and her partner Tim contributed towards food, could require review. Both she and her mother Jennifer commented:

…we talked about it and Mum and Dad both went ‘No, no, no that’s okay cos you’ll be able to save more’ and then the first bills came in and they were jumped and I said ‘Are you sure you don’t want us to put some money towards it?’ and they both went ‘No, no, no, no’ but I guess we’ll just keep re-evaluating as time goes on, if it gets out of control and, we don’t want to send Mum and Dad poor… – Sarah

…look if things get too tough then we’ll say to Sarah ‘We actually need you to chip in a little bit’ but at this stage we’re just monitoring it so and we’ve got no qualms if it does start to get difficult we’ll say something… – Jennifer

While they were willing to cover the majority of the costs, Jennifer was quite firm on what she would and would not do when it came to housework. It was important to her and husband Paul that they “weren’t left to pick up and just parent again”, particularly because “they’re coming in as adults and there’s expectations that they will follow our house rules even though they can class it as their home as well”.

Similarly, Lisa believed that young adults should contribute, suggesting the co-residence arrangement would be negative if children were “effectively like a parasite or something”. In her case, she felt this:
...could be financial or helping around the house or whatever the people involved come to agree with is a contribution, I guess it’s just having a relationship where there’s a mutual understanding that there’s some type of contribution to each other’s experience of living in a sort of shared household...

Lisa and her son, Matthew, were similar to Jennifer and Sarah in the sense that they shared a mutual understanding regarding the young man’s contribution. Matthew acknowledged what it meant to be living in a co-residence arrangement, recognising that he had to “try and clean up after (himself) and things like that so it (made) it easier on the people (he was) living with”. Consequently, in terms of his own contribution, he identified:

...maybe on weekends Dad’ll do a load of washing and I’ll put my stuff in there for him to do, sometimes if I need stuff done I’ll just wash stuff myself and if other people need stuff done throw it in there, yeah do all my own ironing and clean the bathroom every now and then and sometimes Mum gets on my back saying ‘Oh you’ve left your dishes out’ or ‘you’ve left this out. Can you put this back?’ and yeah most of the time I try and do a reasonable job...

His mother acknowledged, if she asked her son, “he’ll help, he’s quite helpful”. Lisa noted:

...occasionally Matthew will cook, not very often, he’s a bit lazy in that regard and I’m, I’ll sort of say, he’ll do stuff, he says ‘look if you just ask me I’ll do stuff’ but I’ve sort of got into the habit of doing stuff myself so I tend not to ask him in terms of cooking but there are other things I’ll ask him to do, like I’ve asked him today to clean the bathroom and he’ll, he’ll do it...

While Lisa expected help domestically, she and her husband Ian recognised Matthew’s financial situation and therefore did not require rent or board. For Matthew, this was both helpful and a source of dissatisfaction:
I feel a little bit guilty but I don’t have any, it’s good that they are supporting me cos I don’t have any income but I do feel a bit, I’ve gone from being independent all last year, now I’m not really independent, I’m relying on, a little bit on them, it’s not where I want to be...I do feel a bit bad for being, I guess, I’m not really a burden on them but I’ve got some money owing but at the same time I know they don’t care at all but for my own self-worth I guess I’d like to be earning money and paying them back as soon as I can...

Lisa agreed that she and Ian were not in any hurry to be repaid and therefore felt her son was “probably more concerned” about the money he owed than they were. Nevertheless, both she and Matthew mentioned their agreement, whereby once he gained employment they would organise “some way of him contributing what he owes us each pay, direct debit or something like that but whatever, we’ll sort something out so he doesn’t have to pay us a lump sum”.

Both Luke and his mother, Susan, recalled a conversation in which the young man expressed his feeling that he should be contributing more to the household financially. Susan’s reply- “‘Don’t worry about it, we’re fine, we’re okay, we’ll survive’”- was echoed by Luke:

...when I moved back in I paid 50 dollars a week and that includes washing and groceries and utilities and I’m like ‘I should be paying more’ and they’re like ‘Luke, we can’t charge you any more cos that means you can’t save’ and it’s like ‘But you’ve gotta raise a demand on us so that say we move out and we’ve gotta pay rent, we’re gonna go from like 50 bucks a week to 150 bucks a week so if we were paying 100 dollars a week, you would probably value our time more and you wouldn’t be telling us to get out because we’re paying our fair share and when we go from 100 dollars to a 150 it’s easier for us to do’ but they’re like ‘oh, nah, nah, nah, nah’...

Recognising that his parents did not charge him enough, Luke devised an alternative financial arrangement with his mother. He commented:
I’ve basically got my mum on my payroll now and so Mum gets annoyed at me when I don’t, or she tells me to bring in my washing and the thing that I do is I don’t like doing washing, I don’t like bringing in stuff and so all she’s doing is kind of pushing me to take responsibility for that thing and so what I’ve actually done is I’ll be changing my bed sheets or I’ll be doing dishes and I’m like ‘I hate this, I don’t wanna do this’ so what I’ve actually done is I’ve actually put Mum on the payroll so I pay her 25 dollars an hour to do all the things I don’t wanna do...

Susan also mentioned their somewhat “interesting” agreement, highlighting how it was negotiated between the two of them:

...he didn’t wanna do anything and I, he said something or other and said ‘Well’, I don’t know, he said ‘I’ll pay you to clean’ and I said ‘I want 25 dollars an hour’, he said ‘Yeah that’s okay. I want an invoice’, I went ‘Oh okay’ so I write up a little thing and I write in what I do and total it up at the end of the month and away we go so I think I’ve probably earned about 80 dollars so far, from doing his folding down of his washing and putting it away...

In addition to the folding of her son’s washing, Susan also identified how Luke paid her to clean his bedroom, including his bedding, and the room he utilised downstairs. She appeared to be quite happy with this arrangement, suggesting she “thought ‘this is lovely; I get paid to clean my own house’”. Luke also felt their agreement benefited his mother, identifying “she likes doing those things, like you know she likes having things neat and tidy and if she can get something out of it then so be it”. However, mostly he acknowledged the significant personal benefits:
...that’s removed her from, from annoying me ‘Luke, you haven’t done this, you haven’t done this’ and I’m just like ‘this is just a broken record’ and you know I have all my stuff there, organised and I don’t have to do it and then at the end of the month she sends me a bill and I pay her and that’s, that’s a pretty powerful thing for me because I don’t get annoyed and I look at my stuff and it’s all organised and I don’t have anyone telling me what to do so yeah I feel that that’s a pretty amazing thing...and yeah so I’m basically learning how to delegate and say ‘Well I don’t want to do these things’ and you know paying someone to do it...

Luke and his mother, Susan, were able to come to an arrangement that accommodated both their needs. While agreement regarding the young adult’s contribution also occurred within other dyads, including Matthew and his mother Lisa, it was nevertheless the young adults who more often than not benefitted from being cared for by their parents.

Thus, to conclude, the younger family members acknowledged the need to contribute but often varied in how much they offered. For the most part, the extent of this contribution reflected their mothers’ actions, in that the maternal tendency not to ask for assistance and undertake tasks themselves meant the offspring did not feel the need to volunteer. In this way, the parents continued to act in ways that favourably accommodated their young adult offspring within the household. While this could result in unmet expectations and at times frustration, they were nevertheless still able to appreciate how the return to co-residence enabled them to advance in various life domains. This appreciation, which is closely tied to acceptance, is explored in the following chapter, beginning with the parents’ views on the benefits of the living arrangement.
Chapter Eight: Appreciation

Despite requiring adjustment and negotiation, the return to co-residence was appreciated by the parents and young adults as an opportunity to advance, or achieve improvements, in various life domains. This chapter begins by exploring the perceived benefits, including closer interaction with each other and assistance with planning for the future. In doing so, however, it recognises that most parents and young adults had considered life after co-residence.

If you’re open, it can only benefit you

The parents frequently cited the company of their young adult children as the primary benefit of the return to co-residence. Christine admitted that she “just (loved) having them around” and the “interaction (they) all (had) as a family”, while Lisa acknowledged:

I guess there’s more laughter that goes on in the family so yeah I guess yeah there’s, there’s probably just generally more chatter, more talk going on cos Matthew’s more of a sort of chatty person and yeah there’s more, there’s more company there, and yeah generally more sort of fun, more frivolity...

Several mothers, in describing this companionship, highlighted the conversations they now had with their offspring. Margaret quite liked the “intellectual chat” she had with her son, suggesting she found it “quite interesting and stimulating in lots of ways”. Christine also loved being able to “sort of communicate and perhaps talk about different things than (they) would’ve when they were younger”, including:
...they’re both talking about building, we talk about the processes they need to go through, they put their ideas in, just with everyday things like banking, insurance, they’re keen to know more about those sort of life things, they’ll come home from work and they might talk a bit about work, they’re mature conversations from both of them and their experiences...their ideas on things, politics, they’ll put their thoughts, their travel, there’s always a conversation going on around that...

Interacting in this way, according to Christine, was “probably strengthening all of the relationships”. However, living together also seemed to provide a sense of validation. She felt it was “really good that (her children) might value (her and husband Richard’s) opinion or trust (their) thoughts”. Similarly, Lisa identified:

I feel needed when he comes to me for support over difficult decisions he needs to make, mostly in his personal life but sometimes in his professional life when he will ask for my advice...

Parents also appeared to obtain a sense of satisfaction from seeing their children continue to develop. Christine felt that, despite living at home, both her son and daughter were “really good young adults so I think that’s been a positive, it’s a positive feeling for me to see that they’ve matured into good adults”. Helen also suggested living with her daughter meant she had “the pleasure of seeing her grow as a young adult in close quarters”, including “watching her changing thoughts and changing ideas and just being there as her sounding board to be able to help her get there”. Bernie also commented:

I suppose it’s been good to see, particularly Nicole, being a lot better, her mental health being a lot better, just being able to experience that and witness that after so many years of difficulty, that’s been very satisfying, yeah there’s still the bad days but generally she’s a lot better, similarly with [my other daughter] Melissa it’s been good to see, just experience things that’ve happened in her life, be there to sort of hear about it and experience it and that sort of thing...
Co-residing with one’s children also benefited parents in terms of their own development. For example, Christine was learning to take a step back in her role as mother and relate to her offspring as young adults, not children or teenagers (refer page 142). In Bernie’s case, he recognised he now had:

…the tolerance to have them back again which you know I may or may not have had previously cos again you tend to adapt to the situation as it presents itself... you remind yourself that you’ll be able to deal with something like that, a couple of boyfriends sleeping over the odd night, people using kitchens and bathrooms and so I suppose you learn in a sense to what extent you’re tolerant or not, it hasn’t particularly bothered me too much so I suppose that shows you that you’ve got the tolerance to adapt to these sorts of situations...

Developing this tolerance was beneficial for Bernie because, even though he felt his daughter was “a lot better” in terms of her recovery from mental illness, co-residence meant he and his wife were more aware of Nicole’s “ups and downs”. Although living together also enabled his wife to see a bit more of her daughter’s happier side, Deborah’s daily involvement with Nicole and her struggles meant that her perceived benefits were few and far between. Anne also had difficulty identifying positive aspects of co-residence, though in her situation this was related to her overarching desire for her sons to depart the parental home so she could get her life back. She refuted many of the benefits the other parents had identified, commenting:

I mean, in so far as there’s somebody there to talk to from time to time, if they don’t come home and go straight to bed because they’re knackered, and sometimes they’re about to help around the house but no, other than they’re sort of reasonable people to have about and you can have a conversation, really I would rather they weren’t [home] because I find there is more nuisance factor and extra work and because I don’t think they really want to be there they don’t spend a lot of time there...so they’re not company, they don’t do a lot of work around the place because they’re not there to do it, it’s not that they won’t do it if I ask them but you’ve got to ask six times but that’s because they’re family, that applies anyway but they’re not there to do it, you can’t mow the lawn at 10 o’clock at night...
In comparison to Anne, some parents appeared to benefit from practical help around the home (refer page 163). Grace received assistance from her daughter in terms of the “every day to day things that most people just take for granted”, including doing the laundry, driving and shopping. She suggested Emma “just picks up what I can’t do, which is just fabulous for me”. Overall, this assistance was particularly significant:

I can’t even say why I’m happy because she’s company, because with my surgery and other medical conditions she’s my support-person and she looks after me and she probably doesn’t say anything but she yeah, she always knows when I’m not well and she’s always there and has always looked after me ever since she was little, and so having her there to me is a bit more of a comfort because I know I’ve got somebody there to look after me when (my husband’s) at work, cos he works on-call so he’s away for long periods of time so to me i’ve got somebody there, I don’t sort of have to rely on people outside the family to come and help so I think most of all it’s probably a greedy thing on my behalf because I know I’ve got that support...

On the whole, the parents tended to focus on the return to co-residence more in terms of its interpersonal benefits. However, in contrast, their young adult children put greater emphasis on the more practical advantages. Andrew identified:

...the practical outweighs the emotional side because I mean it’s just, the benefits are obvious to me you know, like I’m pretty bad with money, like pretty bad, I’ve just never been good with money, I just spend it as soon as I get it and that’s, that’s fine when you’re earning money but not good when you’re not basically you know so yeah I wouldn’t have been able to survive, I mean that’s clear to me, that’s obvious...

In addition, Andrew acknowledged that returning home had allowed him to complete his university studies:
...in reality it has been very good for me because I, I don’t have any money, I wasn’t earning any money this year so I would barely have survived if I tried to move out on my own or with other people, the course that I did was incredibly intense and really, really stressful, very full-on and I’m just really glad that I didn’t have to work while I was doing it you know cos I don’t think I would’ve passed if I had to work while doing it...

Nicole also felt that completing her studies was enabled by co-residence, though in her case this related more to the emotional support her parents provided. She had experienced challenges in the past with regards to persevering with her studies and therefore felt that completing her diploma was “definitely an achievement that they helped (her) get”. Nicole was also different to Andrew in that there were a number of “things (she knew) wouldn’t have happened without the support of (her) family, without them fighting absolutely tooth and nail sort of thing to keep (her) here”. These included getting “back on track” after difficult periods with mental illness and holding down employment for an extended term, an achievement she was “really proud of” given she had not worked for at least 12 months when she “was really messed up sort of thing”.

While they appreciated that returning home was a means of ameliorating their challenging circumstances, the young adults also recognised its advantages in terms of their plans moving forward. Co-residence with her parents meant Sarah and her partner could substantially increase their savings and were thus closer to achieving the deposit for their first home. James was also able to get ahead financially, suggesting he would have been unable to purchase a block of land had he been living out of home and paying rent. Living at home also meant he was able to get support from his parents when applying for the loan:

(Mum) had a pretty good knowledge of how it all works so yeah she helped out a lot and went through everything with me, made sure I knew what I was getting myself into so it definitely made it easier yeah and Dad’s pretty switched on with all that sort of stuff as well so they definitely helped...
Several of the other young adults, albeit identifying an array of benefits, included the advantage of receiving guidance from their parents. Matthew, whose return home had also helped him get back on track in terms of employment, felt his “parents have been through some of that stuff before so they sort of have some opinions”. He identified that his father was “a pretty smart sort of a guy”, meaning he could advise him in regards to “job prospects and sort of help (him) along with, more so with career stuff”.

For Ben, living with his mother meant he was a lot more willing to speak to her than he had been in the past, a change that was very good in terms of his plans to start his own business with her as a key partner. He could now “make a lot of decisions very quickly in conjunction with her and that’s as a result of her business acumen and her technical knowledge”. Ben also felt that co-residence had:

...enabled my current partner to forge a better relationship with my mother which she normally wouldn’t have been able to do, I consider family to be very important and for my partner to get along with my family is to me also quite important so that’s good now and also eating better like I said before, eating tasty food, also bills are lower cos we’re splitting them now and yeah, laundry’s done for me, ironing’s done for me, in most cases, so I’m getting a lot more time to myself...

Kate also recognised that her mother’s support was “really helping (her) work out where (she wanted) to be in life” and therefore living at home was “a good kind of building ground to work out what you want for the future”. Consequently, in describing the meaning of returning to the parental home, she highlighted “lots of benefits and yeah lots of opportunities”, including:
Spending time with my mum, ah becoming a better person, well learning to be a better person through looking at how she does things and learning to see how she does things, learning to cook, helping, getting her to help with that and making up for lost time in things that I could’ve done previously like cooking for her when she doesn’t need to, yeah just becoming more worldly in a way so yeah just doing more domesticky type things and just be open to what she has to offer...

Similarly, Luke also viewed his return to the parental home as a learning experience. He suggested:

I would say that there’s a reason why you’ve come home is to definitely learn about yourself and to learn why it is you are who you are, it’s a lesson for both you and everyone that experiences that and yeah just embrace those things so you know it’s, the reason why you’re home is because you haven’t learnt something about yourself and the reason for your parents why you’ve returned home is because they haven’t either taught you how to do that yet or you haven’t perceived that you’ve learnt those lessons so yeah just embrace it and enjoy that experience because it is the most important experience that you can have is being able to understand who you are and how you interact with those people closest to you, you know your blood relatives, the greatest teachers you have in your life, so yeah listen and be responsible for who it is that you are and yeah grow and learn and know that everyone is there to help you do whatever it is in your heart to do...

Both David and Emma suggested that returning home had enabled them to pursue new opportunities. Moving in with his mother allowed David the “space and freedom to explore different things”, with his mother’s financial support in particular facilitating a return to higher education as part of a new career path. The knowledge that his mother was supporting him also provided:
...confidence, I know that if I need to do something I can go and do it because I have the people behind me to support me doing it and even if I, it’s given me the confidence to, to say ‘Right, you’re not helping me so I’m not going to actively involve you in my life’ so and the people who do help me to draw them in you know to make that choice and differentiation that’s I think the biggest thing it’s given me, yeah, to be able to see that...

Similarly, since relocating to her parents’ home in the country, Emma had not only “learnt a whole lot of new things...[and] made just a stack of new friends” but also “become more mellow, a lot more relaxed in (her) personality and who (she was) and stuff”. However, unlike others who tended to focus on the personal benefits without considering the advantages for their parents, Emma acknowledged how her company helped her mother, Grace:

I personally think it’s good for Mum to have me home as well cos she’s got someone else to talk to...it’s easier now that I’m at home because she can just talk to me or she texts me as well so I think sometimes she just needs that sort of contact...she sort of craves that human interaction sometimes...

Other participants also recognised the advantages for the other member of their dyad. Being in close proximity benefitted Matthew and his mother, Lisa, in the sense they were now more able to support each other. The young man commented:

...sometimes I’ll go up and say ‘what do I do about this situation?’ or ‘I’m feeling like crap’ and she’ll help me or sometimes she’ll come up and say ‘oh, how are you feeling?’, she sort of knew since I got back I was feeling a bit down so she’ll just ask me ‘What’s going on?’ so yeah it’s good, she’s very easy to talk to and stuff, even if sometimes she’s feeling upset she might come and talk to me or something like that so yeah I’ve got a good relationship there, I wouldn’t say I was a ‘mummy’s boy’ but (laughs) no we get along well so it’s good...
Lisa also identified that is she was “having a bad day or something you know usually I will see Matthew before I’ll see (my husband) so I’ll sort of talk to him about it”. She had earlier commented:

...we talk about things and especially I know his moods and like if I feel something’s troubling him I’ll sort of ask him about it and ‘Does he sort of want to talk about it?’ and he does. I think he feels he can sort of confide in me and he says that I, you know I am quite helpful to him and sometimes when I’m having problems I’ll go and talk to him too because I think that he’ll listen and he doesn’t sort of judge you, he’s a good listener and I guess it’s just that thing that he’ll listen and I feel he’ll try and be understanding and I feel like I’ll sort of open up to him and he seems to be the same with me...

Like Lisa and Matthew, there were other dyads in which both members recognised similar benefits. Both Helen and Kate commented on their ability to enjoy each other’s company, while Jennifer and her daughter Sarah also acknowledged that co-residing as a result of the young woman’s return meant being able to spend more time together and have quality conversations:

I’ve got my other half back so on that side it’s been good, you know having my daughter back close where I can have closer contact with her, as I said being able to talk to her, have conversations, we can whinge about the other halves and you know we can plan things together and yeah just talk again so it’s been really good... – Jennifer

...it’s actually nice, get to spend more time with Mum, get to have some real conversations with her, with babysitting it was kind of a case of drop the kids off and run and pick the kids up and get them home so it’s been nice to have some proper conversations with both Mum and Dad now cos there’s more time to actually talk to them... – Sarah

Both women also felt that the return to co-residence had allowed Sarah’s daughters to develop an even closer bond with their grandparents. For Jennifer, seeing her two granddaughters each day was a privilege and there was “nothing
nicer than getting up in the morning and the baby toddling up and just putting her arms out cos she wants to be picked up, it gives you a good feeling”.

Both the parents and young adults appreciated that the return to co-residence had benefits. These included being able to spend time together; engage in self-reflection; receive practical assistance; consolidate their plans for the future; obtain guidance and pursue new opportunities. Although the family members could differ, in that the parents tended to focus more on the relational advantages while their offspring often highlighted more practical aspects, there were also cases where they shared similar perceptions and members showed some recognition of the benefits for the other half of their dyad. Nonetheless, both parties understood the arrangement was unlikely to be long-term, with the young adults eventually advancing to a position where they would move out again.

It’s time to move on

The young adults had all given thought to their departure from the parental home. Both Andrew and Matthew hoped to move out in the near future, plans that were acknowledged by their respective mothers. For instance, having lived with his parents for eight months at the time of his first interview, Andrew indicated that he would “be out of there pretty soon”. His mother, Margaret, also felt he was “quite an independent kid” and was therefore “not going to be someone who’s planning to stay here for years”. Like her son, however, she recognised his departure was dependent on finances. She “definitely (thought he’d) move out when he (got) a job” the following year, while he suggested that, because he was “absolutely dirt poor after studying”, he would most likely settle into his new job and work for the first part of the year and then move out with his girlfriend.

Matthew was also in the process of “trying to get a job and then save some money and then move out of home”. Like Andrew, who considered co-residence
to be less than ideal for individuals of his age (refer page 130), Matthew felt the parental home was:

...not where I want to be and it’s not, I feel a bit like I’m nearly 26 years old so I guess I knew this was going to be a tough period like since I got back to get things back in order, get a job, move out, save money, pay them back but for now that’s what my main goal is to do...

Nevertheless, he felt his plans were “fairly known”, suggesting his parents “just accepted that’s what (he would) do this year, they’re fine with that”. His mother, Lisa, similarly acknowledged:

I recognise that I won’t have that long with him because he is going to move out as soon as he is in a position to do so, so I wanna sort of enjoy having him home more while he’s here you know so if that means having to put up with some of the negative things but it’s a benefit having him there...

In other dyads, the young adults had considered their departure, though it was understood to be less imminent. Grace recalled a conversation with her daughter, Emma, after the young woman accepted a job opportunity in a nearby town:

...it meant now that she was here for the next five years and I think she said ‘Oh unless I moved to (town where she worked)’ and I said ‘Well I guess that’s up to you but then you’ve got to fund a house up there, where here you get to live for nothing or next to nothing’ so that was something that she took into consideration and yeah it might change again cos this is only the first year so we’ll see if it changes in the next few years, you know I think she’s thought about it and then she’s just sort of gone ‘Oh’, I think she’d have to find somebody she’d want to share with quite happily before she’d think about moving...

Emma also acknowledged that she had rationalised the decision to remain at home, at least for the immediate future. She commented:
...although I would like to move out of home and be more independent and have my own house, there’s no real need for me to do that because, although I live 45 minutes away from where I work, it’s not that big a deal cos I just get a lift with my boss in the mornings and there’s no real rental houses available so I’d be renting in [another town] which is still 35 minutes down the road so I may as well just stay in [the town where my parents live] where I’m happy...

Nevertheless, Emma (age 22 at the time) hoped to have left home by the age of 25, as this was when she felt individuals needed to “stop being a teenager and a child and become more responsible, so get a house, get a mortgage, that sort of thing”. Kate was similar in this sense, suggesting:

I’m a bit worried, well I’m 21 now, I’ll be worried at 26, 28 definitely 30 if I’m still living at home, I’ve got serious issues that yeah need to be addressed and I actually need a good kick up the bum at that point cos you know I love my mum a lot but I don’t want to live with her for the rest of my life...

Kate was also similar to Emma in the sense that, although she was enjoying living in the parental home, she had also considered moving on. She suggested:

I think if a friend still said ‘hey you know I’m looking at moving out of home and you know all the criteria was kind of right and fitted with me I’d possibly still look into it and think about it but I’m not so, I’m not looking for that opportunity as much now as I was six, 12 months ago...

James was also “quite happy to live” with his parents, though he hoped to “build a house soon and be out”. However, he also recognised:

...my mindset’s changed now, looking at my financial situation and I can’t really afford to rent a house and pay a loan off as well so being at home is a bit easier financially...if I was in a position financially to do it, I’d probably move out and rent but [I] just can’t so yeah just stay at home until I can move out...
James’ mother, Christine, acknowledged that her son did not want to pay rent and would therefore “be there until he’s got his house built and on his way”. Likewise, Jennifer recognised that, given daughter Sarah and partner Tim had moved home to save for their own home, their departure would be dictated by their financial readiness. Sarah identified that they aimed to live with her parents no longer than 18 months, given they had calculated that “at the 12 month point (they would) have enough money for (their) deposit and then sort of a six month period to get a loan and look for a house”. At the time of the second interview six months later, they were ahead of schedule, with Sarah identifying they were in the process of looking for a house to purchase.

Ben’s departure was also related to his financial situation, though his plans were much less definitive. Although he initially intended to re-assess his circumstances after moving home for a year or two, he recognised that the timing of his departure depended on the success of his new business venture. If his business “took off”, he suggested he would move out at the next opportunity. However, he also acknowledged that “at this point (he did not) intend on moving out anytime soon i.e. in the next six months”, as “obviously a business takes time to develop and only when (he was) comfortably in profit and (he had) a lot of channels set up, that’s when (he would) look at changing (his) lifestyle at home”. Although, for the moment, he could “handle” co-residence, there remained a lack of surety around his plans; he acknowledged that changes in the property market meant that “maybe in the next year” he also “might be looking at moving back out again”.

Ben’s mother, Theresa, suggested that because the young man did not “know where he’s going right now, he’s trying a few different things”, their co-residence arrangement was “more or less alright”. However, at the same time, she felt that he did not “want to live with (her) anymore”, identifying that he “got an opportunity, his dad went overseas and, you know, he moved there straight away, the same day, so it shows you”.
Anne also recognised her son, David, was considering moving out. She recalled a recent conversation the two of them had regarding his plans to depart:

David said to me the other day ‘Look you know I will be going soon’ and I said ‘Oh, alright’ and I’ve got some decisions to make about things to do with the house and he said ‘No, I will be, I will be going Mum you know I don’t want to be here, not that I don’t like you, I want to have my own place, I don’t want to be in somebody else’s house but I just can’t do it at the moment but as soon as I can I will’, so he said ‘If you want to sell the house as soon as I go, and it won’t be all that long, I’m doing my best, then you do what you need to sell the house, don’t just assume that I’m going to be here for the next however long’ and I said ‘Yeah, that’s great, hooray, thank you very much, we know where we are with that one’...

David had thought about moving out with his girlfriend, though he recognised this was dependent on a number of factors, including “where I get work, where she gets work, whether she buys a house or not, where she buys a house, if her and I continue”. He could not envisage why his relationship would end, however, still acknowledged:

...yeah at this stage there’s no plans to move out but I’ve already discussed it with Mum ‘What would happen if I did?’ and she’s okay with that, she’s looking to move out I think in the next 18 months to two years...so if she wants to sell the house in a hurry that’s totally up to her, it’s her house, I’m 26, I’m now in a position where I can move out and deal with it, she’s helped me enough...

Luke, albeit suggesting that he loved living with his parents, recognised it was time for him to move on. Having “gone back to square one and structured everything again”, he believed he would leave home “definitely in the new year at some stage”. Nicole had also begun to consider moving out again. Her plan, once completing her studies at the end of the year, was to gradually increase her work hours. She then thought:
‘Once I’m working full-time and if I’ve been saving for at least six months or maybe a year, then I can move out’, I wasn’t then planning to be moving out with a guy, it would be either on my own or sharing with a friend or somehow working out a share house but then funnily enough I met this guy and we’re both looking for a long-term relationship, if it works with him, I may move in to his suburb in like a year, so there’s definitely, [I] know not to rush things with relationships, definitely learnt that so yeah I definitely think I’ll be out of the house by two years time, before I thought it was going to be on my own, now I think it’s going to be with a guy...

Nicole’s parents, Deborah and Bernie, acknowledged that their daughter’s return was “not going to be forever” (Deborah). However, despite the mutual understanding of the young adult’s plans, the more senior family members appeared to have mixed feelings about the possible change in living arrangement. For example, Deborah felt that “you look a lot more forward, perhaps thinking ‘Oh well when I don’t have as much to do I’m going to try and tackle this, this and this’”. Bernie recognised that his wife was similar to “some people in (his) age group [who] would find that they really are just sort of wanting this peace and quiet and you know they’ve done their time as a parent”. However, he really did not have “that expectation”, instead deciding to “just take it as it comes [and not] try…to plan anything in (his) life”.

Another parent, Lisa, shared similar sentiments:

I’m looking forward to a time when you know there’ll be less, kids won’t be there and I won’t have to do so much you know, I mean when I say looking forward to it I know that that’s what’ll come about so and at some stage I’m going to be happy for that to come about, it doesn’t worry me at the present time and I don’t sort of have any, I mean I enjoy having them there cos I get on well with them so I don’t see it as a negative sort of thing...
However, like Deborah, Lisa was also considering the future. She commented:

*I mean I guess there’d be a point well into the future if (Matthew) was away for like five years and we had our own set-up and he wanted to move home, I mean I’d probably be ‘yeah that’s okay for a while’ but ultimately if we set ourselves up with no kids around then probably you know get used to living a certain way but I guess even if he moved out again for a year or two and then came back wouldn’t really worry me because we’ll probably still have our other son there, he’s not in any hurry to move out so I just sort of figure ‘Well’ if Matthew was there as well you know it wouldn’t be a problem, in fact I like having them around so they’re good company...*

Lisa’s enjoyment of her son Matthew’s company meant she needed to prepare for his departure in a couple of months; “to make (herself) feel better about this (she thought) about the advantages of easier meals, cost of electricity, getting (her) car back [and] more flexibility”. Jennifer also recognised that she would “miss [daughter Sarah and her young family] terribly but that will be a new chapter in (their) lives to explore”. In this way, parents appeared to focus on the benefits of their children’s departures as a means of tempering any negative feelings about the change from co-residence to a more separate living arrangement.

Several parents believed that the ending of the co-residence arrangement was important for their child’s development. Margaret felt living with one’s parents for extended periods during young adulthood was “just not healthy” and it was “best if kids move out [and] are independent”. Helen also commented:

...for the moment she’s living at home, I’m sure at some stage she’ll, I don’t expect she’s going to be living at home with me when she’s 45 years old, I sincerely hope for her sake she’s not, for my sake that’s fine but yeah she’s got a life to lead...

Other parents seemingly had personal reasons for wanting their children to move out. Anne wanted to enjoy some personal time, especially as prior to her
sons’ returns she had “sort of been thinking ‘Oh, now won’t it be nice when you don’t have to go to work and you’ve got rid of the kids and you’ve got your own life back sort of stuff and you can do things that you want to do’”. Part of this involved moving into a smaller property, plans which had been put on hold by the return of her sons. She suggested:

...they tell you that parenting never stops and everybody thinks ‘Oh yeah, once they get to, once they’re 18 and they go to uni or whatever’ ‘No, no’, they’re 28 and nearly 27 and they’re both back home again (pauses) and I’m sitting looking at it and I think ‘Oh, what do you have to do?’...

Christine’s narrative encompassed both perspectives. Although she was aware that the departure of her children was dependent on when they felt financially ready to build their own homes, and that this could be some time in the future, she was:

...looking forward I must say to the time they do move, and that’s not being that I just want them out, I want to see them grow and mature even more and I think when the time comes that they do go that will be the right time for them...

However, Christine was also conscious of her own needs. She hoped that her children were “not there forever really (laughs), yeah I suppose going into retirement, which is sort of on the back of our minds, I probably wouldn’t want to have them there when we are retired”. At the time of the second interview, Christine again suggested that she and her husband were “getting to the stage where (they) wouldn’t mind (their) house back to (them) selves”.

As Christine’s comments suggest, the parents often appeared to experience conflicting desires regarding the ending of the co-residence arrangement. For instance, during her initial interview, when they were still co-residing, Susan acknowledged that her sons “would move out eventually and have their own lives” and was anticipating more time to herself. However, she also suggested:
...no one else is there and I think ‘Oh, I’m home alone. This is lovely’ and then I think ‘It’d be lonely without them’ and it will be and it’ll take some adjusting but if they all move out one at a time I’ll be able to deal with it probably better than if they all moved out holus-bolus in one hit...

Reflecting the temporary nature of the co-residence arrangement, several of the young adults had departed the parental home in the six months between interviews. Nicole, who had moved into shared accommodation, was conscious of “getting older still” and not wanting “to live at home forever”. She acknowledged that, although the three years she spent at home was felt to have passed by quickly:

I don’t want to be having another three years and then I’m nearly 30 and I haven’t moved out because I don’t know then, I don’t know, self-esteem issues or something, like I’m really self-critical and I’d be like ‘Nah, gotta go and do grown-up stuff’...

Her decision to move out also related to issues within her family. According to Nicole, a disagreement regarding the care of her younger brother was “the trigger for the timing [of moving out again]”, as she was “sick of the responsibility” and the lack of appreciation her parents showed for her efforts. However, she also recognised that they had previously argued over similar matters and therefore “it wasn’t like (she) moved out just because (she) was upset”.

Emma, in contrast, was still more than happy to live with her parents, though decided to leave home for the convenience of being closer to her place of employment. Both Andrew and Luke, who each recognised it was time to move on during their initial interviews, departed when they chose to live with their respective partners.
Having made the decision to move out, the young adults were enjoying living outside the parental home again. They did not, however, regret returning home. Emma had “no reservations about having moved home for a short period of time”, while Nicole suggested there were “more things that I’m definitely glad I did moving home and for the time that I was at home rather than regret”. She felt that “I needed it so I don’t regret being there”, with Luke also suggesting he “definitely wouldn’t change anything, I was at where I needed to be at exactly the right time”.

However, they were not always sure about their parents’ feelings about their departures. Luke and Nicole commented:

*I genuinely think they were happy to have me out, not happy to have me out of the house but happy to have me independent and doing my own thing so you know whenever I go and visit Mum she’s like ‘Oh, I kind of miss you playing music and stuff around the house’ and being that creative, supportive son that I am... – Luke

...they were a bit surprised because I hadn’t even talked about share houses and then all of a sudden I’d found one and you know I was moving out in a week but they’ve met some of the housemates and because it’s nearby and it’s not some excessive price and they’ve seen the place, it doesn’t seem extreme or stupid really the choice they’re okay with it basically... – Nicole

Bernie was somewhat surprised when Nicole “suddenly decided she wanted her own space and sort of moved out”, especially as “she sort of seemed to be settled”. Margaret, in contrast, had almost anticipated her son Andrew’s departure:

...well it wasn’t abrupt, he didn’t talk to me about it very much, I just assumed because the girlfriend was already in an apartment and I just assumed he would move out and he did, we didn’t have a big long conference about it, it just became obvious that that’s what he was going to do because he spent more and more time over there...
Nevertheless, both parents had mixed feelings about their respective children’s departures. While Margaret felt it was positive and hoped that Andrew’s relationship endured so he did not feel the need to return again, she also admitted that “sometimes (she missed) him a bit and the conversations”. Bernie also suggested that, when it came time for his daughter to leave:

...as a parent you have mixed feelings, I suppose you’ve got accustomed to having her around the house after the previous couple of years and just being there and then all of a sudden she’s gone but then the good thing I suppose is, particularly in our house where space is an issue, that it sort of suddenly freed up a whole lot of space to make the house a bit more liveable so it had that sort of practical thing for us and so for us it was sort of with mixed feelings but you felt as though she’s got to learn to live away from home and after a tumultuous marriage that it was great that she had that confidence and independence to start to stand on her own two feet again so those were the sort of feelings, an extra bit of sadness but at the same time there’s some practical benefits as well...

For Grace, who “loved having (her) daughter living with (them) and would not have wanted to change it”, Emma’s departure was “heart-wrenching”. She was disappointed she did not “see her often enough now”, a response that seemingly reflected the loss of the company and support she had gained as a consequence of Emma’s return home. The departure of their children thus meant adjusting again, though this time it was to less involvement in the lives of their offspring. According to Susan:

...you miss it a little bit and you sort of wonder what they’re doing and think ‘I’m the parent here and someone should ring me at least and say they’re okay’ and then Luke’s words would be ‘Well Mum I’m only a phone call away’ and Trevor would say ‘He’s only a phone call away if you want to know’ but I figure ‘I’m the parent, he should at least ring me once a week’ cos we used to go and see our parents (laughs)....
It was, however, also about embracing plans for their own futures. Susan recalled a conversation with her husband Trevor:

...he said ‘you know, we’re not going to stay in this house forever’ cos we’ve got stairs and I said ‘Well I’d like to at least live in it for two years when the, all the children have moved out’, he said ‘Why?’ so I said ‘So at least I can have two years by myself with no-one, no dog, no kids, no nothing’ but anyway who knows?

While there was always the possibility the young adults would need to return again, they were quite keen to remain outside the parental home. Luke suggested that, although his parents’ nature meant they would always be there to offer support, his “challenge now (was) to say ‘Okay, that’s there but I’ve stuck with my choice and I don’t want to use that anymore’”. Nicole also commented:

I’m pretty adamant that I don’t want to go home, just because of all the family stress of babysitting and, more just the thing of moving things in and out and there’s no room and you know [it is] just really, really cramped at the house and I’ve got some money to be able to, if I stay in this shared accommodation type environment, yeah I think I’m gonna be fine and I was able to find somewhere that’s just a few streets away from my parents so I’ve still got the emotional support if I need it so nah, I don’t think I’ll ever go home again...

Nevertheless, their parents did not necessarily close the door on allowing them to return home again if the need arose. Bernie, despite having to make a number of adjustments to accommodate Nicole, felt he would still accept her back into the household. He commented:

...certainly there’s no guarantees where she is now, it’s only been a short period of time, three or four weeks, that she’s been out so if that was to suddenly go belly-up, well we wouldn’t have an issue, an issue moving her back in again so, yeah, it wouldn’t be an issue...
While Grace would be “willing to look at the circumstances” should daughter Emma need to return home, Margaret indicated she would “probably advise (Andrew), I mean I’d let him come home but I’d say ‘I really don’t think you should, you should go and find some other arrangement’”. On a similar note, Susan felt her son Luke’s departure signalled time to move on. She was, however, less inclined to entertain another return, commenting during her second interview:

> Could I have said no? Back then no, but now maybe because I figure Trevor and I are in our 60s so really at this age our kids shouldn’t be at home and that’s why I said I loaned him some more money, I said to Trevor ‘I’ve loaned him some more money’, he said ‘we really can’t afford it’ and I said ‘Yeah I know but it’s probably simpler to keep him out and pay his rent and bills than for him to come back home again cos you know he did say ‘oh Mum I might have to come back home’, I’m thinking ‘Oh no, I don’t need you home now’, you’ve moved out, we don’t have music, we don’t have all this extra stuff and, although it would be nice, no, no, you’re 28, you need to be out, nut it out for yourself’...

In this case, while Susan acknowledged it would be nice to have son Luke around the household again, her desire for both of them to have greater independence meant she was hesitant to allow him back home for the third time. Consequently, rather than offer support in the form of co-residence, she decided to assist Luke financially so that he may remain living independently.

To summarise, most parents experienced mixed feelings about the young adults’ departure. Unlike their offspring, who were very much looking forward to moving out and enjoying independent living, the parents appreciated that the ending of co-residence would have both negative and positive implications. On the one hand, the return to co-residence meant they had been enjoying the benefit of the renewed company of their offspring and therefore wanted this to continue. However, they were also looking forward to the next stage in their own lives without the young adults being at home. For much the same reasons, those parents whose children had left home during the six months between
interviews were not always sure how they would feel if their offspring needed to return again in the future. In several cases, they suggested they would assess the need for a subsequent return if and when it arose. This approach demonstrates the overall premise of this study, namely that parents are willing to put their own preferences aside in order to do what they believe is in the best interests of their children. The following chapter explores this parental tendency in more detail, including how it relates to their stage in the lifespan, and thereby attempts to explain why their experiences often differed to those of their young adult offspring.
Chapter Nine: Discussion

The previous four chapters have drawn on the perspectives of 10 young adults and their parents to explore the return to co-residence from inception to either its intended or actual conclusion. Findings revealed the young adults returned home in response to changes in circumstances, many of which were influenced by societal forces beyond their entire control. Returning to co-residence meant parents and young adults came to accept the living arrangement, accommodate each other within the household and also appreciate how returning allowed them to advance.

The ways this living arrangement was experienced and the meaning it was ascribed inherently reflect what it is to be in the world. According to the philosophies of Heidegger, an individual’s potential is not infinite, with who they are and how they understand themselves and their possibilities limited by the world in which they exist (Cerbone 2006; Munhall 2013). The ways one acts and engages in this world, albeit intrinsically shaped by interactions with others, including their family members, is also bounded by their own concerns or what matters to them (Chesla 1995).

Consequently, the parents and young adults often differed in how they experienced and described the three domains of acceptance, accommodation and appreciation. Both parties, although connected to each other in a myriad of ways, are individuals who occupy different social positions based on their gender, age, experiences and different sources of power (Perlesz & Lindsay 2003). They also find themselves with different concerns, reflecting their own values, needs and stages of development. With interpretation from a constructivist viewpoint focusing on “making sense of different accounts and how these are produced” (Perlesz & Lindsay 2003, p. 34), this chapter explores the family members’ experiences by examining these nuances in more detail.
Before proceeding, it must be acknowledged that in accordance with both constructivist and hermeneutical phenomenological perspectives, this interpretation is one of many that are possible (Annells 1996; Tan, Wilson & Olver 2009). While I accept that the nature of the interpretive task, combined with the complexity of families and the return to co-residence itself, means you the reader may perhaps have a slightly different account, I remain equally confident that the following understanding is well supported by the experiences of the parents and young adults and the use of the chosen theoretical perspectives.

**A response to circumstances**

In order for the return to co-residence to occur, the young adults first departed the parental home. They often left when the ‘right’ opportunity presented itself (Roberts 2013), with their reasons for moving out including a desire to be independent, relationship formation, participation in higher education and the pursuit of employment (refer page 111). These were not unique, in that all four motives have previously been identified as key drivers of young adults’ departures in both Australian and international contexts (ABS 2008; Heath 1999; Holdsworth 2000; Mulder 2009).

The young adults were also similar to most who leave home at this age (ABS 2008; Heath 2008, 2009; Heath & Cleaver 2003; Mulder 2003; Mulder 2009; Natalier 2007), in that the majority found themselves cohabiting with their respective partners or residing in share households. All bar one rented their accommodation, reflecting their incomes and constraints of the local housing markets (Ford, Rugg & Burrows 2002).

The circumstances surrounding the young adults’ departures from the parental home remain important to acknowledge, particularly as the reasons for leaving are closely associated with the reasons behind a return (Jones 1995; Young 1987, 1989). For instance, leaving home to commence a course of study, take up
a job or live with a partner has been associated with returning because the course, employment or partnership ends (Jones 1995).

While several young adults returned home when the commitment for which they left concluded, they were by no means the majority. The young adults more commonly left home for one reason but moved back for others, suggesting that it is overall changes in their circumstances that lead to the return home. Supporting the contention that turning points in an individual's life course are key determinants of returning home (Stone, Berrington & Falkingham 2014), namely because they cause a shortage of resources or an increased need to conserve them (DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990), the young adults returned due to the ending of prior study commitments, the loss of employment, the breakdown of their relationships, alterations to their current housing arrangements, increasing financial pressures and emotional difficulties (refer page 113).

These reasons for returning are not uncommon, with surveys both in Australia and overseas previously identifying that money problems, decisions regarding employment or education, housing issues and broken relationships predominate (Hartley 1993; Mitchell 2000b). However, challenging the reliance on methods in which young people simply nominate their reason for returning, the young adults’ decisions to move home were linked to a complex range of circumstances and the different needs these often created. They did not return as a result of one of emotional, practical or financial needs (Jones 1995) but rather, as Hartley (1993) earlier suggested, a combination of all three (refer page 114). For instance, several young adults, despite suggesting their return to the parental home occurred as a result of relationship breakdown, were also engaged in higher education, meaning they therefore had limited time available for paid employment; this, in turn, resulted in an inability to afford alternate living arrangements and a need to pursue co-residence.
The return to this living arrangement, therefore, largely reflected events in the lives of the young adults rather than their parents. While this is consistent with earlier research (Messineo 2005; Ward & Spitze 1996b), the findings also support the view that young adults should not be held totally accountable for their so often labelled ‘failure’ to secure and maintain permanent residential autonomy (Mitchell 2000b), with broader economic conditions and diminished opportunity structures also playing an important role (Flatau et al. 2003; Mitchell 2000b, 2007). Whether young people freely exercise agency to determine their own pathways, or are affected by structural forces, continues to be discussed within youth research (see Côté 2002; Côté & Bynner 2008; Evans 2002, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel 2007; Roberts 2007; Roberts 2010; Schwartz, Côté & Arnett 2005; Threadgold 2011; Woodman 2009, 2010). However, the suggestion that structural changes have resulted in increasingly uncertain outcomes and meant that personal agency, operating in conjunction with support from others, has become of greater importance in determining the pathways to follow (Côté & Bynner 2008) aligns with the experiences of the young adults in the current study.

Reflecting the life course perspective, developmental theory (Patterson 2012) and the notion of ‘bounded agency’ (Evans 2002, 2007), whereby individuals possess greater responsibility for shaping their biographies but are still limited by the society in which they exist, the young adults made the decision to return home in response to changes in their circumstances. These changes were often beyond their control, influenced by broader trends in labour and education marketplaces. For example, faced with the prospect of poorer entry-level jobs, young adults may have little choice but to pursue post-secondary education in order to gain an advantage (Côté & Bynner 2008). However, while they are acquiring the skills and knowledge sought after by a more highly skilled labour force, there is often less time available to work, meaning they experience unemployment or have to settle for low-paid, low-skill jobs (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011; Furlong 2011). With limited earning potential, the majority do not have the capacity to accrue substantial savings and, although the direct
costs of education can be covered by the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in Australia, face the challenge of financing their living expenses (Cobb-Clark 2008; Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011).

Even when they graduate, the shift from standard patterns of employment to increased flexibility has coincided with a rise in more precarious work. With employers also varying in the value they place on education as compared to employment experience, young Australians who are highly educated and ‘qualified’ may find it takes a little longer than anticipated after course completion to become established more permanently in the labour market (Graduate Careers Australia 2013a, 2013b; Pusey 2007; Woodman 2013).

Young adults’ often-limited earnings and insecure employment mean they are not in the best position to finance residential autonomy (Burke, Pinkney & Ewing 2002; Waulff & Baum 2002). With the continued growth in the costs of living, including the price of housing in terms of mortgages and weekly rent (Department of Infrastructure and Transport Major Cities Unit 2013), it is not unexpected that the young adults in the current study looked to return to co-residence. In fact, earlier studies have shown that higher housing costs increase the likelihood of residing in the parental home in Australia (Bourassa et al. 1994; Haurin et al. 1997), while also delaying home leaving and promoting returns in Britain (Ermisch 1999).

However, despite obviously contributing to their returns home, most of the young adults did not discuss broader societal changes. Their parents, in contrast, recognised how changes in the cost of housing, employment and relationship formation meant it was now more difficult for their offspring to live independently (refer page 117), thereby challenging the notion that parents may be unaware of, or choose to ignore, the structural factors that make leaving the parental home more difficult (Newman & Aptekar 2007). It may be that, having experienced prior patterns and opportunities, the parents can appreciate the different pathways and increased challenges their offspring face (see, for
example, Biggart & Walther 2006; Roberts 2011; te Riele 2004; Walther 2006), whereas young adults do not necessarily have this point of comparison when evaluating their decisions to return home.

Alternatively, the tendency for the young adults to focus more on their own decisions may reflect the increase in individualistic attitudes. With greater responsibility for shaping their lives, people are more likely to see setbacks and crises as personal shortcomings rather than consequences of processes beyond their control (Furlong & Cartmel 2007).

Equally, the young adults may be internalising the often-negative messages they encounter in relation to pathways to adulthood and the need to live in the parental home. Although adopting the flexibility demanded by changing social conditions, young adults are not meeting the ‘standard’ model; they are thus charged with delaying their adulthood and, in the eyes of the jurors (journalists, social commentators and social scientists), have failed to reach ‘full personhood’ (Blatterer 2007, 2010). With individuals found to adopt the negative stereotypes of ageing presented in the media, and therefore potentially internalising the views of intense parental support perpetuated by the popular press (Fingerman et al. 2012b), it is possible that the young adults in the current study accept the contention they have ‘failed’ and therefore blame themselves for the return rather than attribute some of the responsibility to societal conditions beyond their control. Their parents, on the other hand, were not the ones who had returned, meaning they were perhaps less likely to experience the negativity associated with this living arrangement and could thus possess greater perspective. Their roles as parents may also explain their greater focus on the effect of societal conditions, in that they wanted to ‘defend’ their children’s decisions.

While the parents’ experiences therefore support the idea that individuals are more likely to blame external conditions for negative results, yet focus on themselves when consequences are more favourable (Furlong & Cartmel 2007),
the same could not be said for their offspring. The different positions held by parents and young adults in relation to the return to co-residence was of significant influence, shaping not only their understanding of its determinants but also the meaning it was ascribed. While evident across the three domains, differences in perceptions were especially apparent when it came to their acceptance of the change in living arrangement.

**Acceptance**

For the young adults in the current study, the decision to live in the parental home related not only to their immediate circumstances but also to their prior family experiences and perceptions of social norms (Messineo 2005). The majority assumed that the option to return home was available to them, supporting the contention that young adults who anticipate parental support are more likely to return home in comparison to those without such expectations (Messineo 2005). The current finding also reinforces the notion that returning is believed to constitute a fallback position for young people if needed (Roberts 2013). However, whereas this previous research did not elaborate on why young adults hold such views in great detail, those in the current study suggested it was the quality of their relationships and their past experiences with their parents that meant they knew they could move home (refer page 123). Several young adults identified that they had always maintained a positive and caring relationship with their parents and how, over the course of their lives to date, they had been continually supported in their endeavors. While these findings align with suggestions it is those with positive parent-child relationships who are likely to receive housing support (Swartz et al. 2011) and also return home (Young 1987, 1989), it must also be acknowledged that others in the current study, whose history with their parents had been more unsettled, still assumed they could move back. Such assumptions, although felt to be based more on the precedent established when the parental home had earlier been made available to them and their siblings
upon encountering challenging circumstances, were nevertheless underpinned by a history of support from parent to child.

The young adults’ assumptions meant that they tended not to engage in elaborate discussions with their parents regarding the move home (refer page 124). In several cases, it was simply a brief conversation in which the young adult informed their parents, rather than asked, about their need to return. With previous studies (see DaVanzo & Goldscheider 1990; Mitchell 1998; Mitchell & Gee 1996a; Mitchell, Wister & Gee 2000, 2004; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997) focusing on the reasons for the return to co-residence and experiences in terms of satisfaction and exchanges of support, at the expense of considering how the return was actually worked out between family members, this notion of relatively ‘unspoken agreements’ constitutes a new finding.

This becomes all the more important when considering the parental perspective. Unlike their children, who assumed that returning home was always an option that was open to them, the majority of parents had not deliberated over the possibility of returning to co-residence (refer page 121) and instead responded to the needs of their children. In contrast to the social exchange theory, which suggests that the transfer of support occurs in anticipation of receiving assistance later on (Kirkpatrick Johnson 2013), the parents allowed the young adults to return in order to overcome challenging circumstances, including job loss and relationship breakdown, or to support them while they pursued new opportunities, such as tertiary education and home ownership. The influence of the young adults’ needs was consistent with previous studies, which suggest it is events in the lives of the offspring more than their parents that drive the exchange of support during this stage in the lifespan (Berry 2008; Bucx, van Wel & Knijn 2012). It also supports conclusions by Ploeg et al. (2004) and Swartz et al. (2011) that parents act as ‘safety nets’ or ‘scaffolds’, providing support in order to either help their young adult offspring overcome difficulties or assist them to set up for their futures.
Parents, according to the intergenerational stake hypothesis, are invested in their children as part of their legacy (Kirkpatrick Johnson 2013). They are therefore sensitive to how their offspring turn out and tend to react to both their achievements and disappointments (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit 2010; Fingerman et al. 2012c). While the parents’ decision to allow the return to co-residence may be motivated by their desire to ensure their children’s success, it also reflects the greater value parents place on continuity and closeness in their relationship (Giarruso, Stallings & Bengston 1995; Shapiro 2004). For several parents, the decision to allow their young adult offspring to return home was a reflection of their sense of family (refer page 122). They loved their children and therefore wanted to do what they could to help them during their time of need. Previous research, albeit in relation to the provision of financial support, has found parents are highly motivated to assist, expressing this in terms of strong feelings of love for individuals as well as a commitment to family because it was family (Ploeg et al. 2004). Further supporting the work of Ploeg and colleagues (2004), parents’ own experiences of a close upbringing and receiving family support whilst growing up was felt to influence their decision to allow their children to return. Thus, in contrast to the earlier suggestion that the quality of past family life was unrelated to co-residence (White & Rogers 1997), the current study supports the idea that feelings of obligation and affinity play an important role (Bucx, van Wel & Knijn 2012).

While there was a sense that parents felt obligated to accept their offspring back into the parental home, this was attributed by some to the mere lack of alternative options (refer page 134). Likewise, several parents’ decisions appeared to be strongly influenced by their perceptions of what it meant to be a parent. Challenging the idea that parents may view the return to co-residence as a negative reflection of their child-rearing skills, as they ask themselves where they went wrong in not preparing their adult children for life on their own (Aldous 1996), those in the current study seemingly felt that not allowing one’s child to move home was much more adverse (refer page 122). Several parents, in describing the alternative to co-residence, likened it to seeing their ‘kids on
Having a child who is homeless appears to carry its own stigma, as evidenced by the propensity for parents of such children to report them as staying with friends instead of having no fixed address (Zufferey & Kerr 2004). While this outcome would probably not have occurred, with the young adults in positions where they could have drawn upon other resources had the parental home not been available, the parents’ tendency to take such a black-and-white view emphasises their desire to avoid being associated with the abandonment of their own offspring. Furthermore, in recounting stories of acquaintances that did not permit their children to return, several parents were quick to suggest that such an approach was not one they could understand or see themselves ever adopting. In affirming their decision as the ‘right’ one, the parents not only echoed findings from an earlier Australian study, which found that women were surprised or shocked when mothers welcomed or actively encouraged their children to move out, but also supported the existence of ‘socially sanctioned’ ways for parents to behave (Dare 2011).

Parents’ acceptance of the return to co-residence may have also reflected a desire to maintain supportive relationships (Giarruso, Stallings & Bengston 1995) and, in turn, preserve the wellbeing of the family as a whole (Babington 2006). They perhaps recognised that disallowing the return, particularly at a time when their offspring felt they had limited options and needed parental assistance, could result in tension and discontinuity and was therefore not in the best interests of their offspring or the family unit moving forward.

Overall, there are very few rules about when parental responsibility should end or how to withdraw it (Lamanna & Riedmann 2012). This, together with the lack of clarity around the effects of prolonged dependence on their offspring’s wellbeing or the wellbeing of society as a whole (Cohen et al. 2003), means parents appear to be establishing new rules about what is expected of them when their offspring reach young adulthood. However, given the complaints and ridicule of co-residence in the Australian and international media (Settersten & Ray 2010), along with suggestions that returning home impacts negatively on
parental wellbeing because it lacks guidelines, increases intergenerational responsibility and violates normative expectations (Mitchell 1998), it is interesting that parents would endorse this over a more independent living arrangement.

Like their parents, the young adults were also influenced by their perceptions of societal expectations. However, in their case, such perceptions influenced their feelings about returning to co-residence rather than their motivations for doing so (refer page 130). Despite the diversity of contemporary patterns, several young adults felt society expected them to be living apart from their parents. Supporting the suggestion that traditional norms about adulthood have yet to wane (Blatterer 2007, 2010), they identified that experiences typifying independence continue to be prioritised and sought-after (Kelly 2011; Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011) and thus circumstances in which young people are not considered independent (including living with one’s parents) are often deemed invalid (Blatterer 2007). With congruity between one’s values and living situation integral to young people’s wellbeing (Kins et al. 2009) and therefore satisfaction with life (OECD 2011), the failure of patterns of returning home to conform to what the young adults believed was expected meant this living arrangement was perceived negatively.

Interactions with older adults, who had the tendency to compare contemporary choices against their own patterns, reinforced the societal expectations and further contributed towards the young adults’ negative feelings about their situations. This supports Blatterer (2007), who suggested that expectations of self and others to grow up, settle down and follow the beaten path of previous generations may assist with the setting of goals but may equally give rise to hopes that can no longer be recognised and therefore encourage self-doubt. The practice of comparing themselves to earlier generations is particularly problematic for young adults, particularly given suggestions the social and economic conditions that gave rise to this earlier adulthood no longer exist (Wyn & Woodman 2006).
It has been suggested that as the practice of living with one’s parents for longer periods becomes more common, social anxiety diminishes; this, in turn, leads to more ready acceptance and a decrease in the negative feelings experienced by those involved (Newman & Aptekar 2007). The current study found that the young adults’ acceptance of the move back home was affected by comparisons between their situations and those of others. However, despite their partners, peers and even siblings continuing to live in the parental home, the young adults still experienced negative feelings about their living arrangement.

Often, it was the young men who were more forthcoming in terms of their perceptions of stigma attached to co-residence (refer page 133). This may be a reflection of age, as the majority of males interviewed were 26 years and older and research suggests age 25 is the time by which people believe individuals should leave home (Settersten 1998). While it was more common for the older participants to acknowledge negative feelings, the fact most of the young adults expressed some disappointment about returning home not only challenges the suggestion by Arnett (2000) that emerging adulthood, as in the period between the ages of 18 and 25, is distinguished by relative independence from normative expectations but also indicates that perhaps age was not the sole factor at play.

The young men described situations in which members of the opposite sex no longer wanted to pursue relationships with them, namely because returning to reside in the parental home meant they were not seen as independent. This finding reinforces the importance placed on experiences that epitomise independence (Kelly 2011; Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011), including living apart from parents. It also highlights how the perception of stigma seems to relate to the association young people have between independence and the status of ‘adulthood’ (Allan, Taylor & Borlagdan 2013; Arnett 2004; Green & Wheatley 1992; Jones 1995; Nelson et al. 2007) and, more specifically to the young men, independence and masculinity (Sneed et al. 2006). Males are expected, through socialisation, to separate themselves from their parents (Kenny & Donaldson
1992), perhaps explaining why the young men in the current study saw living at home, as well as having close parent-offspring relationships, as representing a weakness.

Perceptions of stigma and that they have ‘failed’ in the eyes of society could have detrimental consequences for the young adults, particularly as feeling satisfied, self-acceptance and the ability to evaluate one’s self by personal standards are all considered key contributors to wellbeing (Manderson 2005; OECD 2011; Ryff & Keyes 1995). It could also mean that living with one’s parents was counterproductive- the young adults were moving back in to the parental home to overcome situations that were less than favorable or to get ahead, yet then have the set back of dealing with potential backlash from making a decision that society unfairly views as a failure.

These assumptions are based on the existence of a normative transitional process from which young adults deviate (Wyn & Woodman 2006). While Wyn and Woodman (2006) argue that using the transitions of earlier generations, namely the Baby Boomers, as a ‘standard timeline’ to judge current young adults is no longer appropriate, Furlong (2011) suggests it is important to remember that this preferred future- of financial security, access to rewarding employment and relationships and so forth- is still one that young people wholeheartedly buy into. However, as much as the young adults in the current study compared themselves to notions of traditional adulthood, they also experienced ambivalence about this model. They identified it as an ideal, yet at the same time remained doubtful about how far they were succeeding (or wanted to succeed) in its realization (Blatterer 2007). For example, they recognised the value placed on residential autonomy from their parents but were also conscious of how their choices meant this was not always easy to achieve. In this way, the realities of their circumstances also contributed to their acceptance of returning to the parental home.
These realities often combined with perceptions of the benefits to outweigh the negative influence of societal expectations (refer page 129), meaning that in accordance with the principles of social exchange theory, the young adults came to accept the return to co-residence. This supports earlier research, which found both young adults and their parents engaged in a ‘weighing up’ of the positives and negatives in order to reach an overall appraisal of the arrangement (Mitchell 1998; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997). However, the overall complexity of the young adults’ feelings suggests that these previous quantitative studies have been too narrow in their scope. Using assessments of ‘how well’ the arrangement was working out to conclude that most young people are highly satisfied with co-residence (Sage, Evandrou & Falkingham 2013; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997) actually overlooks the individuals’ feelings. In terms of the current study, the arrangement was often working out well in the sense that it was not conflict-ridden and enabled the young adults to overcome their challenging circumstances, but this did not preclude the initial feelings of disappointment regarding the decision to return to the parental home.

Furthermore, the evolution of the young adults’ feelings from negativity to ultimate acceptance, together with the interplay of contributing factors, affirms that classifying young people is questionable (Wyn & Woodman 2006) and thereby challenges the use of labels proposed in earlier research. This is even more the case when the definitions do not encompass individuals’ eagerness (or lack thereof) about returning home and instead focus on the circumstances under which they do so. Coles, Rugg and Seavers (1999) suggest that young adults can be considered ‘reluctant’ or ‘willing returners’. However, a ‘reluctant returner’ refers to a young person who has had to return because of a failure to sustain an independent tenancy and a ‘willing returner’ someone who intended to leave home temporarily or has resolved the problematic reasons behind their departure (Coles, Rugg & Seavers 1999). Even if Coles and colleagues (1999) changed their definitions to base them on young adults’ attitudes to returning home rather than their reasons for doing so, it would not necessarily be any easier to classify the young adults in this study. The majority could be assigned
to both these categories because, although they were not necessarily keen to return home at the outset, they were not completely ‘reluctant’; they all moved home of their own volition in order to overcome the challenges associated with independent living.

In accordance with the social exchange theory (Vogl-Bauer 2009), perceptions of rewards and costs are likely to vary between young adults and their parents; while there is the potential for both parties to agree that the return home is either highly rewarding or very costly, it is also possible for one to see the return as positive while the other does not (Mitchell 2006b). The current study, unlike previous research which has tended to examine satisfaction of young adults and their parents separately (Mitchell 1998; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997), was able to compare how related family members felt about the return to co-residence, thereby offering an important contribution to the field. Findings revealed that, although the young adults and their parents could experience opposing feelings on the path to acceptance, they were able to overcome these in order to manage the co-resident arrangement.

Furthermore, the parents and young adults did at times consider how the other member of their dyad might be feeling, even if these perceptions did not always align with what the other expressed (refer page 132). In some cases, they believed their family member was unhappy with the return to co-residence, whereas the other suggested they were actually quite accepting of the change in living arrangement. While it is possible that the second family member did not disclose their true feelings during their own interview, and the individuals’ perceptions actually constitute a more accurate representation, there may also be a tendency to perceive unhappiness because of societal portrayals of co-residence as undesirable (Mitchell 2006b; Settersten & Ray 2010; Swartz 2008).

The alternative was also evident, whereby one member felt the other was more accepting of the return than what the latter described him or herself as being. In such cases, it is possible that the latter was concealing their true feelings from
their family member in order to avoid potential backlash (Aquilino 1999b), especially as research suggests neither young adults nor their parents enjoy the potential for conflict and stress associated with the return to co-residence (Mitchell 1998; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997). Each party may have therefore wanted to minimise such conflict, perhaps as a means of preventing the ending of the arrangement. Although the intergenerational stake hypothesis suggests young people tend to emphasise conflict with parents and exaggerate differences in order to achieve a clearer sense of emancipation and separation (Acock & Bengston 1980; Bengston & Kuypers 1971), it may be that the young adults in the current study elected not to reveal their dislike of the living arrangement to their parents because they recognised that the costs of living separately were greater than those associated with co-residence and thus wanted to avoid any cause for eviction.

Furthermore, the young adults may have felt their parents were more accepting of the arrangement because the latter did not verbalise their issues (Aquilino 1999b). Their parents may have given the impression to their offspring that they were more accepting of the arrangement than what they actually were because a negative appraisal could have been poorly received by their children, and thereby had a detrimental effect on their relationship. This aligns with the developmental stake hypothesis, which posits that parents seek to maintain continuity in their relationships with their offspring and are therefore more motivated to present intergenerational ties in positive ways (Aquilino 1999b).

As was the case with earlier quantitative research, which found parents rated co-residence more highly than their children (Ward & Spitze 1996b), the parents interviewed appeared to be more accepting of the return to this living arrangement than their offspring from the outset. However, unlike this earlier quantitative research (Ward & Spitze 1996b), the current study was better able to explore the varying degrees of acceptance the parents experienced. They all accepted the return was what needed to happen, either because they were parents or there was a lack of feasible alternatives. However, despite this, some
parents felt ambivalent about the situation. Those who had to make a number of undesirable changes to accommodate their children were less positive, as were those who had experienced challenges in their relationships with their offspring in the past. This adds to the literature, suggesting that parents’ responses to co-residence could be less positive in situations other than when children were not employed or studying or when they were divorced/separated (Aquilino 1991b; Aquilino & Supple 1991).

However, supporting earlier research that found parents responded with support in times of need regardless of relationship quality (Ward & Spitze 2007), they seemed to put these feelings aside in order to accommodate the young adult back home. In this way, the inherent bond between parents and children appears to override the actual quality of their relationship when one family member is experiencing challenging circumstances.

**Accommodation**

While Vogl-Bauer (2009) acknowledges that returning to co-residence requires re-adjustment, previous studies have not explored the specific changes parents and their adult children make in order to live together again in the parental household. The current study contributes to filling this gap, highlighting how parents make a number of adjustments in order to accommodate their offspring, including personal sacrifices in terms of their plans and finances, emotional adjustments to their offspring and more practical changes related to the spaces and routines within the home (refer page 138).

Most parents accepted that these changes were part of the co-residence arrangement and the decision to support their offspring. However, just as they had different reasons for accepting their children back into the household, there was also a range of factors influencing their satisfaction with making the required adjustments. Some considered these to be part of their role as parents, supporting the notion that parenting is a lifetime responsibility and, irrespective
of age, they are willing to suppress their own needs for the benefit of their children (Dillaway 2006). However, while parenting appeared to be a continually valued part of midlife identity for some (Levitski 2009) and they did not appear to harbour deep resentments about supporting their children (Settersten & Ray 2010), others felt their duty as parents was over. In such cases, adjustments were still accepted, namely because the return was either considered to be of a short-term nature or there were a lack of feasible alternatives, but made more begrudgingly.

It is important to acknowledge the parents’ dissatisfaction with making changes to accommodate their offspring. By potentially reducing opportunities for personal independence and development, which parents come to expect once their children have matured and left home, co-residence can lead to conflict (Schnaiberg & Goldenberg 1989). Taken together with suggestions that disagreement on the expectations surrounding a role results in more difficulty with its adoption and maintenance (White & Klein 2008), the continuation of parental sacrifice beyond what was anticipated could impact negatively. For instance, the parents’ somewhat reduced capacity for environmental mastery and autonomy (Ryff & Keyes 1995), in terms of being able to engage in contexts in ways that suit their own needs rather than those of their offspring, may affect wellbeing. This could, in turn, become the impetus for the ending of the co-resident arrangement.

Nevertheless, the parental tendency to make changes across a number of domains in order to accommodate their offspring meant the young adults could often move back into the household without too much adjustment. While it was often a case of re-acclimatising to the parental rules and expectations they had encountered prior to their departure, this was more significant for some than it was for others. Several young adults, supporting the significance of intimacy and independence to development during this stage of the lifespan (Santrock 2008), perceived returning home to mean changes to their freedom and social lives (refer page 150). They felt they were no longer able to entertain their friends as
readily, thereby reinforcing the value young people attribute to personal freedom and the ability to behave in certain ways without concern for parental expectations (Natalier 2007).

Although an interesting finding given the parents’ suggestion that their offspring were able to have people at the house, equally significant is the tendency for the young men to perceive greater restrictions than their female counterparts. Unlike the young women, the men often commented that living in the parental home meant they could no longer bring members of the opposite sex home for the night (refer page 150). This finding is not unexpected; the option to engage in casual sexual encounters is associated with living independently, namely because being away allows practices that would be considered awkward or inappropriate in the parental home (Natalier 2007). Nevertheless, such perceptions could also again reflect the expectation that, as a male, one will exist separately from their parents (Kenny & Donaldson 1992; Proulx & Helms 2008), meaning that they felt somewhat embarrassed about having to take a girl back to the parental home. However, it could equally relate to the different relationship statuses of the young men and women. The former may have felt, given their perceptions that experimenting with casual relationships was not looked on favorably by their parents, the need to avoid being judged for engaging with a number of different romantic partners. The young women, in contrast, were in committed relationships and therefore, having had to introduce their partners to their parents prior to them being able to stay over, it was no longer an issue.

None of the young women admitted to casual relationships and therefore a comparison cannot be directly made in regards to gender differences in the limits imposed by their parents. However, with suggestions by the parents of the young men that they would allow ‘girlfriends’ to stay over, it appears different expectations exist depending on the duration of the relationship involved. The parents’ tendency to want to see their children settling down aligns with their developmental focus on generativity and investment in the next generation,
while also supporting young adults in their own task of finding a romantic partner (Sigelman, Rider & De George-Walker 2013).

However, limiting the numbers of potential suitors they are able to bring home may actually hinder the young adults’ ability to find a partner. For many young people in their twenties, the challenge of finding a mate and the inevitable postponement of marriage means they are not necessarily settling down to a long-term committed relationship and instead spend time experimenting with casual sexual encounters and experiences (Claxton & van Dulmen 2013; Furstenberg Jr. 2010). This pattern, rather than being an alternative, is becoming an increasingly common pathway to relationship formation. It is actually thought to service future romantic relationships (even if not the current one), with most relationships originating from a ‘hook-up’ in some shape or form (Claxton & van Dulmen 2013; Kalish & Kimmel 2011). Thus, with guidelines and limits around romance said to be largely resented (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008), and positive relationships contributing to wellbeing (Ryff & Keyes 1995; Trewin 2001), the young men’s perceived inability to engage in casual relationships whilst living in the parental home could ultimately result in the decision to end the co-residence arrangement.

The young adults in the current study, although similar to others in that they disliked the parental rules and regulations and the lack of privacy and independence (Mitchell 2000b; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997), accepted these adjustments as part of returning home. In this way, they supported White’s (2002) findings, namely that young people accept the limits on their control of domestic spaces and autonomy within their parents’ homes as part of an unspoken exchange for physical shelter and material support. The current study, in highlighting how family members recognised the adjustments made by the other half of their dyad (refer pages 145 and 146), was also able to show examples where the young adults actually felt their parents had made greater adjustments than they had.
In addition, the young adults challenged the findings of Sassler, Ciambrone and Benway (2008) by typically recognising the need to contribute to the family home, whether it be financially or through domestic labour. Appreciating the notion of give and take and having empathy for others contributes to positive relationships and, thus, wellbeing (Ryff & Keyes 1995). By recognising what their parents had done for them in allowing the return to co-residence and the need to give back, the young adults may have therefore enhanced the wellbeing of both parties and the family unit as a whole (Babington 2006).

However, it must be acknowledged that, in spite of their beliefs, the majority of young adults provided less assistance than they received. While this supports the earlier findings of Veevers and Mitchell (1998), the qualitative nature of the current study facilitated further exploration of the exchange of support. In doing so, it was actually able to highlight the significant roles parents play in shaping the contribution of their offspring. For example, several parents did not require their offspring to pay towards the household costs, in favour of them saving, and others only charged nominal board. While this may reflect parents’ concern for how much ‘harder’ it is nowadays for young people to become established financially (Holdsworth & Morgan 2005), there was also a tendency for parents to undertake most of the domestic labour without asking for help (refer page 158). Doing so, however, meant the young adults often had very little incentive to volunteer their services.

The young adults’ lack of contribution proved to be a source of frustration for several parents (refer page 158), supporting Mitchell’s (1998) finding that parents are more likely to appraise the living arrangement negatively if their offspring provide low levels of instrumental support. It could be that parents’ wellbeing is affected by the absence of assistance from their family members (Babington 2006) or their personal lack of environmental mastery, in terms of the ability to create contexts that better suit their needs (Ryff & Keyes 1995). However, the current study has identified that there was often reluctance on the part of parents to ask their offspring for greater input and thereby alleviate
the unfavourable situation. Challenging Marshall and colleagues (2011), who found parents try to ensure congruity with the environment by pressing for change when expectations are not met, the parents suggested they found it easier to undertake the tasks themselves, either as a means of upholding their personal standards or avoiding the potential conflict that could disrupt the perceived equilibrium of the household. For a few, the decision not to make demands may have been more about minimising the impact, such that their offspring could continue to maintain their own commitments.

These findings further demonstrate the parents’ willingness to make sacrifices for the perceived good of their children, in accordance with their own focus on generativity (Sigelman, Rider & De George-Walker 2013). While this aligns with suggestions parents attempt to create environments that address the developmental needs of their young adult children (Marshall et al. 2011), the findings equally highlight that portrayals of co-residence, in which parents are considered ‘victims’ of lazy or greedy children, may be misplaced. The media, using headlines such as ‘Home is where the help is’ (Morton 2013) and ‘Leave luxury for a shoebox? Why, oh, Y’ (Lewis 2013), continues to remain sympathetic to its middle-aged, middle-class readership (Mitchell 2000b). However, these findings suggest that both parties determine the degree to which the younger family members contribute, meaning neither should be held totally accountable for the at-times inequitable division of domestic duties. Instead, both family members are required to negotiate, with the young adults taking initiative and offering to help out more than what was expected and parents being open to accept this assistance. Provided this occurs, parents and young adults can accommodate each other in the household while also appreciating what the return to co-residence has to offer.

**Appreciation**

Both the parents and young adults appreciated that the co-residence arrangement offered benefits, though they tended to differ in their focus.
Whereas the young adults’ emphasis centered on the practical advantages, the parents were more likely to highlight the interpersonal benefits. Several parents recognised that returning to co-residence provided opportunities for personal reflection. They were able to appreciate how they had coped with the changed living arrangement, as well as the ways they had adapted their parenting practices to suit the different roles within the household. Furthermore, the chance to be closely involved in their children’s lives again and see how they were maturing as young adults also gave them a sense of validation. That the parents identified this as a benefit is not surprising given their developmental goal to invest in their offspring; the belief of a job well done, or that one’s offspring have turned out well, is related to satisfaction with mid-life parenting and, in turn, better health and subjective wellbeing (Mitchell 2010).

These findings support, at least for some parents, the importance of parenthood to their identity. While also supporting suggestions that mothers’ development and personal satisfaction are inherently tied to their offspring’s successful transition to independence and their own role in this transition (Dare 2011), it is important to note that this occurred in spite of the young adults returning home. This is significant, as it contests the notion, derived from life course and family development theories, that only the launching of children from the nest is seen as successful (Aldous 1996; Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009; Sigelman & Rider 2012). The parents’ enjoyment of living with their children further challenges the idea parents feel less happy when their offspring encounter problems or developmental delays (Fingerman et al. 2009; Mitchell 2010), and could be interpreted as suggesting they do not see the return as symbolic of any problem or delay.

While these perceived benefits have not previously been identified, the parents shared similar sentiments with those in earlier research (see Mitchell 1998) when suggesting the primary advantage involved the company their offspring provided. They spoke of simply appreciating the young adults’ presence in the
household, though it was their now-increased ability to engage in conversations that was often highlighted as being particularly enjoyable.

This finding was challenged, however, through the use of interviews with their offspring, with several young men suggesting they did not spend much time in the parental household. This supports the findings of Veevers and Mitchell (1998), who identified parents were considerably more likely to report receiving regular emotional support compared to what their children reported providing. While Veevers and Mitchell (1998) did not elaborate as to the reasons why parents might emphasise the company they receive from their children, one possible explanation relates to the different motivations of parents versus their offspring. According to the intergenerational stake hypothesis (Giarruso, Stallings & Bengston 1995), parents’ greater investment in the lives of their children means they report their relationships more positively than their offspring do. Young adults, on the other hand, are more focused on their independence; the young men may have therefore suggested they were not often at home as a means of upholding the image they believed was expected.

The young men’s tendency to distance themselves from their parents may have also reflected their gendered socialisation, with theorists suggesting the ways boys are raised encourages them to seek independence (Proulx & Helms 2008). Girls, on the other hand, are socialised to maintain relational connectedness (Proulx & Helms 2008), hence explaining why the young women may not have felt the need to highlight their absence from home and were more likely to recognise the benefits of spending time in the company of their parents since returning to live with them.

Given this difference, it was interesting that both young men and women acknowledged that the return to co-residence allowed them to benefit from receiving guidance from their parents. This supports the notion that, although young people desire both independence and self-reliance, they also want their
parents to continue to play a role in their lives (Aquilino 1997, 2006; Nelson et al. 2011).

The value of their parents’ input was particularly salient when it came to making significant life decisions. Reflecting the notion of ‘linked lives’ and the resources offered by the family (Elder Jr. 1994; MacMillan & Copher 2005; Mitchell 2000a), the young adults emphasised how the return home enhanced their opportunities and helped prepare them for the future. More specifically, in line with suggestions that co-residence offers structural support and additional time to gain confidence and life skills (Aquilino 2006), the young adults recognised that living at home offered them the time, space and financial support needed to complete their studies, pursue new career paths and, like their Canadian counterparts (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008), get ahead economically. The young adults were still working towards the achievement of their goals, thereby challenging the notions that returning home represents a delay in the trajectories of young adults (Kilmartin 2000) and a ‘back-tracking’ along the transition path (Jones 1995; Roberts 2007). In addition to supporting the young adults’ development, moving back home may also have positive implications for wellbeing. The possession of purpose in life and personal growth are integral to a sense of wellbeing (Ryff & Keyes 1995), with the specific capacities to realise one’s potential through education; participate in satisfying and rewarding work; and have control over one’s economic resources also contributing to positive feelings (Trewin 2001).

As individual family members, the perceived benefits were similar in many respects to those identified in previous studies (Mitchell 1998; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997). Nevertheless, the current study was able to add to this earlier work by highlighting that both young adults and their parents, in addition to identifying how the return to co-residence benefits them personally, also show some recognition of its advantages for the other member of their dyad (refer page 176). Being considerate of others, as well as looking for the positive aspects, is not only important for individual wellbeing but also, given changes in
the wellbeing of young adults affect the wellbeing of their parents (and vice versa) (Knoester 2003), the overall wellbeing of the family unit (Babington 2006).

However, despite being deemed beneficial, the young adults and their parents recognised that the return to co-residence was to be a relatively short-term arrangement. While previous literature has not yet explored parents’ views regarding the expected duration of co-residence, the idea returning home was only temporary was not unique to the young adults interviewed. Although similar in the sense that they defined their return as an impermanent one, the young adults in the current study nevertheless differed from their Canadian counterparts (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008), in that they were actually concerned with how temporary their return would be.

Reflecting the idea of a social clock (Sigelman, Rider & De George-Walker 2013), several of the young adults felt there was a certain age by which time they should be living independently again. The existence of an age deadline for departing after a return appears to be a new finding, with previous research suggesting young adults only really perceive deadlines in terms of the ages when they first leave home and return (Settersten 1998). Further challenging the work of Settersten (1998), who suggested that age deadlines were more often identified for (and by) men, it was the young women in the current study actually citing the age deadlines more explicitly (refer page 180). While the importance of age in the lives of young women may have changed since the 1980s, when the data used by Settersten (1998) was collected, the difference between the young women and men may have also reflected their perceptions of their life stages at the time of the interview. The women were younger than their male counterparts, meaning that, while they could anticipate experiencing societal pressure to move out, they had perhaps not yet reached the age where they felt this was occurring. The young men, in contrast, acknowledged the stigma attached to the return to co-residence and how, at their age, they ‘should be’ living independently. Thus, challenging the idea that perceptions of
societal norms are not associated with subsequent home leaving (Billari & Liefbroer 2007), they had reached the supposed ‘deadline’ and were therefore more inclined to emphasise their forthcoming plans to leave the parental home (refer page 178).

These plans, however, were often related to changes in the young adults’ circumstances. Supporting earlier research (Sassler, Ciambrone & Benway 2008), most of the young adults were waiting until they had either completed their education and secured full-time employment or found themselves in more financially stable positions before leaving home again (refer page 178). Thus, despite talking of moving out as though they were very keen to do so, the young adults acknowledged it was not feasible to finance the costs of housing, particularly when holding part-time or casual jobs (Pusey 2007). There was also an underlying need to avoid a repeat of history; given economic insecurity had earlier played a role in their decision to return, and this was a move they hoped to avoid having to make again, the young adults accepted the need to postpone their current plans for departure.

While leaving home has important meaning in the lives of young adults, it is equally important for their parents (Baanders 1996; Holdsworth 2013; Holdsworth & Morgan 2005; Lahelma & Gordon 2003; Löfgren 1997; Mulder 2009). The parents in the current study were, in most cases, aware of the young adults’ plans to move on (refer page 178). This in itself is significant, given previous studies of parents’ perspectives have mostly focused on the return itself rather than its implications for later transitions. Furthermore, with much of the literature surrounding the ‘empty nest’ centred on mother’s feelings towards the initial transition, and not when their young adult offspring depart on subsequent occasions, the current findings further contribute towards filling a gap by highlighting that most parents appear to have mixed feelings after having returned to a co-residence arrangement (refer page 188).
The launching of children is a key stage in the development of the family (Strong, DeVault & Cohen 2011), with the majority of parents viewing their departure as a growth opportunity for both themselves and their offspring (Byers et al. 2008; Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009). This was the case for the parents in the current study. They recognised that departing was an important stage in the young adult’s move to increased independence and, echoing findings that the majority of women view the launching of children as an opportunity to pursue their own goals and interests (Dare 2011), were looking forward to having more time to themselves once their offspring lived elsewhere. However, supporting Dare’s (2011) suggestion that parents also express a degree of ambivalence about what this change would mean for their lives, the parents identified that they were happy to continue the co-residence arrangement for as long as necessary and how, when their children did decide to leave, they would have to adjust to the loss of the company they provided. Where their children had departed by the time of their second interview, the parents were pleased they had moved on but still admitted to missing their presence in the household.

It may be that, after a second or third (often unanticipated) opportunity to spend time living together as a result of the return to co-residence, coping with a child leaving is actually more difficult. This is supported by earlier research which found that, although the creation of an empty nest does not adversely affect women’s quality of life, and may actually increase happiness and overall wellbeing, improvements only appear in those who are unconcerned about their children leaving home prior to them doing so (Dennerstein, Dudley & Guthrie 2002).

The existence of these ambivalent feelings, even when additional children were still present in the household, further challenges the ‘empty nest syndrome’ and the idea that parents feel loss when all their offspring have left home (Mitchell & Lovegreen 2009). Parents appear to be affected by the departure even if it
does not result in a completely ‘empty nest’, suggesting each child offers something different to the household.

In light of this, several parents remained open to the possibility that their children would need to return again. Unlike the young adults, who were adamant they would not return home on a subsequent occasion, the parents suggested that, if the need arose, they would consider allowing their children back home (refer page 189). However, at the same time, they also suggested they would probably look to promote alternative arrangements the next time around. Such feelings appear to reflect competing arrangements the next time around. Such feelings appear to reflect competing desires, in that they want to launch their offspring into adulthood yet support them when in need (Birditt, Fingerman & Zarit 2010; Proulx & Helms 2008). Yet, they also support the idea that returning to co-residence constitutes another stage that parents and their children negotiate in their lives as a family.

Albeit not recognised as part of the traditional family life cycle, Johnson and Wilkinson (1995) believe that many families can not only cope with the return to co-residence but use the event as an opportunity to address their developmental goals in a more direct and open fashion. This appeared to be the case for the ten families in the current study. For instance, despite their different lifespan stages and roles, and thus diverse perspectives, the parents and young adults appeared to have a joint goal, namely for the young adults to achieve independence (Scabini, Marta & Lanz 2006). This motivated both parties to put aside their individual feelings and persist with the co-residence arrangement. For example, the young adults returned home to overcome changes in their circumstances and thereby improve their chance of success across a range of options and prepare for independent futures. At the same time, their parents’ developmental focus on generativity meant they were intent on investing in the next generation, helping their young adult offspring get ahead. As a result, they were willing to make sacrifices to support them when needed, in this case returning to co-residence for such a time until their offspring were ready to move on.
This chapter has offered an interpretation of the experiences of the return to co-residence. It has highlighted that, although the parents and their young adult offspring both accepted the change in living arrangement, accommodated each other in the household and came to appreciate that, in spite of its benefits, it was a short-term arrangement, these three domains were often experienced differently. I suggested that this related to their individual developmental goals, namely the parents’ desire to invest in the next generation and the young adults’ preference for independence, and their stake in the relationship. However, it appears that these goals are somewhat complementary; both parties want the young adults to be successful and are therefore willing to make the return to co-residence work. This has important implications, not only for individual success and wellbeing but also the continual relationship between young adults and their parents, to be explored in the following, and final, chapter.
Chapter Ten: Conclusion and Recommendations

This final chapter draws the thesis to a close, highlighting the key findings and demonstrating how the research aim and questions have been addressed. It provides an outline of the key strengths, before offering recommendations for future research. Considering the aim of this study, namely to explore families’ experiences when a young adult returns home, it seemed fitting that the last word should go to those with firsthand knowledge. Therefore, the final section offers some more practical suggestions for other families who may encounter a return to co-residence.

Overview of the findings

In accordance with the overall aim, this study has explored ten families’ experiences when a young adult returns to the parental home, drawing on the perspectives of the young people and at least one of their parents. Findings highlighted the meaning of this living arrangement for both parents and young adults, revealing that the return to co-residence meant accepting the living arrangement, accommodating each other in the household and also coming to appreciate how doing so enabled them to advance.

Across these domains, there were varying experiences within each cohort. The young adults and their parents also tended to have different experiences. For instance, the young adults assumed the option to return was available to them, even though their parents’ acceptance of them back into the household occurred more in response to their changing needs. The lack of feasible alternatives, often in conjunction with their expectations of themselves as parents, meant the return to co-residence was accepted. While the young adults also reached acceptance of their return home, their feelings were much more mixed, not only influenced by the realities of their situations and the perceived benefits but also social expectations around independence and what it means to be an adult.
Both parties had to make adjustments upon returning to co-residence. However, because the parents made modifications across multiple domains to accommodate their offspring back into the household, the young adults were often able to fit back in with relatively fewer changes. In this way, adjustments related more to perceived changes to their freedom and social activities. While they were willing to accept these adjustments as part of the return to co-residence, the lack of contribution by the young adults to the household was at times a source of frustration for the parents. However, the parents’ often reluctance to ask their children for assistance, either financially or in terms of domestic labour, and to instead do it themselves meant the young adults did not have the demand to increase their contribution.

While the young adults therefore emphasised the practical advantages of returning home, including the ability to get ahead and prepare for the future, their parents focused more on the interpersonal benefits. They enjoyed the company their children provided, even when the young adults suggested they did not spend much time in the household. The parents, although appreciating that the return to co-residence was to be a relatively short-term arrangement, therefore had mixed feelings about the departure of their offspring. The young adults, in contrast, looked forward to executing their plans to live independently again, especially having the opportunity to return home and thus better prepare themselves this time around.

The differing perspectives held by the young adults and parents were also evident within families. Hence, there were cases where the family members did not experience the same degree of acceptance; had different recollections of the adjustments and negotiation required to accommodate one another in the household; and appreciated diverse benefits. However, despite these differences, it was apparent that individuals often showed some acknowledgement of their family member’s experiences and what the return might mean for them.
When taken together, the experiences of the young adults and their parents created a unique picture of the return to co-residence. While this meant that the ten families were all different in some way, it was still evident that the parents and young adults appeared to share a common goal. Both parties wanted the young adults to continue to develop and achieve self-sufficiency, thereby allowing them to put aside their individual feelings and accept, accommodate and appreciate the return to a co-residence arrangement.

**Implications**

The current study finds that, in spite of their often-diverse experiences, parents and young adults can manage the return to co-residence in such a way that it offers advantages for both parties. This has important implications, not only for our understanding of the return to co-residence but also the wellbeing of individual family members and their continuing relationship.

Cultural and political influences have the ability to impede adjustment to newer patterns by publicly defining them as defaults on the social contract (Newman & Aptekar 2007). However, by highlighting the positive aspects of returning to co-residence, studies such as this one may challenge the notion that this living arrangement is detrimental and thus incite a change in societal attitude. Demonstrating the ability of families to make the arrangement work may mean society begins to not only accept, but also encourage, the decision by parents to allow their young adult offspring to return home and remain there for extended periods.

This is important, not only because practices that are socially acceptable are said to become a source of pleasure for families rather than a source of internal unhappiness or intergenerational tension (Newman & Aptekar 2007) but the sharing of the household also has implications for family relationships and wellbeing. Returning to co-residence meant the parents and young adults in the
current study were able to spend more time together, enjoy each other’s company and engage in quality communication and support, all of which have the potential to contribute positively to the health and happiness of the family unit as a whole (Babington 2006; Karakas, Lee & MacDermid 2004).

Returning to co-residence may also impact the family through its effects on the wellbeing of individual members, with changes in the feelings of wellness experienced by young adults affecting the wellbeing of their parents and vice versa (Knoester 2003). With wellbeing closely connected to feelings of satisfaction with life and personal decisions (Ryff & Keyes 1995; Trewin 2001), the young adults’ initial negative feelings about moving back home could have had detrimental implications. However, their ability to negotiate these feelings and reach acceptance may have had a positive effect. Living in the parental home may have equally led to a positive outcome, especially because frequent support from one’s parents is associated with enhanced wellbeing (Fingerman et al. 2012b). The findings of the current study suggest that the young adults benefitted from emotional and financial support from their parents, which in turn afforded them the opportunity to pursue their goals. In this way, co-residence facilitates the realisation of personal potential, particularly through the pursuit of education, participation in satisfying and rewarding work and control of economic resources (Trewin 2001). Returning to live with one’s parents, in ensuring a balance between the challenges faced and resources available, thus not only has positive implications for wellbeing (Dodge et al. 2012) but also plays an integral role in successfully launching young people into adulthood (Settersten & Ray 2010).

Giving young adults time to adequately prepare for their futures and develop the skills and knowledge required for success may also enhance their life chances and help to minimise intergenerational poverty in the long-term (De Marco & Berzin 2008). However, while it may be convenient to leave parents to deal with the issues facing young adults, policy-makers need to recognise the consequences of shifting more responsibility onto the shoulders of families
(Mitchell 2000b; Roberts 2013). For instance, middle-aged individuals are increasingly finding themselves ‘sandwiched’ between caring for their young adult offspring and their own ageing parents (Grundy & Henretta 2006). The need to assist the older generation was mentioned in passing by several parents in the current study. Attempting to balance these responsibilities and the demands associated with the return to co-residence could, on the one hand, result in the reprioritisation of their time and resources at the expense of the older generation’s wellbeing (Sage, Evandrou & Falkingham 2013). However, with informal support from the family playing an integral role in ensuring older people retain a sense of independence and remain living outside of institutional care, parents may equally feel obligated to persist with their caring role. In doing so, they could nevertheless become overburdened and, in turn, experience reduced feelings of wellbeing.

Parents are also faced with increased costs of living, meaning they not only require more in the way of disposable income but must also consider investing in preparation for their approaching retirement. The middle to late years of working life are key periods of saving for this age group (Mitchell & Evans 2003). Therefore, with the suggestion by several parents that it was more difficult to pay off their mortgages and contribute towards superannuation whilst financially supporting their offspring, the presence of the young adults at home could potentially put greater pressure on parents economically. Control over economic resources and a sense of financial security contributes to individual and family wellbeing (Babington 2006; Trewin 2001), meaning this could have negative implications.

The wellbeing of parents could also, in theory, be affected by the mere need for a return to co-residence. Parents vicariously experience their offspring’s highs and lows and also see these successes or failures as reflections of parenting performance (Knoester 2003). Consequently, they report enhanced wellbeing when their children are successful but general unhappiness and less satisfaction if offspring encounter problems or developmental delays (Fingerman et al. 2009;
Mitchell 2010). The need for the young adults to return home may therefore have a negative effect on wellbeing. While this is an area where community-based organisations could strengthen their work with families who return to co-residence and perhaps offer additional support and resources, it must also be acknowledged that parents are said to experience less depressive symptoms when their adult children rely on them for support, namely because they feel they matter in their children’s lives (Byers et al. 2008). Considering the parents in the current study did not see the return as a negative reflection of themselves or their children, instead recognising it was what their children needed in order to overcome challenging circumstances that were typically the result of societal factors beyond their control, it seems more likely to have positive implications. Accepting co-residence means the parents have an integral role in ensuring their offspring’s success; this not only aligns with their goal for generativity but may also contribute towards satisfaction and a sense of purpose in life, both important for enhanced wellbeing (OECD 2011; Ryff & Keyes 1995).

By facilitating the return to co-residence, parents could also be laying the foundation for an ongoing close relationship with their offspring and ensure they receive support later in the life course when they find themselves in need (Swartz & Bengston O’Brien 2009). Research suggests those who receive parental help are more likely to care for their parents as they age (Kohli & Künemund 2003), while those who delay their departure live closer, maintain more frequent contact and are more likely to provide support to their ageing parents compared to those who leave ‘on time’ (Leopold 2012). This is important, not only because Australia has an ageing population but parents may be less likely than previous generations to have considerable savings and a generous pension to enjoy when they become elderly; they may therefore need to co-reside in the homes of their adult children (Kahn, Goldscheider & Garcia-Manglano 2013). Furthermore, with suggestions that offspring who receive assistance from their parents are more likely to provide it to their own children (Descartes 2006), the time these ten families spent living together could have reciprocal benefits well into the future.
However, it is also important to recognise that not all parents will be in the same position as those in the current study to accept their young adult members back home (Roberts 2013). Changes in social policy have shifted the responsibility of supporting young adults away from the public purse and onto their families (Cobb-Clark & Gørgens 2011). Consequently, the ability for some young adults to return, while others cannot, may create an increased gap between groups of young people and serve to perpetuate social inequalities that persist throughout life (Mitchell 2000b; Mitchell & Gee 1996b). For instance, not being able to return home could have a psychologically damaging effect on those young people who are not ready to launch themselves into adulthood (Mitchell & Gee 1996b). An inability to live at home while studying or in order to save money may equally force others to abandon their education and remain at the mercy of low paying employers, working in jobs with limited long-term prospects (Mitchell & Gee 1996b). Thus, by understanding the circumstances in which young adults are able to return to the parental home, policymakers, health professionals and family support organisations can be better prepared for situations where they are required to assist young people who do not have the option of relying on their families. This is important, particularly as the decisions and actions young adults pursue now have strong and cumulative effects for both themselves and their families over the decades of life ahead (Settersten & Ray 2010).

**Strengths and limitations**

The current study has offered an in-depth account of how the return to co-residence is experienced by young adults and their parents in an Australian context. While it was never my intention to make broad recommendations or propose interventions, I maintain that this will facilitate the recognition of the return to co-residence as a phenomenon independent of delayed home leaving. Distinguishing the return to co-residence is important given social anxiety diminishes as pathways become more common and recognisable (Newman &
The numbers of young adults returning to the parental home have become more evident in recent times and are likely to continue amid increased costs of living and heightened competition for education and employment (Cobb-Clark 2008). Decisions about returning are therefore inherently linked to broader social changes and policies around education, income, the labour market and housing (ABS 2008), meaning a study of this nature becomes relevant to those working in these areas.

This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the return to co-residence in Australia. It has moved beyond simply highlighting the reasons for the return to co-residence or family members’ satisfaction levels with the living arrangement, as was the extent of much of the previous knowledge. Instead, the current study reveals how sharing a household after time spent apart involves parents and young adults coming to accept the living arrangement, accommodating each other in the household and also appreciating how doing so enables them to advance. In doing so, it adds to my previous work and continues to challenge the often-negative perceptions that prevail in relation to this living arrangement. It has demonstrated that, although it can involve challenges, returning to co-residence is far from being the crisis it is so frequently portrayed to be (Mitchell 2000b). Both parents and young adults are able to manage the situation and experience benefits along the way.

Aside from its contribution to improved disciplinary knowledge, the current study has a number of methodological strengths. It offers more contemporary insight into this phenomenon; significant given past research has relied predominantly on data collected in the 1980s and 1990s. The collection of purely qualitative data is also unlike much of the previous work in the area, as is the adoption of hermeneutic phenomenology. The use of this latter approach is uncommon in family research and has, to my knowledge, not yet been employed in studies of the return to co-residence. This study, with its in-depth focus on the meanings parents and offspring ascribe to their lived experiences, is therefore particularly significant.
Qualitative research into the return to co-residence is needed to contextualise broader patterns identified via the predominant use of large scale surveys (Mitchell 2000a). While these methods may provide important information on the characteristics of those who return, they do not allow exploration of the nuances of this behaviour or the subjective elements related to the decision-making processes and negotiations occurring between parents and their children in great depth (Mitchell 2000a). Without understanding how families experience the return to co-residence, there is less chance of changing perceptions around this behaviour or ensuring policymakers, health professionals and family assistance organisations are best placed to offer much by way of support.

In addition, previous research has collected information from returning children and their parents. However, this has mostly utilised surveys (Mitchell 1998; Mitchell & Gee 1996a; Veevers & Mitchell 1998; Wister, Mitchell & Gee 1997) and, in the case of one qualitative study, was unsuccessful at recruiting all parents of their young female participants (Paseluikho 2000). The current study is therefore unique in that it presents the experiences of related young adults and their parents together. This enabled the nuances which occur both within and between families to be highlighted, and thus provides a more complete picture of this living arrangement. Together, these attributes mean the study offers a level of comprehensiveness that, to my knowledge, has not yet been seen in research related to the return to co-residence.

Although setting out to explore this living arrangement, the family members’ nuanced experiences mean that the current study also offers a contribution to disciplinary knowledge in relation to young adulthood in the Australian context. It adds to research of young people’s life patterns (see, for example, Dwyer et al. 2003; Wyn 2004; Wyn & Woodman 2006), as well as recent studies of 21 year olds’ experiences of adulthood (Allan, Taylor & Borlagdan 2013; Taylor, Borlagdan & Allan 2012), highlighting that young Australians have a wide range
of experiences throughout their twenties. In doing so, the study has identified that young adults are reluctant to recognise the important influence of broader societal conditions and therefore provides evidence to support the proposition that young people continue to compare themselves to ideals associated with the more traditional models of adulthood established by previous generations (Blatterer 2007, 2010).

However, the current study has also highlighted how, despite beliefs surrounding the achievement of independence, young adults continue to draw on their family relationships. They anticipate and utilise the option for parental support (in this case returning to co-residence), with the benefits of this seemingly outweighing the disappointment of ‘failing’ to meet supposed expectations. In doing so, the study further affirms the significant role of the family during young adulthood (Scabini, Marta & Lanz 2006) and thus the need for studies of this lifespan stage to consider the changing nature of relationships, together with patterns of interdependence and exchanges of support (Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011).

The study also contributes to our knowledge of parenting when offspring are young adults. The limited Australian research in this area focuses on parents’ perceptions of their role in terms of assistance (Vassallo, Smart & Price-Robertson 2009). While this was able to support international literature, which suggests parents continue to play a key role in their offspring’s lives beyond adolescence and their launch from the parental home (Dillaway 2006; Gower, Dowling & Gersch 2005), its reliance on survey data meant it did not explore how personal beliefs about what it means to be a parent are integral to the exchange of support. Therefore, in highlighting that parenting continues when children return home, the current study starts an important conversation. Findings suggest parents have strong ideas about what being a parent means, even when their children are young adults, and that this translates into an ongoing (and at times unquestionable) willingness to provide support. The capacity for most parents to continue to see their involvement in their
offspring’s lives as beneficial, despite the return to co-residence, also challenges
the notion that parents only see themselves positively when children are
independent. These constitute important findings, particularly as, to my
knowledge, there has yet to be an Australian study into the complexities of
parenting when offspring are young adults.

However, despite this significant contribution, the study does have potential
limitations. Firstly, although qualitative research offers rich data and thus
provides a meaningful portrayal of social phenomena, its use of a sample of
interest, not one that is representative of the population (Llewellyn, Sullivan &
Minichiello 2004), means the results cannot be generalised to all families in
which a young adult returns home. However, given the aim of this study was not
to generalise findings but rather explore families’ experiences in-depth, the
value of qualitative research, which lies in the particular description and themes
developed in the context of those individuals being studied (Creswell 2009), was
recognised as appropriate. Its interpretative nature has revealed common
themes that may prove useful to those interested in the lives of young adults
and their families, while the possibility of multiple interpretations still allows
others to derive their own meanings from the participants’ accounts.

The 21 participants (from 10 families) provided extensive and highly detailed
information. While some may consider this to be a small sample, the number of
participants was methodologically consistent with the qualitative and
phenomenological nature of this study (Morse 2000). Furthermore, the volume
of material generated through the interviews meant the use of a larger sample
may have been prohibitive within the confines of doctoral research.

There has also been suggestion in the literature that unhappy co-residents may
refuse to volunteer to participate in studies of this nature (Mitchell 1998).
However, in the context of the current study, family members ranged from
those who seemingly felt their co-residence arrangement was unfavourable to
others who deemed it to be a positive experience. Furthermore, within each of
their narratives, participants identified both positive and negative aspects, suggesting that their experiences follow somewhat of a ‘sliding scale’. Notwithstanding, had the families’ experiences been entirely positive, this would have reflected the tendency for young adults who return to be positively selected from the outset (Mitchell 2000b, 2006b). In other words, those with already strong familial relationships are more likely to return to co-residence than those with unsupportive connections (Aquilino 1991b; Aquilino 1996).

The sample included a greater number of mothers. Although single women headed three of the families, only one of the remaining seven fathers was interviewed. The other men declined to participate because of their work commitments, namely long hours and engagement in shift-work patterns. This lack of involvement, on the one hand, mirrored the recruitment for samples used in previous quantitative research on returning home (Mitchell 1998; Mitchell & Gee 1996a; Veevers & Mitchell 1998). However, despite the participants’ suggestions that the return to co-residence seemingly involved more negotiation between the young adults and their mothers rather than fathers, it would have still been beneficial to capture the paternal perspective in more detail.

Recommendations for future research

In accordance with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, interpretation continually opens up new vistas of meaning to be explored and can therefore never be absolutely completed (Munhall 2013). As such, I acknowledge that posing areas for further study is integral and by no means shows that this thesis is incomplete.

Several possibilities for future research in this area continue to exist. For instance, although this study involved families with diverse backgrounds in terms of structure, class and location, they were mostly Anglo-Saxon. Consequently, there remains a need to explore the experiences of those from a
wider range of cultural backgrounds, particularly given the multicultural nature of the Australian population.

The parents in the current study offered great support to their children, both prior to and during co-residence. Given parents’ early investments in the relationships with their children appear to have important ramifications for their interactions long-term (Thornton, Orbuch & Axinn 1995), further research would benefit from exploring the implications of returns to co-residence on parent-child relationships later in life. More specifically, longitudinal research would be useful to examine whether returning home affected the support adult children gave in the future. Two participants, whilst unrelated, made reference to the possibility the young adults could reciprocate the return home through the provision of assistance to their parents. For example, James suggested that, after the way his parents had supported him, he “certainly would welcome them back in, so yeah if they’re struggling health-wise or anything” he would be “more than happy” to have them move in with him. From the parental perspective, Bernie also indicated he expected reciprocity, suggesting “if you as a parent have made the effort to look after your adult child and I suppose shown a duty of care and love for them throughout their lives [you expect] that in your time of need they’re there to help”.

While the parents in the current study accepted their children back into the parental home, there are others who may equally choose not to do so when asked by their offspring. Similarly, some young adults may elect not to return home but instead pursue alternative solutions when faced with challenging circumstances. Studies could therefore explore the experiences of parents and young adults who do not return to co-residence and instead remain living separately.

Future research could also include greater emphasis on fathers’ experiences. Whereas previous research has found fathers are generally less satisfied with returns to co-residence than mothers (Mitchell 1998), comments from
participants in the current study suggest this may not be the case. Several women perceived their husbands to have managed quite well when their children returned, while the interviewed father suggested he was actually better able to cope with the situation than his wife; his commitments (full-time employment, service club involvement) provided outlets and meant he was not at home all the time as she was. Many of his insights would be worth following up with other fathers, particularly through the use of qualitative interviews with them directly.

Studies could also explore how other offspring living in the parental home experience the return of their sibling. Considering several young adults and parents highlighted changes in the relationships between siblings as a result of the co-residence arrangement, and the paucity of research into young adults’ sibling relationships more generally (Shortt & Gottman 1997; van Volkom 2006; White 2001), pursuing this area of inquiry would further add to our understanding of families’ experiences of the return to co-residence.

**Suggestions for families who return to co-residence**

The parents and young adults, in describing their own experiences, offered recommendations to other families who may encounter the return to co-residence. First and foremost, several young adults felt it was important for individuals to examine their decision to return. For example, Nicole suggested young adults should not “take it lightly”, while Emma advised:

*I think it needs to be, a more of a like a personal decision, like I have a really good relationship with my parents but I have other friends that, who like fight with their parents like it’s going out of fashion and I don’t know I think it just needs to be, you need to, it’s not right for everyone, it works for some people but won’t work for others...*
James shared similar sentiments in his recommendations:

...make sure you’ve got a good relationship with your parents I suppose, you don’t want to be fighting and bickering every day, make sure it’s for the right reasons too I suppose, you don’t want to just move home because you can...if I wasn’t going to move home and work and stuff like that, if I was just going to be at home cos I could I probably wouldn’t do it, and I wouldn’t advise someone to do it, you’d end up fighting so I suppose just do it for the right reasons...

Like these young adults, other participants advised individuals to have positive relationships with their family members. Matthew felt a good relationship was necessary because “otherwise if you don’t it’s sort of, makes life harder, like if you’re dealing with stressors of living with people that can be difficult”. Sarah suggested that young adults should not return home “if you don’t get along with your parents cos it’s not gonna work”.

On a similar note, several parents recommended that both parties show each other respect. Jennifer summed this best:

I think you’ve got to be, you know you’ve got four adults living in a house, you’ve gotta be respectful and mindful of the other person so that’s the only way it’d work... everyone’s an individual, you’ve gotta be respectful of each person’s space and work with that so and you know be aware of yourself in amongst it...

Several participants advised to accept the situation for what it is, including dealing with “each situation as it arises” (Helen). Andrew recommended:

I guess it’s really important to try and look at the situation for, for what it is and not get too head up about how awful it is that you’re living with your parents I suppose, it’s a kind of, provided it’s a transitional phase you know if it is a transitional phase then it’s important to look at it as such...
Bernie also suggested:

*I suppose take it as it, take it as it comes, don’t worry too much, yeah I think number one is don’t, you start thinking a whole lot of things, possibilities, I think the important thing is to take it as it comes and sort of give them space to relate back to you again and don’t sort of lord over them, master of the household, I think you know your house is a home, it isn’t just a show piece so I think that they’re coming back for a reason, whether it’s change of job, change of relationship, something like that, there’s obviously some need why they have to come back in the first place so I suppose you have to be conscious of why they came back and to adapt to attitudes accordingly...*

Family members also need to **acknowledge that changes may have occurred** as a result of time living apart. Nicole, from a young adult’s perspective, advised individuals to “make sure you’re willing to deal with the dynamics and I think just be a bit open minded to like things might be different when you’re living there again”. Kate also suggested:

*...be prepared to change, possibly be prepared to realise what the other person has to offer and while you may have changed the other person may have as well, the relationship you had before you left will be different to the relationship you’ll have when you come back as well and just be aware of that and tread water for a while and then possibly see where that leads you, but you don’t have to sit on the fence, be decisive about things and make things happen for you and the other person, just make this work however you want it to work...*

**Maintaining open channels of communication** was also deemed particularly important. According to Jennifer, “keep the communication open, don’t sit with the little niggles, actually talk about them, the communication’s the best thing and be upfront if something’s not working and asking them to do the same”. Her daughter also agreed that it was important to “constantly talk because if you don’t talk things just explode eventually cos you just keep it bottled up and then it goes ‘boom’ and that’s not good for anyone”. David, another young adult, also suggested:
...be open about what you need and be open about what you can’t live with so actually put down on paper I need this, I need that, I need the other and I can’t have people expect this of me, I can’t have people expect that of me, work out what your give and take things are, know what the things you need to compromise are and know the things that you can’t compromise are, do some exploration of your own thing first and know what the family expects of you and what they don’t expect and what they would like you to do so your needs, wants, obligations, expectations you need all that sorted out...don’t leave important stuff in limbo...but be prepared to offer something, it’s the negotiation side of it so I think you’ve gotta enter into it like an agreement, you’ve got to be prepared to do that so everybody knows where they stand, and if things change be prepared to re-enter that...

Several participants felt it was important to clarify the ground rules. Ben suggested family members needed to “make sure the ground rules are clear...make sure you’ve got a clear plan as to who’s paying for what”. Grace and Deborah agreed, with the latter mother recommending:

...probably set some strict rules, not strict rules but set rules so whether it’s written up so it is there in front of them and in front of you and I suppose yeah try and broker some form of deal on yeah you know what they’re going to do, what is their responsibility...

While the majority of suggestions focused on ways to manage living together, some participants also recognised the importance of having opportunities to spend time apart. From a parental perspective, Deborah felt “you have to get out of the house, you know you can’t be on top of each other all the time”. She also recommended young adults had “something to get them out of the house, something to relax cos they’ll need it”. Kate, as a young adult, acknowledged that family members need “to remember that because the two of you have been away for so long from each other in various ways it’s going to take a while to get back together” and should therefore “have in the back of your minds ways of going back to that time”. She recommended young adults and parents “spend 90 per cent of the time together but make arrangements to have that 10
per cent of the time away so that you have new things to talk about and you’re not just having the same old boring conversations”.

Nevertheless, Kate also recommended making the most of the opportunity to co-reside. She advised:

...if it’s not going to be detrimental to your relationship or you think it will help your relationship with your parents and of course if they’re okay with it then go for it, cos realistically if you’re open to it then it can only benefit you as a person, it can only make you a better person, you can learn so much without even realising it, and begin to realise how thankful you are for everything that our parents do for us, how much they’ve done without question...you can learn so much from your parents so make the most of it while you can...

Another young adult, Luke, also recommended:

...just embrace it and enjoy that experience because it is the most important experience that you can have is being able to understand who you are and how you interact with those people closest to you, the greatest teachers you have in your life so yeah listen and be responsible for who, who it is that you are and yeah grow and learn...

While these recommendations were the most often cited by the participants overall, it was rare for related family members to provide the same suggestions. This diversity in experiences within the ten families involved in the current study indicates that perhaps Christine’s advice was the most pertinent:

I think it’s really hard to give advice, because dynamics in families are all different, if it’s a good relationship in the family I don’t think it’s a problem, I just love having them around I suppose, I don’t know if I can give anyone advice, it’s really up to them and their situation...I don’t think I’d give advice cos I think everyone’s different, everyone’s got a different circumstance, there might be different reasons why that person’s coming home...
Throughout the completion of this thesis, I have attempted to remain reflexive. Given part of this reflexivity, according to Willig (2001), involves researchers considering how their work might have influenced them individually and professionally, I feel it is important to briefly acknowledge the personal significance of undertaking this study.

As a woman in her twenties, meeting other young adults with varying experiences has helped me to further accept my own pathway through adulthood. It has also affirmed that enjoying close relationships with one’s parents during this time, as I do, should be considered a real positive. At the same time, meeting their parents has given me a greater appreciation of their perspective, including how they frequently put their offspring’s needs before their own. It made me realise how, even as grown children, we often take our parents and their support for granted.

This realisation was timely, especially given circumstances within my own family changed during my PhD journey. Late in 2012, my mother experienced a sudden change to her health. Her recovery, albeit involving extensive rehabilitation, was only ever going to be partial, meaning we were encouraged to consider the possibility of someone moving home for support rather than leave her living alone. Consequently, at the beginning of the final year, as I was preparing to write this thesis, I returned to the parental home.

Although the decision was made in response to these changing circumstances, my mother and I were unlike most participants in the current study; we had previously discussed the possibility I could return if need be. There had been occasions since I had departed where I had contemplated moving back, and even though she said I was always welcome, we came to the same conclusion.
each time— that it was more appropriate for our personal development and maintenance of our close relationship if we remained living separately.

Nevertheless, returning to co-residence was the best option given her circumstances, a move we both had to accept. Being privy to others’ experiences meant I anticipated I may experience mixed feelings and my mother may be in a similar position. While I felt there really was no decision, as she is my mother and I would therefore do whatever I could to support her, there were times in the beginning that I missed the possibilities that living independently offered. I also got a sense from Mum’s comments that she had mixed feelings; on the one hand, she appreciated having me home for support but, on the other, also felt guilt about the sacrifice she perceived I was making.

Interviewing the parents and young adults as part of this study enabled me to anticipate some of the adjustments the two of us may need to make. While there have been some changes, many of these relate more to her different needs rather than my return. For example, her reduced mobility has meant we have both had to adapt to me taking greater control of the household duties, tasks she had mostly been responsible for previously. She has told me she has found this difficult and I acknowledge that, having managed my own household and then hers while she was away, I have perhaps not relinquished control as much as I possibly could. This will be an ongoing process of negotiation, one that will continue to change as she adjusts to a somewhat different life now she is back home.

Like the participants in this study, I can appreciate that living at home has been beneficial. While it has enabled me to focus on my goals, including completing this thesis, it has more importantly given my mum the opportunity to adjust to coming home without having to face the challenges on her own. Nevertheless, my mum made it clear from the outset that our living arrangement is only temporary. When it became apparent I would be returning, she was adamant that I would move out again once I had completed and submitted this thesis.
While I have at times considered my plans to leave, I am sure I will do so when the time is right for both of us.

Overall, completing this research, coupled with the changes in my own circumstances, has given me a greater appreciation of the importance of family, including their ability to come together to support their members, often with no questions asked. Both experiences, I believe, will hold me in good stead, not only for my career in family research but also as a daughter, a sister and, hopefully one day, a mother to my own children.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guides

Interview guide: Young adults

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. Here is a copy of the Plain Language Statement for your records. Before we get started, did you have any questions about this information? Do you still agree to be involved? Are you happy to have your comments presented in family case studies? Did you have any queries about this aspect of the study? I have a copy of the consent form, as I was not sure if you brought one along. If you are happy to continue, please sign this form.

Perhaps to start, could you tell me a bit about yourself?

Initial generative question

I would like to ask you to tell me about your experiences of returning to the parental home. Perhaps you might like to start from when you first left home and then describe what has happened up until this point. You can take your time doing this, and give details of your thoughts, feelings and experiences, because everything that is important for you is of interest to me.

Questions to prompt further discussion

- What does returning home mean for you?
- How did you come to decide to return home?
- Can you describe the events that led up to your return home?
- How did you view returning home before you moved back?
- Tell me how you went about talking to your parents about your return.
- Tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you were returning.
- What changes have occurred in your life since returning home?
- Where do you see yourself in two years? How is this different to now?
- What helps you to manage living with your parents?
- Who, if anyone, has helped you during this time? How have they helped?
- How have you changed since returning home?
- After having these experiences, what advice would you give someone who has just decided that he or she is going to return home?
- Is there anything about your experience of returning we have not covered?

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I will be in touch with your transcript.
Interview guide: Parents

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. Here is a copy of the Plain Language Statement for your records. Before we get started, did you have any questions about this information? Is there anything you are unsure about? Do you still agree to be involved? Are you happy to have your comments presented in family case studies? Did you have any queries about this aspect of the study? I have a copy of the consent form, as I was not sure if you brought one along. If you are happy to continue with the interview, please sign this form.

Perhaps to start, could you tell me a bit about yourself?

Initial generative question
I would like to ask you to tell me how your son/daughter’s return to the parental home occurred. The best way for you to do this would be to start from when they first left home and then describe all the things that have happened up until this point. You can take your time doing this, and give details of your thoughts, feelings and experiences, because everything that is important for you is of interest to me.

Questions to prompt further discussion
- What did their return mean to you?
- How did you come to decide to allow your child to return home?
- Can you describe the events that led up to their return?
- Tell me about how your views may have changed since your child returned.
- How did you go about organising their return?
- Tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you realised they were returning.
- Could you describe a typical day for you when you are at home?
- What changes have occurred in your life since your child has moved home?
- Could you describe what you have learnt about parenting through experiencing the return?
- What helps you to manage living with your young adult child?
- Who, if anyone, has helped you during this time? How have they helped?
- How have you changed since your child has returned home?
- After having these experiences, what advice would you give someone who has just discovered that he or she is going to have a child return home?
- Is there anything about your experience of returning to co-residence we have not covered?

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I will be in touch with your transcript.
Appendix 2: Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms

Plain Language Statement and Consent Form: Young adults

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT & CONSENT FORM

TO: Young adult

Plain Language Statement

Date:

Full Project Title: What does a young adult’s return home mean for families?

Principal Researcher: Dr. Claire Henderson-Wilson

Student Researcher: Ms. Elyse Warner

Associate Researcher(s): Dr. Fiona Andrews

You are invited to take part in this research project.

The following document contains information about the research project. It aims to help you make a fully informed decision about whether or not you are going to be involved. Please read this carefully. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the student researcher. You are also encouraged to discuss the project with your family members and friends.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, please sign the Consent Form. By signing this form, you are indicating that you give your consent to participate in the research project.

You will receive an additional copy of this Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

Purpose

Young adults in Australia are choosing to live at home longer, with many of those who leave eventually returning to live with their parents at some stage. However, because most of the studies of returning home have involved surveys collected during the 1980s and 1990s, there is limited knowledge of how this process of returning is currently being experienced by those involved.
The aim of this project is to gain a more detailed understanding of returning home by exploring the experiences of families who have had a young adult return to live in the parental home after time spent living independently.

The project is being conducted as part of a higher research degree in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University.

**Methods**

A total of 10 to 15 families will participate in this project.

You are invited to participate in this project because you are someone who has returned to live with your parent(s) after a period of living away. You have lived the experience and can therefore provide a direct account of returning home.

You were selected after you or a member of your family contacted the researcher to express an interest in being involved. You, or your family member, may have responded to an advertisement or heard about the study through your (or their) social networks.

By contacting the researcher, you identified yourself (or were identified by a family member) as someone between the ages of 18 and 35 who has moved out of home for four months or more (for reasons not related to travel) and returned to live in your parents’ home. If this was confirmed with the researcher and contact details were exchanged, you were invited to participate in this study. Your parent(s) are also invited to take part.

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be interviewed by the student researcher. For this interview, you will need to meet with her at a neutral place that is convenient for you, such as a meeting room at a university or at your local library. During this session, you will be asked to describe your experiences of returning to the parental home. You will also be asked a series of open-ended questions related to the process of returning; these may focus on how you decided to return home, how it was negotiated with your parents and how it has changed your family relationships. Questions may include ‘Can you describe the events that led up to your return home?’ ‘What positive changes have occurred in your life since returning home?’ ‘What negative changes have occurred?’ ‘What helps you to manage living with your parents?’ ‘What problems do you encounter? Tell me the sources of these problems’ and ‘After having these experiences, what advice would you give someone who has just decided that he or she is going to return home?’.

The interview could take anywhere between 45 minutes and two hours, depending on your responses, whether additional questions come up during the discussion and obviously the time you have available. Since it is the aim of this
project to explore the process of returning home from a range of perspectives, a second interview may need to be arranged to follow up on earlier discussions. This will again involve meeting with the researcher at a time and place that is convenient for you to share your experiences of returning home.

These interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. You will be given the chance to review your transcript. You can let the researcher know if there is any information that you would prefer not to be included as data.

This research will be monitored to ensure it is conducted in an appropriate manner. The researcher will check the conduct of your interview by asking you questions about how you found the experience of being interviewed, as well as writing reflective notes after each meeting. Regular reports will then be submitted to the other investigators involved in the project.

**Potential benefits**

We cannot promise that you will receive any benefits from this project. However, you may enjoy sharing your experiences and find it reassuring to know that you are one of many young adults experiencing this transition. You may also feel pleased that others find your circumstances interesting enough to want to undertake research about you and your experiences.

Exploring families’ experiences of a young adult’s return to the parental home may improve community understanding of this event in an Australian context. This is important, especially because young adults are likely to continue to move back home and there is also a lack of local research into this specific living arrangement. By talking to young adults, their parents and siblings, the study may also highlight strategies that could be implemented to better support families who experience a young adult’s return home.

**Potential risks**

Possible discomfort may arise during the interview. Depending on your own personal experiences, you may potentially become uncomfortable when describing your initial reasons for leaving home or your time spent living independently, especially if these were particularly negative events. However, you are not required to reveal any information you do not want to.

Please be aware that a family member(s) may talk about you during their interview(s). However, your identity will not be revealed with this information. You may still potentially become upset if you perceive that information about your situation has been discussed by other members of your family, particularly if you chose not to reveal this during your own interview. Depending on your
personal family circumstances, including your ability to resolve your concerns with each other, this could affect your relationships with your family members.

If you experience any distress as a result of taking part, please let the researcher know. Counselling, free of charge, can then be arranged through Deakin University. If you are a Deakin University student, you will be offered counselling through Student Life (telephone 92446300 or email www.deakin.edu.au/studentlife). If you are not a Deakin University student, you will be referred to Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) (1800 817 569), who offer telephone counselling appointments and also face-to-face counselling for both men and women (call 1300 364 277 or visit their website http://relationships.victoria.com.au/sub_locations/locations.html for nearest location). Alternatively, you may be referred to The Family Relationship Advice Line (1800 050 321), which can provide the contact details of local family counsellors who could help with hurt feelings, problems between you and your parents/siblings or issues related to new living arrangements/financial adjustments.

Depending on your situation, you may also be referred to one of the following crisis counselling services- Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), Lifeline (13 11140), Mensline (1300 78 99 78) or Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria (03 9329 8433).

If distress occurs, you can choose to suspend or end your involvement in the project.

Every effort will be made to minimise the likelihood that you will be harmed as a result of participation in this study. However, you need to be aware that additional unknown risks may occur.

**Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure of information**

Data collected from your interview will be in the form of an audio recording. Your interview will be converted into computer files when transcribed.

During transcription, any information that could potentially identify you will be removed. Instead, you will be allocated a numerical code that will be attached to your transcript. This code, which will be recorded alongside your name in a separate file, is used by the researcher to re-identify your interview and delete your response if you later decide to withdraw from the project.

The audiotapes and transcribed interviews will then be saved to separate CD-ROMs and stored in locked cabinets at Deakin University for a minimum of 6 years after final publication of the data. After this time, the data will be
physically deleted. Only the researchers involved in this project will have access to the data.

Any information obtained during this project and that can identify you will stay confidential. In any publication, information will be written in such a way that you cannot be identified. Your name or personal details will not be stated in the publication, with any direct quotes used from your interview referenced using a false name.

However, because this research involves interviewing other members of your family, it may further improve our understanding of returning if your results were published together in case studies. This may mean that your comments could be presented alongside those of your parent(s). They will know that the results from each family member are being presented together; if they are able to recognise their own comments, they could identify what you said during your interview. In this situation, your identity would no longer be kept completely confidential.

**You do not have to agree to have your comments published in a case study.** If you do not want your family members to be able to identify you or your comments, specify this on your Consent Form.

Your comments will only be published in a case study if you and each of your family members agree to it. However, even if everyone gives their consent, the members of the research team will review all of your comments and ultimately decide if using case studies is appropriate. If we believe that developing a case study could cause you or your family harm, results will not be published using this approach.

If you are not involved in a case study, your results will still be included. They will be pooled and discussed together with the experiences of the other young adults involved in the study. In all cases, a false name will be used to protect your identity.

**Results of the project**

When the research is completed, you will be contacted via telephone or email. You will be given the opportunity to receive a summary of findings from the researcher.

This research will be published as part of a thesis submitted for a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) by Ms. Elyse Warner. The results will also be discussed in a series of oral presentations and there is also the possibility that they will be written up as an article to be published in an academic journal. You can choose to be notified of any publication via your preferred contact method.
Participation is voluntary

Involvement in any research project is voluntary. **If you do not wish to take part you do not have to.** If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the project at any stage until the data is processed. Any information obtained from you will not be used.

Your decision whether or not to be involved, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with Deakin University. There are no risks expected if you withdraw from this study. If you decide to withdraw from this project, please notify the student researcher or complete and return the attached Revocation of Consent Form.

Complaints

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Deakin University.

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: 9251 7129; Fax: 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au

Please quote project number [2011-91].

Reimbursement for your costs

You will not be paid for your participation in this project. However, you will receive a movie ticket as a token of our appreciation. This will be mailed to you at the end of your involvement in this project.

Further information, queries or any problems

If you require further information, wish to withdraw from the study or if you have any problems concerning this project (for example, any distress), please contact the student researcher:

**Ms. Elyse Warner**  
School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125, Phone (03) 92517215 or Email ewarne@deakin.edu.au
You may also choose to contact:

**Dr. Claire Henderson-Wilson**
School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125, Phone (03) 92517268 or Email claire.henderson-wilson@deakin.edu.au

**Dr. Fiona Andrews**
School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125, Phone (03) 92517053 or Email fiona.andrews@deakin.edu.au
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT & CONSENT FORM

TO: Young adult

Consent Form

Date:

Full Project Title: What does a young adult’s return home mean for families?

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language Statement.

I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

I am aware that I am being asked to be interviewed about my experiences of returning to the parental home.

I agree to allow my interview to be audio-recorded.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where information about this project is published, or presented in any public form.

I give the researcher permission to publish or present my comments alongside those of my family members in a case study. I understand that this may mean I can be identified by my family members.

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Participant’s Name (printed)........................................................................................................

Signature............................................................................ Date.................................

Please mail this form to:

Ms. Elyse Warner
School of Health and Social Development
Deakin University- Melbourne Campus
221 Burwood Highway Burwood VIC 3125
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT & CONSENT FORM

TO: Young adult

Revocation of Consent Form

(To be used for participants who wish to withdraw from the project)

Date:

Full Project Title: What does a young adult’s return home mean for families?

I hereby wish to WITHDRAW my consent to participate in the above research project and understand that such withdrawal WILL NOT jeopardise my relationship with Deakin University

Participant’s Name (printed)..................................................................................

Signature.............................................................................................................. Date..........................

Please mail this form to:

Ms. Elyse Warner
School of Health and Social Development
Deakin University- Melbourne Campus
221 Burwood Highway Burwood VIC 3125
You are invited to take part in this research project.

The following document contains information about the research project. It aims to help you make a fully informed decision about whether or not you are going to be involved.

Please read this carefully. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the student researcher. You are also encouraged to discuss the project with your family members and friends.

Once you understand what the project is about and if you agree to take part in it, please sign the Consent Form. By signing this form, you are indicating that you give your consent to participate in the research project.

You will receive an additional copy of this Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

**Purpose**

Young adults in Australia are choosing to live at home longer, with many of those who leave eventually returning to live with their parents at some stage. However, because most of the studies of returning home have involved surveys collected during the 1980s and 1990s, there is limited knowledge of how this process of returning is currently being experienced by those involved.
The aim of this project is to gain a more detailed understanding of returning home by exploring the experiences of families who have had a young adult return to live in the parental home after time spent living independently.

The project is being conducted as part of a higher research degree in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University.

**Methods**

A total of 10 to 15 families will participate in this project.

You are invited to participate in this research project because, as a parent of a young adult who has returned home after a period of living away, you have lived the experience and can therefore provide a detailed account of the returning home process.

You were selected after you or a member of your family contacted the researcher to express an interest in being involved. You, or your family member, may have responded to an advertisement or heard about the study through your (or their) social networks.

By contacting the researcher, you identified yourself (or were identified by a family member) as the parent of a son or daughter between the ages of 18 and 35 who has moved out of home for four months or more (for reasons not related to travel) and returned to live with you in your home. If this was confirmed with the researcher and contact details were exchanged, you were invited to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be interviewed by the student researcher. For this interview, you will need to meet with her at a neutral place that is convenient for you, such as a meeting room at a university or at your local library.

During this session, you will be asked to describe how you have experienced the return home of your son/daughter. You will also be asked a series of open-ended questions related to the process of returning; these may focus on how your child’s return home was negotiated and how it has changed your family relationships. Questions may include ‘How did you come to decide to allow your child to return home?’, ‘Could you describe the most important lessons you learnt about parenting through experiencing the return home of a child?’, ‘What helps you to manage living with your young adult child? What problems do you encounter? Tell me the sources of these problems’ and ‘After having these experiences, what advice would you give someone who has just discovered that he or she is going to have a child return home?’.
The interview could take anywhere between 45 minutes and two hours, depending on your responses, whether additional questions come up during the discussion and obviously the time you have available. Since it is the aim of this project to explore the process of returning home from a range of perspectives, a second interview may need to be arranged to follow up on earlier discussions. This will again involve meeting with the researcher at a time and place that is convenient for you to share your experiences of returning home.

These interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. You will be given the chance to review your transcript. You can let the researcher know if there is any information that you would prefer not to be included as data.

This research will be monitored to ensure it is conducted in an appropriate manner. The researcher will check the conduct of your interview by asking you questions about how you found the experience of being interviewed, as well as writing reflective notes after each meeting. Regular reports will then be submitted to the other investigators involved in the project.

**Potential benefits**

We cannot promise that you will receive any benefits from this project. However, you may enjoy sharing your experiences and find it reassuring to know that you are one of many young adults experiencing this transition. You may also feel pleased that others find your circumstances interesting enough to want to undertake research about you and your experiences.

Exploring families’ experiences of a young adult’s return to the parental home may improve community understanding of this event in an Australian context. This is important, especially because young adults are likely to continue to move back home and there is also a lack of local research into this specific living arrangement. By talking to young adults and their parents, the study may also highlight strategies that could be implemented to better support families who experience a young adult’s return home.

**Potential risks**

Possible discomfort may arise during the interview. Depending on your own personal experiences, you may potentially become uncomfortable when describing your child’s initial reasons for leaving home or reasons for returning, especially if these were particularly negative events. However, you are not required to reveal any information you do not want to.

Please be aware that a family member(s) may talk about you during their interview(s). However, your identity will not be revealed with this information. You may still potentially become upset if you perceive that information about
your situation has been discussed by other members of your family, particularly if you chose not to reveal this during your own interview. Depending on your personal family circumstances, including your ability to resolve your concerns with each other, this could affect your relationships with your family members.

If you experience any distress as a result of taking part, please let the researcher know. Counselling, free of charge, can then be arranged through Deakin University. You will be referred to Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) (1800 817 569), who offer telephone counselling appointments and also face-to-face individual counselling for both men and women (call 1300 364 277 or visit their website for your nearest location http://relationshipsvic.com.au/sub_locations/locations.html). Alternatively, you may be referred to The Family Relationship Advice Line (1800 050 321), which can provide the contact details of local family counsellors who could help with hurt feelings, problems between you and your children or issues related to new living arrangements/financial adjustments.

Depending on your situation, you (or your child) may also be referred to one of the following crisis counselling services- Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), Lifeline (13 11140), Mensline (1300 78 99 78) or Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria (03 9329 8433).

If distress occurs, you can choose to suspend or end your involvement in the project.

Every effort will be made to minimise the likelihood that you will be harmed as a result of participation in this study. However, you need to be aware that additional unknown risks may occur.

**Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure of information**

Data collected from your interview will be in the form of an audio recording. Your interview will be converted into computer files when transcribed.

During transcription, any information that could potentially identify you will be removed. Instead, you will be allocated a numerical code that will be attached to your transcript. This code, which will be recorded alongside your name in a separate file, is used by the researcher to re-identify your interview and delete your response if you later decide to withdraw from the project.

The audiotapes and transcribed interviews will then be saved to separate CD-ROMs and stored in locked cabinets at Deakin University for a minimum of 6 years after final publication of the data. After this time, the data will be physically deleted. Only the researchers involved in this project will have access to the data.
Any information obtained during this project and that can identify you will stay confidential. In any publication, information will be written in such a way that you cannot be identified. Your name or personal details will not be stated in the publication, with any direct quotes used from your interview referenced using a false name.

However, because this research involves interviewing other members of your family, it may further improve our understanding of returning if your results were published together in case studies. This may mean that your comments could be presented alongside those of your child/children. Your family members will know that the results from each person are being presented together; if they are able to recognise their own comments, they could identify what you said during your interview. In this situation, your identity would no longer be kept completely confidential.

**You do not have to agree to let your comments be published in a case study.** If you do not want your family members to be able to identify you or your comments, specify this on your Consent Form.

Comments will only be published in a case study if you and each of your family members agree to it. However, even if everyone gives their consent, the members of the research team will review all of your comments and ultimately decide if using case studies is appropriate. If we believe that developing a case study will cause you or your family harm, results will not be published using this approach.

If you are not involved in a case study, your results will still be included. They will be pooled and discussed together with the experiences of the other parents involved in the study. In this case, a false name will be used to protect your identities.

**Results of the project**

When the research is completed, you will be contacted via telephone or email. You will be given the opportunity to receive a summary of findings from the researcher.

This research will be published as part of a thesis submitted for a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) by Ms. Elyse Warner. The results will also be discussed in a series of oral presentations and there is also the possibility that they will be written up as an article to be published in an academic journal. You can choose to be notified of any publication via your preferred contact method.
Participation is voluntary

Involvement in any research project is voluntary. **If you do not wish to take part you do not have to.** If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the project at any stage until the data is processed. Any information obtained from you will not be used.

Your decision whether or not to be involved, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with Deakin University. There are no risks expected if you withdraw from this study.

Before you make your decision, a member of the research team will be available to answer any questions you have about the project. You can ask for any information you want. Sign the Consent Form only after you have had a chance to ask your questions and have received satisfactory answers.

If you decide to withdraw from this project, please notify one of the researchers or complete and return the Revocation of Consent Form attached.

Complaints

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Deakin University.

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Office of Research Integrity, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: 9251 7129; Fax: 9244 6581; research-ethics@deakin.edu.au

Please quote project number [2011-91].

Reimbursement for your costs

You will not be paid for your participation in this project. However, you will receive a movie ticket as a token of our appreciation. This will be mailed to you at the end of your involvement in this project.

Further information, queries or any problems

If you require further information, wish to withdraw from the study or if you have any problems concerning this project (for example, any distress), please contact the student researcher:
Ms. Elyse Warner
School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125, Telephone (03) 92517215 or Email ewarne@deakin.edu.au

You may also choose to contact:

Dr. Claire Henderson-Wilson
School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125, Telephone (03) 92517268 or Email claire.henderson-wilson@deakin.edu.au

Dr. Fiona Andrews
School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood VIC 3125, Telephone (03) 92517053 or Email fiona.andrews@deakin.edu.au
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT & CONSENT FORM

TO: Parent

Consent Form

Date:

Full Project Title: What does a young adult’s return home mean for families?

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

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I give the researcher permission to publish or present my comments alongside those of my family members in a case study. I understand that this may mean I can be identified by my family members.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant’s Name (printed)........................................................................................................................................

Signature............................................................................................................................................................................ Date..................................................

Please mail this form to:

Ms. Elyse Warner
School of Health and Social Development
Deakin University- Melbourne Campus
221 Burwood Highway Burwood VIC 3125
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221 Burwood Highway Burwood VIC 3125
Appendix 3: Flyer for recruitment

Volunteers Wanted

Are you a ‘boomerang kid’?
Or has your ‘nest’ refilled?

Deakin University is looking for participants for a study of how family members respond when a young adult returns to the parental home after time spent living away.

People aged 18-35 who have returned to live with their parents after moving out (for ≥4 months) are invited to participate.

Parents are also welcome to take part.

Participants will receive a movie ticket for their time.

If you or someone you know is interested in this study, please contact Elyse Warner via phone (03 92517215) or email (ewarne@deakin.edu.au) for further information.

This study has received ethical approval from Deakin University (HEAG-H 91/11).
Appendix 4: Advertisement for newspaper classifieds

Boomerang kids study participants needed
People aged 18-35 who have left home but then returned are sought for a study into its effects on them and their family members. Those who are eligible receive a movie ticket for participating. Contact Elyse Warner: 92517215 or ewarne@deakin.edu.au.