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Life Course Narratives from U.s. Expatriates: Continuity Work

Victoria L. Russo
Loyola University Chicago

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

LIFE COURSE NARRATIVES FROM U.S. EXPATRIATES: CONTINUITY WORK

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

VICTORIA L. RUSSO

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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To my family

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, exploratory research examined the American life course through narrative accounts of twenty, former expatriates. All participants had lived and worked in another country for a minimum of at least one year before returning to the US. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted between April 2011 and June 2012. Interviews were unstructured and lasted between 1-2 hours.

Participants in this study were well-educated, middle class professionals with highly desirable skills. Yet, despite the flexibility that privileged status bestowed, participants maintained normative life course patterns. Families were instrumental in monitoring the life course and bestowed sanctions and benefits to family members as a means of influencing life course decisions. Additionally, this research highlighted the amount of labor parents performed to prevent disadvantages for their children and to collect and maintain advantages. For parents moving overseas with children, the paramount concern was whether this move would disrupt the health or education of their children.

The primary finding of the study was the concept of continuity work and how people maintain continuity in their lives when a change in one sphere of life has influence on multiple aspects of life. For example, a new job required relocation and new schools so people performed various tasks and routines to maintain continuity as best they could. These transition periods were sometimes bundled intentionally with multiple transitions as a means to change life trajectories.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Donna entered the room 10-minutes late and slightly out of breath. She was a white woman browned from the African sun and her reddish blond hair blended in well with her tan. She wore no make-up and was casually dressed in a Bohemian shirt and khakis. Donna tossed her satchel onto a side chair, leaned on the table with confidence and exclaimed, “Let’s do this!” I could not have found a more eager person to interview.

She sat down, apologized for being late and stated that she was on the phone with her daughter-in-law who had just given birth to her grandchild, her second grandchild. She repeated, “just given birth”, in order to emphasize how the baby was born that morning. This vibrant, grandmother of two was the first person I interviewed for the project. She had spent close to twenty-five years living in Africa. I considered myself lucky to have such a seasoned expat willing to share her life story with me.

This research project could easily have been an analysis of transnational living and what it is like to set up residence in a foreign land. It is not. Although some of the stories of other countries are quite captivating and amusing, this is a study of the American life course. It is an exploratory project examining the life course through a lens offered by US expatriates who were immersed in another culture for at least one year.

Why study expats? Expatriates provided an opportunity to hear from individuals

who had left the US for an extended period of time, and resided outside the US. They were not tourists. These Americans had the unique opportunity to examine their own culture almost as outsiders. To some extent, they had been released from the ordinary expectations accompanying life in the US. One participant was able to capture this sentiment.

The thing about [this Japanese city] that I absolutely love and my [partner] and I came to this together and realized that's why we love living there: you're cultureless. You're not Japanese, you're never going to be Japanese, you're never going to be confused for being Japanese so the Japanese have no cultural expectations of you and America is completely gone. You don't have to conform to anything that you don't want to conform to there. So you are completely cultureless and you can do whatever you want. There are no expectations.

Was this participant right? Was there really an absence of cultural expectations and did that state of freedom release expats from life course norms as well?

Interviewing expatriates provided an opportunity to hear from people who, by the very nature of having been expatriates, had a disruption in the traditional lock-step life course of preparation – work – retirement, illustrated by Kohli (1986). The concept behind this study was that the best way to uncover a sociological construct was to break from the norm and expose underlying social assumptions, to metaphorically disturb the surface of a pond to let the ripples reveal the water. Fry (2010) showed that one of the advantages of anthropology is the researcher's ability to view cultures as an outsider. Were participants in this study better able to evaluate life course norms now that they stepped outside their own culture and looked at American society with a new perspective?

This research examined the way skilled, “white collar,” repatriated expatriates viewed their life course. I wanted to know what mental guides people utilized to construct their life course when they accepted employment away from their home country? Before accepting a position abroad, did they consider the various ways a global move for employment affected other areas of the life course? What life course considerations did they have when they chose an expatriate assign? How did they view their lives now that they were back in their home country? Were these moves seen as transitions or turning points? How did participants create their own biography given the choices available to them?

What I realized was people went through great lengths to maintain continuity in their lives even when they moved abroad. Internalized life course expectations were powerful motivators for the choices people made although for some participants, circumstances could have been improved by choosing alternate paths. Family continued to play a significant role in monitoring the life course of family members by distributing rewards and praise, as well as, sanctions. Overall, participants followed the life course expectations of their culture and class.

Literature Review

General Life Course Concepts

Life course study looks for pattern, both the continuities and discontinuities, in people’s lives. “These age-graded patterns are embedded in social institutions and history,” (Elder, 2003; Elder, Johnson, Crosnoe, 2003, p. 4). The life course incorporates many theories to examine sociological phenomena from the context of people’s lives. It

does not take a snapshot in time of a social problem and try to draw conclusions. Rather it takes into consideration how a particular moment in time relates to the whole life of individuals or large periods of time. To continue the photography analogy, the life course perspective is interested in how a frame of a movie fits into the whole story.

The origin of the life course perspective is often attributed to Thomas and Znaniecki (1918 – 20) with their work entitled, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe, 2003). In this body of work, Thomas and Znaniecki advocate for the study of peoples' lives over time and in many different situations. Yet it was not until 1964 that Cain coins the term "the life course," and this perspective received any real scholarly attention (Elder et al, 2004; Fry, 2003). Riley, Johnson and Foner (1972) and Neugarten (1965) continued to solidify the importance of age and the life course in social structure with their Age Stratification Theory which acknowledged that social identity, as well as resources, was based on age.

As early as 1942, Linton had shown that there were expected ages for people to make various life transitions. These age transitions were seen as two different systems, one for men and one for women. Linton acknowledged that the age-sex categories were driven mostly by culture rather than biology. Additionally, many age expectations were not formally recognized through rituals.

In 1947, Glick described the normative ages for transitions within the family, such as, marrying, having children and launching children. He noted that there were not only patterns in family formation and reproduction; there were patterns in economic characteristics and changes in residence. Using census data, Glick was able to compare

the expected ages for various family transitions in 1940 with family transitions in 1890. The 1940 family appeared to stop having children earlier than the 1890 family and launched children earlier.

Despite these early works in the 1940's that show expected age norms, it is Neugarten (1965) who is most frequently cited for exploring the concept of age norms and how people know the age parameters for various life transitions and stages. She asked people questions regarding the timing of various transitions and behaviors to identify age norms. For example, at what age should a man still live with his parents? Notably, respondents perceived that other people (Mead's 'generalized other') were stricter in adhering to age norms than they saw themselves following these norms. Although the respondents all knew what these age norms were, they did not think that they followed these norms as closely as other people followed the norms.

More recently, Settersten (1997) conducted a similar project to that of Neugarten. In this study, Settersten asks, "For which specific transitions is age considered relevant?" (p. 260). The results of this study found that there were more rigid age norms for men in regard to finishing education and getting established in a career and more rigid age norms for women to have children. Modell (1997) commented on Settersten's study, "the mental mapping he details tells us much about how Americans' selfhood is formed, challenged and maintained. The common thread is that there are culturally validated 'shoulds' that guide actors in constructing their own pathways through life." (p. 282).

However well-known these culturally validated 'shoulds' may be to individuals; Keith (1994) concluded that these norms are bound in culture. From 1982-1990, Keith,

Fry and colleagues conducted a large cross-cultural comparison study of peoples' understanding of age and life course. Project A.G.E. (Age, Generation and Experience) compared the concept of age in four countries: the US, Ireland, Hong Kong, and Botswana. Over the course of this study, the researchers realized that not only does the life course differ from site to site but the concept of age also differs. Through the use of a pictorial, card game that they called the "age game", the researchers asked respondents to categorize the age of people represented in the cards (Fry, 1994). People in Hong Kong; the US; Blessington, Ireland; and the Herero of Botswana were able to handle this task. However, it was a difficult task for the !Kung of Botswana and the people of Clifden, Ireland. According to Fry (1994) people in a small social field, like a tribal village or pastoral town, did not need to generalize about age because they knew enough information about specific individuals. "If there is little change in community personnel over one's lifetime, there is little inclination to resort to categories." (Fry, 1994, p 190). Thus, as the social field enlarged and there was more mobility within a community, age as a marker for social expectations became more salient. In addition to the size of the social field, Fry found 1) education, 2) predictability of life events, and 3) timing of normative social and work roles to be salient for a staged life course. Therefore, people in developed countries with greater populations and societies with a division of labor used 'social clocks' and 'normative time tables' to refer to for important life transitions.

However, US age norms are not stagnant. They change over time. Hareven (2001) documents how patterns of support and familial expectations changed. In the 19th century, US families had more say over the life course timing and transitions for family

members. If a person was needed at home to care for an aging parent, that family obligation was considerable. The child was less likely to leave home and get married. Hareven concluded that “the timing of transitions is now viewed as an individual decision rather than a familial one” (p. 145). My research found Hareven’s conclusion about the family’s role in control of the life course needed modification.

In an earlier study, Hareven (1975) reviewed records from a closing textile factory and concluded that people within an industrialized company town timed their family needs to coincide with labor needs. The sequencing of major family events became less random and the age range for each transition became more standardized. According to Kohli (1986), with industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries came a greater focus on the individual and “internalization” of the normative life course. This form of internalized control was better for industry and people who could time their family needs to coincide with labor needs would have more work.

Change in the life course is not limited to the institution of family. According to Kerckhoff (2003) change in one area of life affected the likelihood of adjustments in other areas of life. Carr and Sheridan (2001) tested to see if changes in one institution, such as work, prompted individual change in another institution such as education. For example, did job displacement cause someone to return to school for more training? Additionally, they examined whether ‘empty nesters’- parents who already launched their children –would be more likely to start their own business. Carr and Sheridan found that career transitions for both men and women were linked to family transitions but in

different ways. They speculated that career transitions were responses to earlier career goals and shifting family needs.

Life course norms are culturally constructed and change over time. These are bound in the social structure and historical events of the time. According to Dannefer (2009), “social interaction and social structure operate as constitutive forces over the entire life course.” Settersten (2003) and Kohli, (1986) observed that the twentieth century life course was more standardized than the life course patterns of previous generations. The sequencing of life course events had become less varied and people followed a similar order of life transitions. With improved child labor laws more children were completing high school and then moving into manufacturing jobs easily due to the expanding economy. Industry was organized in a pyramid with top down management and hierarchical structure. A seniority system for job retention and promotion from within contributed to long employment tenures with the same company. This manufacturing economy encouraged a similar order of life transitions into a series of separate and distinct life phases: education – work – withdraw from work (Kohli, 1986). The order of life events was more predictable with people sharing similar sequencing. Additionally, the age at which life events happened was closer together. Transitions were occurring at similar age periods so the life course was becoming more chronologized. Age was established as a convenient and important factor for predicting when people would finish school, have children, enter the labor force, get married, and launch their children. With advances in medical technology, even the age of death was more predictable and primarily reserved for the latter half of life. Not only were these

transitions occurring at similar age but the duration of these events were lasting about the same amount of time.

The life course was seen as institutionalized and determined by public policy or other institutions (Settersten, 2003, Kohli, 1986) Social institutions such as the government determined the earliest age that people were permitted to marry, drive, drink, vote, leave school, collect retirement benefits. These institutionalized age policies influenced the life course by setting the minimum time that people could participate in various life transitions, For example, child labor laws and legal driving age influenced the age of first employment because people needed to drive to get a job and could not start work until they were legally old enough. Weymann (2009a) stated that social institutions have a purpose in making life more predictable so that individuals could choose their path and direction with reasonable expectations that they would benefit from their decisions.

Over the last 30 years, there has been a great shift in the structure of the economy and the labor force in general (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013; Elman, 2011; Heinz, 2003). The cycle of economic recessions has accelerated from the late 1970's to the present. No longer in a post-war, industrial expansion, the economy has been more volatile as it transforms into a post-industrial, globalized service economy. Large manufacturing industries providing 'good jobs' (Kalleberg, 2000) with benefits to the working classes have moved off shore, leaving in their wake a service economy and 'just in time' manufacturing both of which command a flexible workforce. While a flexible job may

sound like a fine opportunity for workers, employers have shifted the risks of market fluctuations onto the workers (Elman, 2011).

Only an elite few with sought after skills and a notable project resume are able to take advantage of the positive side of flexibility and piece together exciting new career opportunities that pay well (Elman, 2011). For the average worker, the move to a flexible workforce means non-voluntary, part-time employment; decreased salaries; increased periods of unemployment; reduced benefits; and job insecurity. Most people now expect a series of jobs in their lifetime owing to both voluntary and involuntary changes (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013; Heinz, 2003).

The lives of women and minority men have never been neat and orderly like the tripartite male model of the life course, education-work-retirement (Kohli, 1986) that was reinforced in an industrial economy. In the post-World War II economy from 1945-1970 which was epitomized by Fordist manufacturing and the male breadwinner/ female homemaker social model (Moen, 2011), women were rewarded for staying home to care for children or older family members (Moen, 2011, Mayer and Schoepflin, 2009). Early studies of age and the life course focused primarily on a male model of the life course and the collective experiences of men (Callasanti, 2010). Women were either excluded altogether from research on life course and retirement or they were included in surveys that assumed a male pattern of labor (Callasanti, 2010). The omission of women from the design of these studies contributed to public policy decisions and pension construction that reinforced the unencumbered worker and male view of the life course.

Historically, women and minority men made up the bulk of the contingent work force holding part-time or contract specific jobs with few health benefits, job security, or pension opportunities (Kalleberg, 2000). As early as the 1980's for blue-collar workers and the 1990s for white-collar workers, massive lay-offs and corporate restructuring have made employment patterns fragmented closely resembling the historic patterns of women (Kalleberg, 2000). Additionally, women now comprise a larger segment of the full time workforce (Moen, 2011).

Heinz and Krugar (2003) and Pallas (2003) contend that we have moved past a standardized life course and that a post-industrial society calls for a more contingent customized life course. In a customized life course, people are responsible for their own biography. Their lives' take on an individualized aspect and reflect the choices they make. There is an emphasis on personal decision making (Heinz, 2003) and people take more responsibility for planning their work lives. According to Mills and Blossfeld (2013) this increase in individual choice comes with an increase in uncertainty for the individual. This in turn leads to fewer age markers for "the timing and sequencing of labor market participation." (Heinz, 2003, p 185).

The institution of work shapes and changes life course expectations (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). People no longer have the 'job for life scenario' that epitomized Fordist manufacturing, most people now expect a series of jobs in their life time owing to both voluntary and involuntary changes (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013; Heinz, 2003). Sometimes these changes are the result of self-reflection and readjustment; more often than not they are involuntary. Increasing globalization is making it harder for advanced

industrial societies to compete with cheaper, global labor; less regulated working conditions; and looser lending practices (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). These global forces and a break with internal labor markets then causes severe consequences to the average worker such as salary cuts, lost jobs, layoffs, and bankruptcies (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). Due to competition and job scarcity, on-the-job training is harder to find because there is a pool of available trained workers. This makes it hard on people entering the labor force. Gone are the days when employers would expect to provide a worker with training to gain skills and then the worker steadily would move up the corporate ladder in the same firm. Now the employer expects the worker to come to the position with the required skills. Promotions often are achieved by changing jobs.

Furthermore, the expansion of service industries has created an influx of low paid, part-time jobs. In the 1990's, the age groups most vulnerable to being relegated to these non-standard work arrangements were people 15-24 and people 55-64 (Heinz, 2003) at what is considered the entry years and exit years of employment. In a tight economy like the present, displaced workers of any age, young, middle age, mature workers, settle for these low wage positions without advancement and without benefits (Elman, 2011). Mills and Blossfeld (2013) point out that in the current global and knowledge-based society both work experience and expertise are the capital of labor. Since young people just entering the workforce do not have the work experience, they must focus on expertise and acquire skills through education. People who cannot acquire skills have weak occupational standing and suffer through the volatility of labor markets (Mills and

Blossfeld, 2013). They add that education has become the repository for the unemployed (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013).

All these economic factors have significant effect on the life course even in non-work related spheres. The rising uncertainty in the labor force reverberates to personal uncertainty with opportunities and relationships. In order to reduce uncertainty and maintain flexibility in the area of relationships, young adults are more likely to enter into a period of cohabitation before marriage (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). This relationship enables individuals to postpone the long term decision of marriage and remain unbound by permanent commitments (Mills and Blossfeld, 2003). Along similar lines, the added uncertainty of economic times leads couples to put off having children (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). The uncertainty of work leads people to put off family formation and to examine the binding effects of marriage and children on their career prospects. For many women, having children puts an additional burden on them for care and maintenance. These obligations may be hard to address if the family is also counting on the woman's income. Resolution of these competing demands may be determined by the negotiation skills of the each individual.

In the face of all this economic and personal uncertainty, individuals need to choose their path in life. People who are more skilled at planning and exhibit self-reflexive behavior are able to fair better than those without these skills. Elman (2011) contends that advantaged 'protean careers' may be successful in a more flexible job market because these jobs focus on 'portfolio work' and can work across settings and jobs. Heinz (2003) notes that "institutions tend to support affluent families, while

working-class and poor families are more or less directed toward self-help and kinship support” (p. xvii). Participants in this study are from this category of well-educated, skilled workers with a high degree of planful competence.

Another major change from the standardized life course is the sequencing of life events. In other words, individuals have more choice in how they will arrange major life events. For example, they may move from education to work to education and then back to work again. Heinz (2003) suggests further research into this area of sequencing. “It is important to discern the degree of choice in the timing and sequencing of transitions between job, occupations and firms and the extent to which institutions facilitate or restrict multiple participation in different institutional fields, for example, university and company” (Heinz, 2003, p. 195). Additionally, people may choose to mix up the order of leaving home, becoming a parent and getting married into various arrangements. Presently, people have much more flexibility in how they sequence education, work, parenting, leaving the family of origin and marriage. Much of the flexibility in the life course is a result of duration changes and sequence changes (Shannahan, 2000).

There may be a shift from the value of studying age norms to learn about the life course to studying the time spent in various phases of the life course, education, work, parenthood. The longer the duration of education or work, the more advantages people accumulate. For much of the twentieth century a longer time in the education system equated to a longer time in the labor force. However, this may no longer hold true as even college graduates are competing for low skilled jobs (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013, Elman, 2011). It is important to study the life course in the context of both the

standardized, industrial model and the post-industrial contingent model because societal transformations are slow (Elman, 2011). Individuals may be operating under the old system and utilizing long established expectations until they are confronted with the realities of the new system and then need to adjust (Elman, 2011).

In this study, I ask if culture influences age-based norms, what happens to people's understanding of their life course when they move outside their home country and cultural setting for employment. Do they retain the age norms of their native culture, do they create their own age expectation, or do they adopt norms from the new country? Is there freedom to improvise because of culturelessness?

Transnational Professionals

The number of US families moving abroad for employment is increasing. According to the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS), in 1987 there were 171,191 taxpayers who reported foreign earned income. By 2001, this number rose 115% to 294,763. In 2006, there were 334,851 families filing overseas earned income. Although the report is made every 5 years the data on 2011 statistics are not yet available. However in a 2009 document, the United States IRS estimated that 7 million Americans lived outside the US and this estimate did not include military personnel.

Globalization has been touted as an important feature in fueling changes to work. One aspect of globalization is the mobility and diversity of labor. In the popular press, globalization is often discussed as manufacturing jobs moving overseas or immigrants coming into a country to take away service-oriented jobs (Chinchilla, 2005). Academic literature on expats and temporary migration primarily addresses domestic or poorly

compensated labor moving from predominantly third world nations to more developed nations. Recent works in sociology (MacDonald, 1998; Parrenas, 2000; Shipler, 2004) examine the plight of women who leave their third world countries. However, there is another side to globalization that seems less contentious, the exchange of skilled technical labor from one country to another.

These highly skilled, technical professionals also migrate due to global demand for their services. Solimano (2006) goes as far as to conclude that “well educated and/or talented people are often more internationally mobile than unskilled workers.” The number of people temporarily migrating to other countries for employment has steadily risen as national economies become more globalized (Solimano, 2006).

Immigration from one country to another in search of a better life is not a new concept and has been going on for centuries. The mobility of talent from one country to another has real consequences for both the country of departure and the receiving country. Countries that lose talent may wind up with a shortage of skilled personnel and therefore experience limited economic growth. Receiving countries are able to make up for skill shortages in their own population even if they don't make the capital investment in educating their own populations. When immigrants return to their home countries they bring new ideas, new wealth and new social networks (Solimano, 2006).

Literature on life course expectations of transnational professionals is hard to find as a subject area but it can be revealed peppered through articles on work and occupations, international migration, or expatriate life. For several decades, lush corporate benefit packages lured handfuls of key talent overseas. Corporate benefits

were in exchange for long working hours and served to ease family pressures on employees (Gordon, 2008). These benefit packages often included corporate housing in expat enclaves or generous housing allowances; private school tuition at international schools; domestic servants; drivers; and travel allowances. The stereotype developed of the expatriate family living in corporate or consulate enclaves with men totally immersed in their careers while women and children lead a more relaxed existence with household help, private schools and leisure time to cherry pick the best local experiences (Hindman, 2008; Gordon, 2008).

Even with these perks, it is difficult for some corporations to maintain personnel overseas. Corporations and non-government organizations (NGOs) take a financial risk sending an employee and his/her family overseas. The employee and family could decide to return to the home country before the company considers it has had a return on investment and moving expenses. Many international human resource articles and popular press books on expatriate life warn that the family's unhappiness is the primary cause of unsuccessful assignments (Hess and Linderman, 2002). Often the non-working spouse, usually the wife, feels isolated due to the extreme distance between the family and relatives back in the home country. At other times, the isolation is due to language barriers with the locals and the intense working hours of the spouse. The company risked spending money to ship the family and their belongings overseas just to find that the new international position did not suit the employee or his family.

For people who grew up with expatriate parents the idea of a migratory life seems familiar and expected (Eyben, 2008). They have previous knowledge of the expectations

and sacrifices that come along with an international life style. For others such as software developers and aid workers, international experience is an expected rite of passage in their profession (O’Riain, 2002; Eyben, 2008) and is a journey more often made at the start of their career. For many others, the expatriate experience was not contemplated or envisioned before and employer provided an opportunity to go abroad.

Despite whether people have formed mental maps of what they imagine life to be as an expat, they may need to adjust their expectations due to global trends. Factors such as tighter economies, increased competition for international jobs and easier communication systems combine to make corporations less likely to offer traditional corporate packages (Hindman, 2008). As a matter of fact, more international assignments are reflecting the greater labor force shift to contingent labor as companies move from direct hire to more contract workers and/or ‘local’ hires (Ardener and Callas, 2008; Willis and Yeoh, 2008). In keeping with the less generous economic climate, companies are scaling back on direct corporate hires for overseas positions and are focusing more on local hires (Fechter, 2008), contract work, and/or subcontractors. Local hires do not demand the relocation expenses of foreign hired workers. Additionally, local hires expect pay scales and benefits more in line with the local economy than with the country of origin. This creates a less stable environment for the employee as he/she assumes more of the risks of foreign assignment (Hindman, 2008).

Contract and subcontract workers usually agree to a specified time frame for their services. The company knows how long the contractor will work and can balance the expense of relocation with the amount of time served. Often the contract has early

termination clauses so that the employer can recoup some of the relocation expenses if the contract is not completed in its entirety.

Subcontracting for services totally takes the burden of hiring and maintaining foreign personnel off the hands of the company in need of the work. Greater competition for global jobs often produces a strong need for employees to quickly conform to corporate expectations. However, this greater need to conform comes at a time when employees such as subcontractors may have less access to the source of those expectations and expectations may be less clear (Hindman, 2008). Failure to conform to these expectations is seen as a fault of the worker (and their families) rather than a fault of the system in which they work. Contractors, subcontractors and local hires are not as costly to release and replace if they do not meet expectations. The employee also is at risk of having the subcontract traded or cancelled. This creates greater fear among contract employees and supposedly increases production.

In short, corporations changing from direct foreign placements within the company to local hires, contract workers or subcontractors, shift the risk of employment onto the employee. Not only is the employee in a more tenuous position because the employment is less likely to be long term; they are more likely to get fewer corporate perks and benefits. The cost of moving and relocation is assumed by the employee.

For those who are still foreign hired, they find benefit packages are scarce or shrinking in size because they are competing with local hires. There is fear of “going native” for these employees because they are hired from abroad partly because their loyalty and knowledge of corporate culture is seen as a great asset to the organization.

Too much fraternizing with the locals makes these employees seem more sympathetic to local concerns than corporate issues. This fear encourages some families to seek out expatriate enclaves where they are insulated from the locals and escape to stereotyped, hyper-nationalized spaces (Hinman, 2008). The expat enclave also spares the family from investing too much in local culture which is time consuming considering they may have short stays and frequent moves.

Greater global competition from local hires (Willis and Yeoh, 2008) and contract workers has increased the vulnerability of professional families living abroad (Fechter, 2008). If they moved to a foreign country for a specific job and the employment terms are tenuous then the family may not see a return on their investment. The investment doesn't just include the relocation expenses they incurred. Often there is a greater price to pay, foregoing the other spouse's career (Coles, 2008).

Two earner households have been a strategy used historically by low income families to weather the storm of unstable labor markets. However, more and more middle income families have been using this strategy to protect the family from loss of income due to periods of unemployment (Meiksins and Whalley, 2002). Coles (2008) writes:

It is officially accepted that the dual career family is now the norm. According to consultant advising on employment conditions abroad, this is now the overriding problem when sending expatriates abroad. Spouses regarded poor employment chances as the second biggest disadvantage to diplomatic life (p.144).

Trends such as short-term contracts and advertised 'bachelor only status for local hire' compound the incentive for trailing spouses to stay in the homeland and keep their

current jobs at home. “With the trend to short-term contracts rather than lifetime employment, greater pressure may be placed on families by the need to keep all potential breadwinners marketable” (Ardener and Callan, 2008, p. xi). Long contracts or sequential contracts can keep couples and families separated for extended periods of time.

Families going abroad are often subject to restricted labor markets and may not be able to keep both spouses employed if they chose to have the family stay together. Due to immigration or licensing requirements, the second spouse may not be able to work in the industry of the trailing spouse or the spouse cannot command the salary that was paid in the home country. Spouses may decide to take positions in the new country that are well below their skill level or not work while overseas. When the family returns to the home country, they may find that it is harder to get back into the local job market due to weakened networks or lengthy terms of unemployment. This leaves them at greater risk when the foreign position is terminated.

For some spouses, a “portable career” is the best technique for staying employed while following a spouse on international assignment. Transnational women that work in the field of education, journalism, writing or information technology (IT) usually continue to work overseas. These careers are often in demand at the new location or easily conducted remotely.

Some couples compensate for the vulnerability of an unemployed spouse by offering employers two employees for the price of one. If both people in a couple works for the same employer, than the employer only needs to cover the relocation, housing and

health insurance for one family but two adults are employed. Employees on foreign assignment frequently give the employer two for the price of one in the areas of education and aid work. However, the more traditional arrangement to provide two for one is to have the trailing spouse informally engage in planning social functions on behalf of the company or assist the working spouse with administrative tasks such as editing reports or making travel arrangements. This arrangement is unspoken, informal and expected. It is still used today by many employers and helps with job retention if the wife is considered a suitable hostess.

An overseas move has the potential to impact all areas of the life course for the employee and family. It is not just limited to issues of employment. For example, it can influence dating practices and thus the selection of a mate. It can influence the quality of the marriage and determine whether a couple is a two earner household or if there is a stay-at-home spouse. Issues of family life and even divorce become more complicated with international placements. Overseas assignments can influence retirement and pension considerations, as well. Child rearing, education and even grand-parenting are affected by foreign placement for work. The literature alludes to many potential areas of influence that further research can bring to light.

Dating and Courtship

Young, single professionals in the early stages of their career are the target population for foreign assignment in professions such as computer programming (O’Riain, 2007), banking (Fechter, 2008) and aid-work (Verma, 2008). Young, single persons travel without the encumbrance of family and are easily mobile. They have not

yet settled down and taken on the responsibilities of a mortgage or family. They have a desire for adventure and want to build a resume; therefore, they are more willing to accept entry level salaries or local hire contracts in exchange for international experience. This new generation actively seeks work abroad in contrast to those who passively accept an international post from their company. Fechter (2008) describes this generation of single, transnational professionals as “disembedded” and able to move freely without the constraints or concerns of family members and partners. O’Riain (2007) praises the freedom for singles in the computer programming profession to move to the highest bidder and command great salaries before settling down with mortgage and family. However, this is for the limited few super stars on the cutting edge of a fast paced field.

The location and type of work young professionals engage in greatly influences their choice of relationship. Verma (2008) notes development practitioners prefer the city for relationships even if they work primarily in rural areas. Expatriate men have traditionally outnumbered women. The majority of men are married. The number of women going abroad for employment is steadily increasing over the last decade with more jobs opening up in administration and banking. The vast majority of the women who are relocated for work in their own right are single. These single, expat women usually do not live in the stereotypical expat enclaves but choose areas with other singles and more nightlife. They love the lifestyle of living in nice accommodations, weekend holidays in the region and socializing with other international expatriates (Fechter, 2008). Fechter observes that many young single women are unsure how long they want to continue in this lifestyle due to the conflict between work and settling down. They are

often in temporary relationships and are easily mobile. However, due to the limited number of expat women, their dating habits are under closer scrutiny than their male counterparts (Verma, 2008).

Both men and women expats often change their expectations of the ideal mate or postpone this part of their life until a more convenient time. For some 'going native' and dating locals is an option, for others it is taboo. Cole (2008) notes that for many years there was a taboo on men of the British Diplomatic Core dating and marrying native women while they were on foreign assignment. Over the last two decades more leniencies have relaxed this taboo and therefore, there have been more native-expat marriages. Fechter (2008) writes that western expat women in South East Asia do not consider the locals as suitable choices and are often torn between their desire to start a career and find a mate. Western expats of a different nationality are considered a viable alternative when their own countrymen are in short supply. Due to gender differences in what constitutes a suitable mate, it may be easier for men to date within the local community.

Some single, expat women hold onto the idea of marriage and family but see it as something in conflict to their present situation (Fechter, 2008). It is on their long term agenda but not compatible with their present transnational life because it is easier to move as an unencumbered single person. Other women push the window of age norms and feel that a relationship is 'ever more elusive'. Still other women look forward to a committed relationship but are willing to forgo children for the sake of their careers. In Fechter's study, an expat woman cautions that "if you don't have such expectations, you

won't be disappointed" (Fechter, 2008, p. 205). This would imply that people, do have life course expectations and international assignment could alter these expectations.

Marriage and Family

Foreign assignment also brings with it marriage and family issues that may not have been anticipated in the home country. Regardless of which country a family is assigned to there appears to be an amplified need to recreate the family's country of origin within the home. The difficulty is "How does one create a sense of 'home' for the family in a space that is so far from your homeland?" For many, the answer is to "hyper nationalize" the home and use more stereotypical displays of the home country even if you wouldn't decorate in that manner back in the home country (Hindman, 2008). For example, an American family may have an American flag displayed somewhere or a Dutch family may have a pair of wooden shoes in view.

Other than décor, a hyper nationalized home can be created by purchasing expensive foods from the homeland when local produce may be better and cheaper. For example, Americans could pay \$5/box for imported Kraft Macaroni and Cheese Dinner. At home the same box would be \$1 but now the added expense is justified because it becomes symbolic of the homeland and gives the children experiences of a "normal" American life. It is a conscious re-creation of home (Hindman, 2008).

Another way to recreate home is by selectively transporting to each new overseas placement meaningful home furnishings or items that represent home. This could be an old family heirloom, folk art from the country of origin or treasured family photographs.

Often these items are interspersed with selected items from the various countries that the family has visited.

A migratory lifestyle for families with frequent relocations can leave the family with no incentive to invest in the local culture. They seek out expat enclaves and compounds which shelter them from the local culture but more importantly create an environment which maintains their own culture. Thereby decreasing the amount of labor needed to recreate home. They do not want to invest in the local culture if they may be reassigned again. The task of putting down roots in a rootless environment and recreating “home” in transnational space makes the simple task of housekeeping much harder than it is in the homeland. Women need to quickly learn how to “provision” (DeVault, 1991) the home and secure the imported items that will make the family home acceptable to both the family and the husband’s colleagues, many of whom are now in their primary social network.

Women turn to International Women’s Societies to curb their feelings of isolation and to learn what is expected of them from the employer and how to procure essential imported goods. These women’s organizations are often mocked by husbands at work and single working women expats as well (Fechter, 2008). Men engage in social networks through work and their colleagues. The same is true for the single working women. However for married women, the social club is essential to enable them to meet others and be part of a community (Cole, 2008). Married women have more unwritten expectations put upon them and do not have the home network of family and friends to draw upon. Trailing spouses use women’s groups as a quick way to learn the lay of the

land, similar to the use of the “coffee clatch” in the 1960’s classic by Lopota, “Occupation Housewife.” According to Walsh (2008), some wives describe the woman in their social organization as their “surrogate” family and they share holidays together, use each other as emergency contacts, and call on one another for advice and guidance with child rearing (Walsh, 2008). Activities offered by these organizations provide wives with social activities, learning opportunities (ex. foreign language clubs), toddler activities and sheltered excursions around the new city. However, these organizations also serve to reinforce the concept of the “good expat wife” and are seen by some as facilitating a “Stepford” like community.

Irrespective of nationality, the division of labor within marriages of transnational couples show a more traditional gendered division of labor than in couples who do not engage in skilled migration (Koffman and Ranghuran, 2005). Employed transnational men and single women alike are in positions of greater authority, responsibility and power than they normally would have in their home country. This sense of increased power and authority may be harder to turn off when they return to their domicile and can create marital problems for couples that had more egalitarian relationships prior to overseas assignments. The family’s choice to move abroad means the literal and figurative domestication of the wife. She may have had a career of her own and the self confidence that comes with managing her own career. If there are limited career options in the new location or her career is not portable, she may find herself as a stay at home wife and mother with less power in the relationship. This redistribution of roles and power may reverberate throughout life and their marriage (Coles and Fechter, 2008).

Skilled migration brings with it additional stresses on a marriage. These stresses may be caused by the adjustment to changing gender roles, frequent moves, isolation, or work demands. The location of the assignment contributes greatly to marital stress. Gendered divisions of labor can be more pronounced if the culture within the foreign assignment is strongly divided. For example, masculine behavior patterns are emphasized in Dubai where the local culture treats women as second class citizens (Walsh, 2008). Men assume some of the masculine culture of their surroundings partly due to their long work hours and exposure to a gendered labor force (Walsh, 2008). If they reproduce these attitudes when they get home, it can create stress in their marriage.

In Madagascar, marital infidelity is culturally accepted and sex workers frequent expat communities making sex outside the marriage easily available (Verma, 2008). Sexual tourism and specialized men's clubs increase the temptation to stray during business trips. The consequence of sex and infidelity vary from culture to culture which can lead to conflict within the marriage of expat couples who move to cultures that differ greatly from their home country taboos.

Divorce for expat couples brings with it unique risks and difficulties not experienced by people who stay in their home country. Divorce or abandonment in a foreign country often leaves the trailing spouse without resources or informal support networks. Walsh (2008) reports that the British Community Assistance Fund (BCAF) provides many British women with money and counseling after their husbands have divorced or separated from them in Dubai. These funds are then used to repatriate the women. The divorce rate of expats is high in both Dubai and Madagascar. Sex and

infidelity have different consequences in different cultures. Expats in Madagascar have a 70% divorce rate due largely to the ease of sexual relationships outside the marriage (Verma, 2008).

Transitions Back to the Home Country

Anecdotal evidence and articles on international human resources show that the transition back to the homeland is the most difficult part of foreign assignment. The employee has had a lot of autonomy while they were away and may not have the same level of responsibility upon return. Additionally, colleagues have no interest in hearing about experiences from abroad and the employee may be frustrated that their skill set is not utilized to its full capacity (Coles, 2008).

Accompanying wives of transnational professionals find it hard to return to their careers due to their time out of the field and their weakened professional networks. They may experience a feeling of being out of place in their home community and find that the local people are not interested in their travels abroad (Coles and Fechter, 2008). For returning transnationals, the idea of “fitting in” is a big concern not only how it relates to their careers but also in relation to their retirement.

Overview

Studying the life course by examining expatriates is a unique opportunity to look at interruptions in the life course and the various life course assumptions made at the time of transitions. If people have mental maps of the life course, how were these mental maps altered by overseas assignments? Were they more likely to determine their own biography and select a path of their own, or did they conform to American cultural

norms? Before accepting a position abroad, did they consider the various ways a global move for employment may affect other areas of the life course? Were issues regarding marriage, child rearing, education and retirement taken into consideration when contemplating overseas assignments? Were these moves seen as transitions that are long term paths on a fairly consistent trajectory or turning points which greatly alter the path of the trajectory in a different direction?

Chapter Two is the methods section of this study. This chapter details the way this study was conducted. It lays bare the difficulties with recruiting participants for the study.

Chapter Three examines the decision to go abroad. What motivated these participants to seek jobs overseas? The findings in this study support the idea of a contingent life course where people assess their options and make a selection from available options. Participants expanded their field of choices by looking globally. Participants in this study were all educationally accomplished and had cultural capital to use on the global market. Half of the participants went abroad in their early twenties and exhibited patterns very similar to their privileged status as college educated individuals. The remaining participants were more established in their professional careers when they went abroad and they had the leverage of desirable skills and work experience in order to garner good jobs with multinational firms. These opportunities are only available to a limited number of highly trained professionals. Yet despite the flexibility that a privileged status may bestow, participants stuck to normative life course patterns. While

there was some variety in their choices, these choices were limited to only a few 'preselected' options.

Chapter Four discusses the effect of family on the life course and its influence on participants' decision-making. In this chapter, I show how the family monitors the life course of its members and works to constrain some of the life course decision making of individuals. There appears to be structural lag with familial expectations that can be mediated through the language of 'exceptions'. The family exerts its influence through a series of rewards and sanctions. The process of starting a family by marriage and having children adds additional voluntary constraints on the individual life course leading to a phase of life with more normative and standardized behavior. Participants looked forward to a time when they could launch their children and return to a more customized life based on what the couple wanted to do rather than what they needed to do for their children.

Chapter Five presents the life course from the concept of linked lives and raising children. This chapter discusses the life course of children and the amount of work parents go through to meet expected life course events for their children. Given that this is a privileged group of participants, I examined the way parents maintain privileged class norms by accumulating advantages for their children and minimizing risks and disadvantages. Providing opportunities for children to have multi-cultural experiences, dual citizenship, multi-lingual skills and world travel experiences are seen as advantages in a globalizing society. The more skills and advantages a child has, the broader the pool of opportunities for life decisions.

Chapter Six covers life course transitions, trajectories and the concept of continuity. Participants were skilled at anticipating and planning transitions. Some used more easily attainable statuses to ‘bridge’ over to the status that they wanted to achieve. For example, participants enrolled in school when repatriating because it was easier to get a degree than a job. Once they had the degree they could continue with a more traditional entry into the labor force than if they entered directly from overseas. Other participants used combined states such as intern which combines education and work to transition over to a work only status. Combined statuses and bridging were used as techniques to maintain continuity in the life course.

In Chapter Six, I present the idea of continuity work. Continuity work is the mental, emotional and physical work that goes into coordinating life trajectories such as work or family, when there is a major transition in one or more trajectories. It is an effort to maintain continuity in the trajectory primarily affected and all the other spheres of life that were or will be disrupted. As the life course becomes more contingent and unpredictable, I anticipate the need for individuals to perform continuity work will increase.

In Chapter Six, I also introduce the concept of ‘bundling’ which is when individuals combine many life course status changes together almost in an effort to maintain economies of scale and only have one large period of transition and life course upheaval rather than sequential changes over a longer period of time. There must be some sort of advantage to one large adjustment. I suggest this as an area for further

research because it seems counter intuitive to maintaining continuity and minimizing life course disruptions and the stress that accompanies disruptions.

Chapter Seven summarizes the findings, develops the theoretical issues of cumulative advantage and continuity work and suggests new areas for research in the life course around continuity work, bundling, and disaggregating the adult stage of the life course.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

This study examined the life course through the narrative stories of globally mobile professionals. Narrative analysis and in-depth interviewing techniques have been used with qualitative sociological research (Meiksins and Whalley, 2002), feminist studies (Sosulski, Buchanan and Donnell, 2010) and life course scholars (Cohler and Hostetler, 2003). Cohler and Hostetler (2003) noted that people continually revise their life story in order to maintain a sense of biographical coherence. It was this process of maintaining biographical coherence that I wanted to uncover by using life story narratives. Cohler and Hostetler recommended using the life story method in order to understand structure and meaning in adult lives.

Clausen (1998) distinguished between life reviews that were spontaneous and those that were elicited to assist a researcher. Spontaneous life reviews were not elicited by another person. Instead they were told purely to communicate something to oneself or another person. Elicited life reviews were solicited by a researcher who had a particular objective in mind. Clausen saw both types of reviews as important and providing information about how people present themselves and how they developed over time. Clausen (1998) noted that these life stories were “subjective, retrospective reports of past experiences and their meaning to that person” (p. 192). He recommended supplementing either type of life review with the views of others or with records.

Scott and Alwin (1998) compared the advantages and disadvantages of retrospective and prospective measurement of life histories. They focused primarily on the pros and cons for large scale survey data but contended that these comparisons held true with smaller studies as well. They recommended wherever possible to collect information as lives were lived. However, this technique has great cost and has a bias about who stays in the study and who leaves. According to Scott and Alwin, the lower cost of collecting retrospective data made it more attractive but people were subject to poor memories and a desire to give socially appropriate answers. They recommended a combination of retrospective and prospective data collection where the respondent provided retrospective data but it was collected in intervals. Due to the short turn-around time for this study, prospective data was not ascertained.

Mischler (1986) made a good argument for the use of unstructured interviews by comparing these to structured interviews. According to Mischler, the structured survey interview tested variables that were predetermined by the researcher and were used for statistical analysis in an attempt to generalize to a larger population. The use of standardized questions was an attempt to have the question posed the same way to every respondent and therefore have reliability that all participants were answering the question. The trouble was that the researcher did not always ask the question in the same manner. Nor could the researcher control for the way the question was interpreted by the person being interviewed. This type of interviewing did not provide insight into the interpretive meaning of the question to the participant but was designed to test an a priori theory.

The popularity of quantitative research and large, national databases for the use of secondary data analysis had moved research in life course studies more to the side of testing theories than developing theories (Heinz, 2001). Critics of narrative analysis saw participants' retelling and revising life narratives as a problem to be controlled for in order to make the results generalizable to a larger group. However, this retelling and reconstruction of the narrative is where the processes are uncovered and the meaning of life changes to participants could be revealed.

The use of unstructured interviews allowed participants to tell their story in a manner which had meaning to them. It was through the use of participants' own stories in the way they wanted to tell the story that meaning was able to be ascertained (Mischler, 1986). This method provided rich qualitative data in which grounded theory could be uncovered.

Grounded theory was built from participants' meanings and interpretations of their lives and then revealed the processes behind how people constructed their lives (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011; Charmaz, 1994). It was more than a description of a life. "The hallmark of grounded theory studies consists of the researcher deriving his or her analytic categories directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts or hypotheses" (Charmaz, 1994, p. 5).

This research studied the process of making transitions to another country to live and then the process of repatriating back to the US. It was in the process of these transitions where the meaning of each move to participants could be found. Heinz (2001)

recommended more studies with limited sample populations and in-depth exploration on transitions and agency questions.

This was an exploratory study of the American life course through a lens offered by US expatriates who were immersed in another culture for a minimum of one year. Expatriates provided an opportunity to hear from individuals who had left the US for an extended period of time, and resided outside the US. They were not tourists. These Americans had the unique opportunity to examine their own culture almost as outsiders.

Participant Recruitment

Twenty people participated in face-to-face interviews about their time living and working overseas. Participants needed to be American citizens, 21 years of age or older and had to have worked abroad for a minimum of one year and live in the US at the time of the interview with no immediate plan to live abroad. Originally the study was envisioned to address professional people who were sent overseas by their employer. The purpose was to uncover how going abroad affected the way they planned and saw their lives. Due to time constraints and difficulty tapping into the 'employer sent' population, the study also included participants who took the initiative to travel abroad independently; most of them in their youth (Refer to Table 1.)

Thirteen participants relocated to Europe, four to Asia, one to Africa, one to South America, and one to the Middle East. I referred to the continents and sub-continents rather than the individual countries in which participants resided because of the small number of participants and their need for anonymity. My intent was not to imply that all countries in a region of the globe were interchangeable.

Table 1. List of Participants Sent by Employer or Independently and Region

EMPLOYER SENT	INDEPENDENT TRAVEL		
Participant	Region	Participant	Region
Shana	Europe	Donna	Africa
Mark	Europe	Abigail	Europe
Valerie	Europe	Robert	Asia
Betty	Europe	Toby	Asia
Brittany	South America	Lena	Europe
Terrance	Asia	Claire	Europe
Cliff	Europe	Sue	Europe
Tammy	Europe		
Kara	Europe		
Amanda	Asia		
Eileen	Europe		
Chris	Europe		
Nancy	Middle East		

Although the study was designed to recruit participants through snowball sampling, this method proved to be challenging. At the end of each interview, I informed the participant that I was recruiting people through snowball sampling and asked if they knew of anyone who would fit the criteria to be in the study. I then handed the participant an envelope which included a letter of invitation for potential participants (Appendix A) and a business card so that potential participants could initiate contact with me. Neither the current participant, nor the potential participant would be required to give me the name of another expat or feel obliged to contact me. It was purely voluntary and very passive. Most of the participants who responded to the letter of invitation did so via electronic mail and several messages were exchanged in order to explain the study and set up a meeting site. These E-mails became part of my field notes. Only on one occasion did a potential participant not become a full participant after contacting me and this was due to scheduling conflicts. Eight people were recruited using this technique.

A method of “purposive sampling” and using personal contacts accounted for the remaining referrals. For example, a friend asked me what my dissertation was about and I told her it was about expats and the life course. I told her I was having trouble with the sampling technique because many of the expats interviewed did not know of other expats living in the US that were within a two-hour driving distance. She said she knew of two people at the school who would qualify for the study so I gave her three recruiting packets with the letter of invitation and the business card. Two participants were recruited through this friend.

Additionally, my sister asked if she could help and I told her I needed to find more expats. She stated that the international side of her company would know of potential candidates. I explained that I did not want a mass E-mail sent out randomly. She assured me she would talk to the colleague with the international division and only ask people who met the study criteria by forwarding study information. I forwarded the letter of invitation and description of the study to my sister who forwarded the study description onto people with the international branch. Two participants contacted me due to this channel and I received three referrals for additional candidates from these participants. Friends and acquaintances offered that they may know of someone so I gave them my recruitment envelope with a letter of invitation and business card. Then the potential participant contacted me via E-mail and I would schedule an appointment for the interview. Two acquaintances self-referred after I spoke to them at a friend’s picnic. Another acquaintance self-referred while making small talk during an elementary school field trip that we were chaperoning.

Respondents lived in a major metropolitan area in the mid-west United States.

All but one participant in this study was Caucasian. There was one African -American participant. There were 5 men and 15 women in the study. The average time overseas was slightly over six years with four participants only working overseas one year.

Overall, participants were well-educated: six had undergraduate degrees, ten had master's degrees and three participants had doctorates (Refer to Table 2). One participant left college after 3 years to work for her family's business and to await her fiancé's completion of his college degree before they could marry.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Ed Level	Children	Child Home	Years Abroad	Family Occ.
Abigail	55-64	Divorced	Masters	-	-	7	Mgmt
Betty	55-64	Divorced	Masters	2	X	5	AE
Donna	55-64	Divorced	Doctoral	1		25	Art
Nancy	55-64	Married	3 yrs. UG	4		1	AE
Shana	45-54	Married	BA	2	X	6	Finance
Mark	45-54	Married	Masters	2		13	Mgmt
Valerie	45-54	Married	BA	2		13	Mgmt
Tammy	45-54	Married	BA	3	X	10	Mgmt
Terrance	45-54	Married	Masters	2	X	1	Finance
Claire	45-54	Married	Doctoral	2	X	2	Law
Kara	45-54	Married	Masters	3	X	6	Finance
Toby	45-54	Married	Masters	2	X	10	Tech
Cliff	35-44	Married	Masters	2	X	1	Educ.
Lena	35-44	Married	Doctoral	-	-	10	Educ.
Sue	35-44	Married	Masters	2	X	3	Tech.
Eileen	35-44	Married	BA	2	X	2	Finance
Robert	35-44	Married	BA	1	X	2	Tech
Chris	35-44	Married	BA	2	X	2	AE
Amanda	25-34	Married	Masters	-	-	4	Art
Brittany	25-34	Married	Masters	P	-	1	Educ.

As mentioned earlier, participants were highly skilled and so were their spouses.

Four of the families received their primary income from management positions while

they were overseas. Four participants had the primary family income from financial services such as finance, banking or accounting. Architecture and engineering services (AE) accounted for three more jobs overseas with participants. There were also three participants in the areas of education and three in computer technology. The area of art including performing arts and journalism provided jobs for two participants and the final participant occupation was law.

Participants in the study were predominantly middle aged at the time of the interview, 35-55. Eight people were in the age category 45-54 and six people were in the category 35-44. Only two participants were in the category 25-34, one was in her late twenties and the other was in her early thirties. Four women were in the 55-64 age category. None of the participants were over sixty-five. All participants had been married, although three were divorced at the time of the interview. Of the twenty marriages, eight were to foreign born spouses. There were three inter-racial marriages.

Sixteen participants had children and another participant was expecting her first born. Three of the participants did not have children. Two participants were grandparents. Twelve of the participants had children still in the home. The children still at home ranged in age from 9 months to 22 years.

Interviews

In-depth, qualitative, face-to-face interviews were conducted with people who had lived and worked abroad for at least one year. These interviews were conducted between April 2011 and June 2012. Interviews were conducted at the participant's home (9) or

office (1), at coffee shops (8) or at a conference room at Loyola University (2). The average interview time was 1.5 hours.

Table 3. Location of Interview

Location of Interview	Home	Office	Coffee Shop	Conf. Room
# of Participants	9	1	8	2

Interviews were unstructured. I provided an opportunity for participants to tell their story of moving abroad and returning to the US in whatever manner they liked. Participants started their story wherever they wanted but most started with their trip that qualified them to be in the study or when they graduated college. I wanted to hear their stories and the meaning that they attributed these events to have in their current situation. For example, Abigail started her story in childhood and it was clear that being a global citizen was an important identity for her. Clair and Eileen started their stories with their relationships since maintaining the relationship was their driving force for going abroad. These life stories were often a combination of spontaneous accounts and participant responses to questions I asked to probe for more in-depth descriptions.

An interview guide, located in Appendix B, was used as a rough guide for topic areas if the participant needed a prompt or a line of inquiry had been exhausted. Interviews started with a brief description of the study, the signing of the release form and a request to audio record the interview. All participants consented to the audio recording although on two occasions only partial transcripts were made due to technical difficulties and operator error. I wrote field notes immediately after interviews and included the partially recorded segments, as well as, all I could recall about the interview.

Coding and Processing Data

I transcribed each interview verbatim and included pauses, hesitations and slang. Then I replayed the tapes to ensure that the written transcript matched the tape. This prompted some corrections in the transcription or a note of explanation such as “cat knocked over participants wine glass.”

Transcriptions and field notes were then read and reread. Due to the manageable number of interview and slow pace of finding participants, I was able to hand code interviews and field notes. These notes lead to more notes and writings.

As a qualitative researcher my intent was not to draw a statistically representative sample that could be generalizable to all expats. My intent was to provide insight into the lives of the participants and how they dealt with life course issues. While I would have liked a few more people in the study for a total of 25 -30, the rich data received from the participant and their willingness to expand on their lives made this a very worthwhile endeavor. The in-depth nature of these interviews provided insight into the processes used to construct autobiographies and served as a catalyst for exploratory research into the area of the life-course, transnationalism, and transitions. The study provided valuable insight into the experiences of an often unseen category of American.

CHAPTER THREE

WHY THEY GO ABROAD

America is the 'land of opportunity' so why did these 20 Americans choose to go abroad to live and work for at least a year or more in a foreign land? Six of the participants who went abroad without having a job lined up, did so at a young age. They left for adventure, to postpone a career decision or to pursue other non-career interests. For the fourteen people who had jobs lined up before the move abroad, they too, had a sense of adventure and believed the trip would offer them expanded opportunities. However, in this case, the move was tempered by greater financial security. All the participants in the study, with the exception of one, made the move with a sense of self determination. They wanted their lives to be different, to be unique. They did not necessarily want to abandon all aspects of the normative life course but while they were able and most young, they wanted something out of the ordinary, exciting or memorable.

According to Shanahan (2000), the pathway to adulthood is becoming more varied as young adults take greater responsibility for creating their own biography. One's early twenties, is a time for risk taking (France, 2000). Often well-educated people in their early twenties are single. Less frequently, they may be married or in committed relationships but are still willing to make the risky move to another country because their partner is a willing adult who shares similar interests. For example, Chris negotiated a

transfer to the overseas division of her company so she could accompany her fiancé who had accepted a training program in Europe.

Reasons for Move

Independents

Thirteen of the participants in this study had their foreign jobs lined up before making the move and can be thought to be in a more typical expat arrangement where either their employer or their partner's employer initiated the move (Coles and Fechter, 2008; Gordon, 2008). I discuss this group in the second half of this chapter. The other half of participants found employment after they arrived overseas as a student or tourist. For the ones willing to go over and then find employment, the primary motivating factors were: to seek adventure, to postpone a career job, to pursue other non-career interests, or to expand career choices.

Adventure and an Individualized Biography

Robert, Abigail and Toby had a real 'wander lust'. They wanted the opportunity to go to foreign lands, see the sites and expand their view of the world. This sense of adventure and expanding horizons was captured by Robert:

I think it was a combination of wanting to just go have some experiences, like just sort of outside of normal, Midwestern, middle-class life and ah, not necessarily a fascination with [a specific country].

It implied the notion of leaving the nest, leaving what's known and going out on one's own. For these participants going abroad meant a grand adventure. Travel gave participants the opportunity to have something to look back on with pride.

Toby expressed a dream to travel. “[We] wanted to travel and so when we got out of college, we agreed that we were going to do nothing but work towards being able to travel.” Travel was the physical as well as the emotional display of leaving the security of home and striking out on one’s own.

Abigail’s first overseas job was as an office assistant at the foreign university where she spent her junior year taking undergraduate courses. For Abigail, the sense of adventure and ‘wander lust’ was a family trait and rite of passage. She claimed to have inherited this gene. “I have a cousin...her son is from the rolling stone half of the family like myself.” “So I’ve jokingly said, and members of my family, while they were still alive, have said that I seem to have the gene.”

Similar to the Grand Tour of Europe popular among elites before the turn of the twentieth century, travel completed their sense of education and gave them a more worldly view. In some circumstances participants such as Lena, Cliff and Brittany saw travel as a necessary way to acquire fluency in second language skills.

According to Brittany, travel to another country was necessary. “I knew that in order for me to ever apply for a job or consider my [language] degree anything other than a piece of paper, it would require me to spend some time outside of a traditional education setting in order to be able to be forced to learn a language.” Lena also considered the US system of language education to be inadequate.

I honestly feel like our universities graduate kids from foreign language programs at the university level who are completely unprepared to work in the real world because they have learned to speak a foreign language from a textbook and have no concept of the cultural implications of the people. They study just the language. They don’t study the people; they don’t

study the culture. So when they get into a real-life setting where that foreign language is being used, they're completely incompetent.

For college educated, young adults, time spent abroad has become a normal part of the expected life course and has been institutionalized through the normative aspect of universities offering Junior Year Abroad programs. Brittany was well aware of missing out on these programs due to her participation in sports. Brittany considered traveling overseas as an expected part of the college experience. By going abroad after graduation, she was completing what she considered as a prerequisite for a degree in language and making up for an expected life course event that she had delayed.

Postponing the Real Job

For other participants such as Donna and Lena, travel abroad was a way to postpone getting a 'real job' and provided something to do as they decide what they 'really' want to do. Donna recounts, "I had finished a Master's Degree in Education and had sort of had some questions, you know, like what am I going to do next." She thought of going back to school and was accepted to a divinity school but did not have enough money to pursue that option so she looked for alternatives. Many of her friends from school were already teaching but that didn't feel like the path she wanted to take. She hadn't considered going abroad until her mother suggested an international fellowship; it seemed like the perfect opportunity. Donna described her mother as a "socialite" who "always had a wander lust but her parents wanted her to marry my father....He was a country bumpkin from Iowa, a real farm boy. My mom was a socialite." Maybe Donna's mother wanted Donna to have an experience the mother never had. It was not uncommon for "socialites" to go abroad before or after college in the mid-1900s

however, it was not as common for a middle-class graduate to go abroad in the late 1960's when airline travel was still thought of as a luxury.

By the time Lena graduated college twenty years after Donna, traveling overseas was more common. Lena was more direct in her description, "So I finished there [university] and you know, was pretty sure I didn't wanna start kind of a corporate style of job right away." So she went to Europe with the little bit of money she had saved and thought she would try it out for three months. After a few months abroad she returned home and decided to apply for overseas internships so she could return to Europe for a longer time and with a better plan. "It was my goal to still prolong [getting a corporate job] just a little while longer, with any kind of internship." Her non-paid internship in Europe quickly turned into a paid job with an NGO (non-governmental organization), International Organization.

...a few weeks after I was there, they said they were going to start paying me, a little contract here and there. Then a job opened up and then pretty much eight years later....

Both of these women were reluctant to choose a career or actively apply for employment at home. Internships and study abroad programs may have provided a socially appropriate way of stalling until a career choice could be made because education was seen as a better choice than the status of unemployed person (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). The internship and study abroad program could have been the placeholder while they explored opportunities in order to have a better idea of what they want to do. Furstenberg (2003) stated that young adults from privileged backgrounds were often encouraged to take some time in their early twenties for self-discovery and to

explore employment and career options. Additionally, Shanahan (2000) noted that men were more likely to have greater variability in the path to employment when they had high educational attainment and the society was experiencing greater longevity and low youth participation in the adult labor market. In other words, if the person had a high education level but the labor market was tight, they could choose to wait awhile to enter the labor market because the greater longevity rates gave them the impression that they did not need to rush to get all phases of the life course in before they died.

Pursue Other Interests

For other participants such as Robert, Terrance, Cliff and Toby, going abroad gave them the opportunity to pursue other interests such as music, basketball, learning foreign languages and bicycling, respectively. They were looking for ways to finance the activities they really wanted to do. For example, Robert was passionate about music and a type of music that was not as popular in the US as it was in parts of Eastern Asia. He described the music as “underground stuff” and “it was a very fringe-type of music.” By going to Asia and finding a lucrative job teaching English as a Second Language, he was able to support himself and be close to the music scene he was most interested in pursuing. The job in Asia was just a way to earn easy money enabling him to explore ‘cutting edge’ music. In discussing his decision to go abroad, Robert revealed what he would really wanted to do.

At that time there was a lot of really interesting music coming out of [Asia]. So that was, like underground stuff, and so yeah, I was just kind of like, “Why not?”

Robert had a sense of not wanting to do what he thought he was supposed to do after graduating college. He was looking for alternatives:

I was out of school, hanging out, still in [hometown], mostly playing music with friends, not really looking to get a career-type job and at the time, it was a good time and a good experience. A lot of people were going [abroad] to teach English and I had some friends who graduated a year before me who went and they were following, I think you know, a chain of friends who had gone over there and done it and so I had people who I knew doing this and they'd actually come back to visit and it sounded great. I also hadn't really traveled much at that point either.

By going abroad Robert was able to postpone the 'formal job' and pursue what he really enjoyed, music. Robert stated in this passage that by going abroad he was following the lead of other friends who had graduated earlier and he had 'a chain of' friends who had made a similar move. Robert's choice to move to Asia was not a unique choice considering his group of friends who went before him. Elder (1978) notes that studies on the life course need to keep in mind historical perspective and locate participants in both time and place. There is a lot of variation between cohorts of the same generation but the relationship of people acting together in a group should not be overlooked (Elder, 1978). At the time Robert went abroad the exchange rate was very high from the Asian country he was in to the US dollar. His friends told him he could make much better money in Asia than he could in the US. The job of teaching English as a foreign language did not require certification overseas if the person getting paid was acting as a tutor. Robert heard from his friends that these jobs were easy to get and had a low threshold for educational investment. He would not need any more skills and training to start the job. According to his friends, he would have free time to put toward music.

Along similar lines, Toby and his wife saved money so they could bike internationally. Rather than biking internationally, some young, married couples may have put a down payment on a house. Toby and his wife followed their dream and financed an international bike trip. When their money ran low they bumped into a fellow traveler who told them about the easy money they could make teaching English as a second language in Asia.

While we were in India we had run into a woman who had taught English in [Asia]. She was telling us about all the millions of dollars you can make, it's like falling off a log.... We decided when we were running out of money in Thailand, we had the decision of we could keep traveling and probably end up with no money and just enough to get back. We could probably make it to Australia, down through Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia or we had enough money to have suits made in Thailand and probably enough money to get an apartment in [a major Asian city].

They decided to take a job in Asia teaching English as a second language so they could finance their passion and continue bicycling. Toby elaborated, "We wanted to make money so we could get back on the road." Originally, working in Asia was a means to an end - biking the world. Later on their second trip to Asia, working overseas became their goal because they realized how much money they could save and invest while the foreign currency was strong and the dollar was weak. They were paid in foreign currency. They were getting into their late twenties and had had enough of life on the road. Toby said he was not ready to live in the US. Later on he described this second period of time living abroad as having a lot of disposable income.

Cliff took a job after college graduation and held a full-time job for two years before asking himself, "What would I really like to do?" He decided that he wanted to travel and learn a language. He used a summer education program as his entrée into an

eastern European country where the exchange rate enabled him to live off savings from prior earnings. In this case Cliff took advantage of the greater value of the dollar to purchase a higher standard of living overseas while learning a foreign language. He spent 5 years learning the native language, occasionally taking formal courses and working as an English language teacher for bartered goods. For example, he taught English to a family in exchange for home cooked meals. Cliff knew why he was overseas. “My goal there was to study the language and culture. That’s what I did.”

For Terrance, the job **was** the opportunity to pursue other interests. Terrance took a ‘dream job’ overseas that enabled him to live his passion for professional basketball. It was an opportunity he could not have in the US due to greater competition. His motivation was not so much to go abroad and have adventure but to take a job that enabled him to play semi-pro basketball while he still had the physical agility and strength to do it. “So I decided to take advantage of what little I had of my athletic skills to go overseas and play basketball.” He did not consider himself a strong enough player to compete in the US so the foreign league was the only place where he could play professionally.

I’m good but not that good...I wasn’t Magic Johnson and those guys. If I had to compete against them, I wasn’t that caliber. I’m not going to try and kid you.

Terrance didn’t want to give up on his dream of playing professional basketball when his second chance came along. Several years prior to going abroad, Terrance had a scholarship to play college ball at a mid-western university in the US but a major injury left him without a scholarship and no way to pay for college. His dream of playing ball

was crushed and it appeared that so was his dream of an education. Then a university alumnus offered him a job with a large firm. He worked at the firm and used the company's tuition payment benefits to go to community college at night.

When he heard through a friend about the position with the foreign ball league he left the firm. He had not yet finished his undergraduate degree when he went abroad but he was confident in what his future direction would be and he planned out his trip in a goal oriented fashion.

I planned it before I left. OK. Let's say, I don't want to lose one or two years of an educational momentum. So I planned to take some courses somewhere. And I felt that looking at the fact that I was trying to finish at (specific University). I called them up and said look, if I go [overseas] which school would you take credits from.

Terrance was very conscious of the fact that he was a non-traditional student and still needed more education in order to get an MBA. He had a sense of the time frame in which he should finish with his Master's degree. While he was 'living the dream' for a year or two he also enrolled in an educational program that would allow him to work toward what he saw as his long term career in global finance.

Terrance exercised agency in planning and coordinating his education to accommodate his dream and previous expectation of playing professional basketball. He assessed his potential to play ball long term and decided he "wasn't that caliber." He planned which school in Asia would be accepted by the US school he hoped to attend and he was aware of the average age at which people he knew accomplished their educational goals. Heinz, (2009) stated that "agency is a person's ability to shape their life course transitions, anticipating, reflecting and choosing paths along a time horizon." (p. 423.)

Terence was able to assess his capacity for long term goal completion. The ability to achieve this type of self-managed career path, came from predictable economic and social conditions (Weyman, 2009a).

Escape From the Ordinary Life

Throughout the interview, participants in the study showed playful competence (Clausen, 1993). They could compare the life they wanted with what they saw as ‘the average, expected life’ and could competently plan and select options. In this passage, Robert expressed his desire to create his own personal biography and have a story different from that of his father and brother.

The pattern I was seeing that was not attractive to me at the time was going straight from college to a career. I guess partially because I didn't study something that I was particularly interested in. If I was really passionate about what I studied, I could see that seeming more logical. And then, you know, very quickly having a mortgage and starting a family, which to a 20 year-old was like, just a lack of freedom right? A total lack of freedom, that's what that looked like or felt like to me, again, probably because I hadn't found something other than music. Music was what I was passionate about and that's not **that** lifestyle. If I was passionate about, whatever, geology or physics, it could have been a more logical progression for me. So I think it's just good to then go out and have, you know, everything seems pre-set in that pattern, right? It's like, It's what my dad did; it's what my brother did. So traveling, those are your experiences. I mean anything is going to be your experience, but it's not a pattern, right, that you're following.

Robert was conscious of the standardized life course. He was aware of life course patterns and it appeared that he had a mental map in his head of what was socially expected. This was very similar to the finding of Neugarten (1966) and Settersten (1997) that people know societal age norms. Just as respondents in the Neugarten study perceived the ‘generalized other’ to be stricter in age norm adherence than they saw

themselves, Robert expressed how ‘others’ followed the pattern more closely. It was the life he saw his father and brother lead - go from college straight into a career job and then get a mortgage and a family. Robert didn’t want to be stuck in a pattern before doing activities of his own choosing which he called ‘experiences’ He wanted his own experiences, his own story.

I think it was a combination of wanting to just go have some experiences, like just sort of outside of normal, Midwestern, middle-class life and ah, not necessarily a fascination with [a specific country].

Robert’s interest in ‘experiences outside of normal, Midwestern, middle-class life,’ could be interpreted as Robert’s desire to customize his life and express his individuality. He seemed to have an almost fatalistic sense that he would conform to pre-established patterns like his father’s experiences and he just did not want to conform so soon in his early twenties. He still expected the normative life course but wanted to postpone commitments to work or family until he had completed some activities he wanted to do for himself.

From the passage above, it appeared that Robert did expect a family, children and a mortgage someday, just not in his twenties. The twenties were seen as a time for personal exploration, to figure out what he liked to do other than music. Robert did consider his twenties as a time to enter the labor force but not necessarily as a time to commit to a career. Mills and Blossfeld (2013) showed that in tough economic times people postpone family formation because uncertainty about their financial future makes them reluctant to ‘bind themselves’ to others. They want to be flexible. Here, Robert did not see music as a viable career for supporting a family. Robert mentioned that he saw

other disciplines as having a more direct path to employment such as geology or physics. He did not see a pre-made feeder path for musicians to full-time employment nor did he want to commit to business right away.

Participants in this study went abroad in order to find adventure, to postpone securing a career job, to pursue other interests, to expand opportunities, or to accompany a partner. They were well-educated professionals who wanted a life path that was unique and out-of-the-ordinary. Like Robert, they wanted to customize their life choices and add more options to the possibilities of where to work and where to live. They considered themselves atypical and saw themselves as very lucky to have had their time abroad.

In order to want something out-of-the-ordinary, participants had to have a sense of what an 'ordinary' life was like. They needed to have expectations about a standard life course or an understanding of age norms. Without this view of the age norms assigned to Mead's generalized other, how would they know that their life story was unique? Participants were able to plan by looking ahead in time and assessing possible options available to them.

Robert, Toby, Terrance, and Donna, all mention that they listened to the suggestions of friends and peers when choosing what to do after college. Participants in this study were all well-educated. They had a variety of skills and cultural capital to draw upon for employment. They were willing to consider jobs outside their country of origin in order to expand their options for employment. They were privileged with college educations. Yet, most participants made choices that were typical of their class, gender and race. They did not use their privileged status to create new options and

appeared constrained in their choices to what their parents did, what their friends were doing, or what was the normative life of the generalized other.

Furstenberg (2003) noted that children of privileged families (the upper quintile of the American population) tended to have a period of time after college when they were encouraged to explore and pursue their personal interests. This time included exploring the world, community service or maintaining a sort of limbo while they tried to figure out what they want to commit to professionally (Furstenberg, 2003). Children of privileged families were not expected to make strong professional commitments until their mid to late twenties and sometimes even early thirties. Once they did have a sense of career they tended to settle down only when their children reached school age. Then their geographic mobility declined (Furstenberg, 2003). The gendered experiences of men and women of privilege were very similar until parenthood, then women took on the larger burden of parenting (Furstenber, 2003).

Participants in the study who went abroad on their own without employer sponsorship did so in their early twenties. They were exploring and looking for adventure. Some were following the lead of friends who went before them. Others were recapturing the semester abroad they didn't have time for in college. It appeared that while their path to adulthood may not have resembled the path to adulthood that their parents took, their choices were very standard for their peers and a well-educated social class.

International Labor Force

Make Opportunities and Expand Options with Multinationals Companies

Ten participants in the study went abroad only after they had an international job offer and carefully planned their foreign journey. These participants were skilled in their field and held a privileged position as middle class, well-trained employees. They could look for jobs on the international labor market due to their skills and cultural capital. These participants or their spouses had some power based on their training and ability to negotiate for benefits and privileges with their assignments.

Amanda, Chris, Eileen and Shana had extra coordination work to do because they were in committed relationships. For Chris, Eileen and Shana, their partners accepted assignments overseas. Therefore if they wanted to join their partners abroad and also have their own careers, they needed to secure their own job overseas. Amanda and her partner applied for their positions together. Amanda applied for an international job right before she graduated from school. Amanda was not particularly interested in working abroad but she was very interested in working right after school. She worried about the narrow and competitive field of music and was afraid of being unemployed.

I think I had been there [at conservatory] one year when I started auditioning for jobs. So there were about 20. I had probably already taken maybe a couple, two-three already for different orchestras. Didn't get anywhere. My husband found this advertisement for the [east Asian city] audition, which was in New York City. So I wouldn't have even known about it. It wasn't advertised in American union papers or anything because they don't support foreign orchestras.

Amanda was willing to expand her search globally as long as it meant securing a job upon graduation. The bonus was having an employer who also hired her partner.

Amanda stated that it was rare in the music field to have one company offer a position to both people in a couple.

And the nice thing was that we went together. That's pretty unheard of for musicians, for a couple to win a job together.

In a fiercely competitive employment market with limited opportunity, Amanda was able to improve her odds of getting a job by expanding the field of possibilities. Although she considered it rare for two people in a relationship to get a job with the same company, that may only be the case with a domestic labor market. Amanda's foreign company had the benefit of only providing one housing accommodation for two employees. It was common for housing to be provided for expats when they were recruited from overseas and for companies to prefer two workers for the accommodation expense of one employee. This was common in the field of international education and couples had an improved chance of becoming hired over a single person because of this preference to reduce expenses. If it was the same for the international music community, maybe the relationship helped Amanda get this position.

Chris also showed agency in getting her job overseas and relied on her reputation as a valued employee to facilitate the move. When Chris' fiancé accepted a position overseas, Chris requested a transfer to the overseas office of her US company.

I was engaged to my husband, my now husband and um, his company needed to have consultants in [Europe]. And so, it was his job that brought us over there. My boss, serendipitously, the man that hired me at my company was now the general manager in charge of Europe and we'd gotten along famously. Or you know, really well. He hired me, really mentored me and when I found out that [my fiancé] was moving over there I called him and said, "Is there any way there would be a place for me to work there?" And he said to work it out with my new boss, 'cause he wasn't my boss anymore.

For Chris and her fiancé this move to Europe was a wonderful opportunity. For Chris, it was negotiated with her receptive employer who understood that she was soon to be married. They were willing to transfer her to their European office and do the paperwork necessary to keep her as an employee. Her company paid for her work visa but she did not get an expat package or other types of employer benefits because she initiated the transfer.

So my company was able to find me a job. My new boss said that would be fine. They found me a job. They got me a work permit because I wasn't married at the time. There was two months before my wedding when we moved over and so I needed a work permit because I wasn't married. You didn't at the time need a work permit if your spouse had one. So they were very generous and got me a work permit, which I think is around \$3,000 and I was able to work in the [European] office, which was so great.

Chris didn't really need the company to include housing and other amenities such as paid moving costs because she was going to live with her fiancé and it was two months before the wedding. She did however need a job.

I don't think we could have afforded to live there if my fiancé was working but not me. It would have been very difficult. It's so expensive and he wasn't, my husband wasn't going over there as a senior level executive, so it wasn't like we were getting a huge ex-pat package to live there, very generous, but not where I could just, you know, go over.

Similarly, Eileen was able to transfer within her existing company.

At the time I was dating my now husband. We were both at an accounting firm. They had a structured program for nine months for him. He was on the audit side of things and so he wanted to do this program over in [Europe] so he did. And he was there – we'd been dating a little over a year. So I thought, oh, nine months, that'll be fine. You know, maybe go back and forth a little bit and it'll be all right. So two months in, he goes, "I really wanna stay." And he goes, "but I'll only stay if you can come over." And I'm thinking, "How am I gonna get over there? I'm in the tax side; I'm not on that side. They don't do that kind of thing for tax people." It's different. Well, then he found an opportunity for me, a potential. They

were looking for somebody in the valuations group. So a different group than I was in.

While her boyfriend found an opportunity for Eileen, it was still up to her to apply for the position in the Europe office.

So anyway, I passed my CV over. They were interested and we phone interviewed a couple of times because back then e-mail was not what it is today,

Eileen accepted the position with the Europe office but she was considered a 'local' hire.

So I interviewed on the phone and got the job, but the difference was my husband, well, my boyfriend at the time, was still an employee of the U.S. I had to quit my U.S. job and then I was hired in the [Europe office]. So it was a little different. So I had to wait for my work visa to come in and all of that stuff. So I went over with the expectation that the work visa was coming in.

Although it was the same corporation, Eileen was taking a chance resigning from her US job and moving to the Europe office for a year or two. Luckily her US employer helped here reduce some of the risk.

So I came in and so I was hired over there. I had a letter from home saying, "Yes, we will re-hire you back," which was a nice assurance because I basically had to quit and be re-hired.

Eileen was a known quantity to her employer. He was willing to vouch for her skills and talents to the international branch of the same company. Eileen's talents in the field of accounting and her track record as a professional helped her to negotiate a position overseas.

Unlike Eileen whose company couldn't facilitate transfers and position changes at the same time, Kara was employed by a company that could transfer her and let her switch departments. Kara had a job with an international bank and requested a transfer to

the European office, as well as, a position change when her prior supervisor behaved inappropriately to her and verbally abused her after she called to light an agency error.

Anyway, so the result of me kind of standing toe-to-toe with this guy, saying “I’m not (pause,) you can’t treat me this way,” they ended up saying, you know, “Again, we hear you. That’s not right. What can we do to make it better?” And I said, “I really want a transactor job. After all this work I’ve been doing for you guys I feel like I’m ready to do some actual business.” And so that’s when they transferred me to [Europe] and there was a new group forming in [Europe] that would have been doing exactly what we’ve been doing in [the US] and they needed sort of, you know.

Kara was surprised that the company complied with her request especially because she was a young associate who may not have put in enough time with the organization to get such a coveted opportunity. She expressed her surprise by noting nobody gets a job in [Europe] and people fight for it.

So that’s how I got the job in [Europe] and interestingly, a lot of people are looking at me like, “That is such a plum. How did you get that?” Nobody just gets a job at Big Bank in [Europe]; people are fighting for this stuff you know. Um, but again, it was sort of the outcome of just trusting my instincts about, you know, not being abused by this guy in [the US], such a jerk.

Clearly this was a placement reserved for people with more institutional clout in the organization than she thought herself to have. She was proud of the fact that she stood her ground in the confrontation with the superior and equally proud that she asked for what she wanted. She was convinced that if she hadn’t asked, she would not have received the opportunity. However, she also noted that because she asked, there wasn’t any incentive for the organization to go above and beyond with her expat package.

Like instead of giving me a U.S. dollar pay salary which a lot of people in former packages would have gotten I had to accept what was essentially a local package but with some extra stuff added on instead of a typical ex-

pat package. That's right. So um, it ended up working out fine because you didn't have the currency risk then of translating your dollar-based salary into local currency and um, you know, I ended up rooming with another girl who was doing the same thing.

She received the basics of housing and assistance, a work permit and moving expenses.

However, the package did not include some of the 'hardship pay' given to other colleagues in recognition of the lucrative bonuses they forego while on an international assignment.

That was an interesting element because at that time Big Bank was really cutting back on ex-pat packages. Before that, these packages were just so famous for being very rich, especially if you had a family. It would just be like now you're setting yourself up for life financially because they pay for everything. They paid for school if you had children. In many cases there's hardship pay involved even for places that you're not experiencing any hardship. But there was this sense of 'you're giving up on this money track that exists in the United States,' you know. I think there was this real sense in the states, the trajectory of your income is so much richer and faster than in other countries, even in European countries. So part of what they're compensating you for was that you're giving that up by going to another country. I mean like the bonuses you could earn in New York based on North American business are just so (long pause and gesticulates with hands widening)..., as we've seen, you know. They're crazy, right? It was almost a corporate acknowledgement of that.

Mark was married and a new father when he had the opportunity to go abroad.

He applied for positions with international companies and actively let colleagues know he would welcome the chance to go abroad.

The interesting thing for me in it falls under the headline of 'no one can help you realize your dream if you don't share it.' In passing with probably any number of my peers, I had told them that I was kind of, you know, wanted to do something internationally. Well, I don't even know what year it was. I was there five years; maybe it was like year three or year four. There had begun by that point a steady migration of marketing people from big (company) to smaller (subsidiary), which was a (toiletary company). Subsequently sold out to (multi-national company), which we'll get into later. But it was smaller; people were getting promoted and

moved up. And a number of people went over. One of which was a friend who knew of my interest in international and knew that they were recruiting for a European expansion, so-called business development. And that was 1989. And that literally changed my life. For reasons I still don't understand, they hired me.

Mark did not just sit back and wait for his current employer to decide to go national. Mark informed colleagues of his interest and they notified him when they heard of an international position. He followed up on their suggestions and applied for the position. While he had good luck in getting the offer, he applied on his own initiative.

For Mark, Kara, Eileen and Chris, the opportunity to go abroad was sought after. They showed self-determination and agency. They made their interests known to employers and were considered 'trusted employees' so employers were willing to go out of their way to accommodate them (Meiksins and Whalley, 2002). Amanda and Mark widened their employment options by including international options in their job search.

Partner's Work

Shana, Claire, Chris, Eileen, Tammy, Valerie, Nancy, Sue and Betty, all went overseas to accommodate their partner's job opportunities. However, they were not passive recipients of their partners' decisions. All the women, with the exception of Betty, participated in the decision process and stated that it was a family decision and seen as a great opportunity. Their husband's held upper management jobs or highly skilled jobs for multinational corporations. Three of their husbands were in finance; two were in architecture/engineering; three were in management and one husband was computers. These were considered very good upper middle class jobs.

As mentioned earlier, Chris and Eileen actively requested transfers from their employers so they could join their partners overseas. While they were able to get jobs overseas, they were not offered expat packages because the move was to meet their personal needs and not the company's needs. They relied on their partners for moving expenses and help with the housing. Claire and Sue were married to residents of their new country so did not receive employer based relocation packages for their moves overseas.

For married people and/or people with children, moving abroad was more complicated. They not only need to consider their career and life course but how their decision had an impact on other members of the family. Even with planning there were tradeoffs that advantaged one member of the family and occasionally disadvantaged other members of the family. For example, Betty gave up her job to move overseas with her husband and had difficulty finding employment overseas because of her husband's frequent relocations as he learned about all aspects of a multinational's engineering needs.

Shana, Tammy, Valerie, Nancy and Betty were married at the time employers offered their spouse overseas assignments so they received expat packages that accounted for additional family members. Most of these employer based packages did not financially require the non-affiliated spouse to work. This was the company's way of acknowledging that the transfer would put some constraints on the family such as the loss of income from the spouse who may not be permitted a work visa in the new country. It was the institutional acknowledgement of linked lives. Valerie and Tammy saw this as a

blessing because the added benefits and cheaper cost of living enabled them to stay home and take care of children without financial difficulties. As Tammy put it, the family lived greater than their means would be in the US and it may have spoiled her children who expect servants to pick-up after them.

For Betty, her husband's international job opportunity was initially a curse. Betty looked at the move overseas as limiting her career trajectory and taking her away from a job she adored.

I liked my job. It was a really, kind of an exciting job, more exciting than I'd ever expect to get.....I was working with a group of Ph.Ds. Usually they only hire Ph.D.'s but they hired me anyway. I got to present, got to be involved in all sorts of interactions with people I'd just read about in my textbooks from all around the country.

She felt her career was sabotaged because there were other employment options offered to her husband at the time and he chose the one with an international focus.

He had three offers like that without even trying, so it was that kind of market for him, then. And I was lucky to have the one. I found a really good job. I really enjoyed it, but I was a little dismayed because he, of the three offers he had, he immediately picked to go work for this company that we knew was going to relocate us in three years.

Betty described her husband's job as an engineer.

They had for years a really big training, career development program for their engineers where they started out of school. They spent three to five years in pilot plans and three to five years on the road traveling like I just described and then they would come back in the office and sort of trained for every function the company did and have a lot of hands-on, out in the field experience to draw on.

Betty lobbied her husband and tried to negotiate for him to accept a more financially lucrative position that did not require the international travel or relocation.

He had, you know, actually a better monetary offer from a company that wouldn't have sent him out like that and so I briefly tried to persuade him to consider that, but no, he wasn't hearing anything of it, because he really liked the appeal [of traveling].

Eventually, she came to terms with the move and accepted the advantages.

It was kind of exciting, you know, that draw of the road, even to me. I thought, "Well, this is an adventure." I grew up in a small town in the Midwest and lived in the same house from the time I was born 'till I left for college and you know. So this idea of traveling all over the place was kind of appealing to me too.

Betty's story showed how lives are linked and her husband's employment decision changed her life in ways she did not plan. She felt disadvantaged by her husband's choice in job because it meant frequent travel and she would not be able to hold a job of her own. Yet, the story also showed the gendered nature of social relationships. Her husband took it for granted that his wife would accompany him and his job would have priority because he was the husband. She did not have power to negotiate in that relationship. The social norm of the wife staying home to take care of the children and the wife acquiescing her needs in order to foster the husbands' career made it difficult for Betty to negotiate keeping her job.

Valerie, Tammy, and Nancy followed their spouses and didn't have difficulty moving abroad either because they were able to work and were not putting their careers on hold or they welcomed the opportunity to stay home. Shana and Claire did not go overseas with jobs lined up and they took risks by giving up high powered careers.

Shana noted that she was being mentored in her career before moving internationally.

I was working for [a local broadcasting company]. And I had a lot of opportunities and they were saying, “Oh you’re gonna.....” (She paused as if too modest to finish the sentence and tried a different way to get her thought across.) I was getting job offers around the country. You know everything looked like things are going extremely well. Even though [Europe] was a place that I always wanted to live, I thought, “how could I give up this route that I was being mentored?” I was being given lots of opportunities but after some discussion we realized this is a, you know, once in a lifetime opportunity. We should go to [Europe].

Although Shana was willing to give up her US job and relocate with her husband, she wanted the opportunity to work if she was able to find a position. Shana’s work permit became a negotiated condition with her husband’s firm. Her work permit became part of his relocation package.

My prerequisite of going over was that if I was going over as an expat wife then I wanted to be able to have a work permit, if I found work. Because I didn’t want to go over there and just be an expatriate. So they were able to negotiate that. They would get me a work permit. Before I went over I had lots of contacts around the US and I let everyone know.

Shana did not have a job lined up before arriving overseas, however, she did have three essential tools before moving: her work permit, an impressive resume, and an extensive contact list actively developed by networking with her US colleagues.

I was a Program Manager so I knew all the Program Managers across the country. So I contacted them all and I got their contacts in [Europe] so when I went over there I had a whole list of contacts.

Once in Europe, she went to work immediately to secure a position that would maintain her career.

And so when I went over there Day One I started calling all those contacts and basically networked for a few weeks and got many, I got three job offers and took the job with [a major network].

Shana was able to find work quickly.

So I was very fortunate to land a position. The skills that I had were not something that they had many people who had those skills. They were not use to dealing with a competitive television environment and I had knowledge in how to work in a multi-channel environment. Satellite was a new thing for them so I had skills that they needed which is why I think I had so many people interested.

Shana and her husband stayed in Europe much longer than originally expected.

So anyway it was a great experience. I loved.... We were there..... they initially were going to send us for two years, and then it became four, and then we decided we love it there so much we are going to stay and we became residents. We went off the expat package. We actually became residents... We applied for residency and we got our residency. So we could live there the rest of our lives if we wanted.

Shana originally went overseas for her husband's career but stayed longer than expected because she was able to establish her own rewarding opportunities.

Claire also left a high powered career for her partner's job and created a rewarding opportunity overseas.

Well, I was living in [a major northeast city] in 1989 and working for a law firm there and met my husband, who was [European], so in early 1990 we decided to go and live in [a major European city]. So he was called back to [Europe] for his work. He had been in [the US] for about a year. And he had to go back so I quit my job in [the US] and went to live in [Europe] and then we got married later that year. Yes, 1990 we got married. Um, I got my working papers in June '91 I think and started a job with a multinational in [Europe].

For Claire the decision to follow her partner was a romantic leap of faith based on the strength of her relationship.

It was kind of crazy 'cause I left my job. I really didn't know, I didn't speak [the language], I didn't know, I didn't have any real idea of how easy or hard it would be to find a job in [Europe], I really didn't. So I took a chance.

There was a period of several months while she waited for her wedding before she could get the work permit.

I found it very hard at first because I had nothing to do. I had nothing, I think I'm someone who needs structure in my day. I need structure in my day and I had nothing to do. So I was a little depressed. I was a little, I was having a hard time. I couldn't speak [the language]. I did, you know, I was taking classes so I was meeting some people. I was meeting some nice people, some Americans who were trying to learn [the language] also but overall I was kind of alone most days while [my partner] was working and I was having a hard time. But then, you know, we got into this stage of planning the wedding. That kept me busy.

Once she was married to a citizen of the country she resided in, there was no problem getting the work permit. The rest of her employment conditions and benefits were negotiated as any local hire.

I got very lucky because through a contact of a contact, I met the legal director of a company which was a really important company in Europe. They offered me a three month internship to work on a certain, they actually had a lawsuit in the US so they offered me a chance to work on that. And it was just a three month, a little three month job. But I got along with the people there and while I was there one of the owners left and so they offered me his job and I didn't actually have to look for a job in [Europe]. It just kind of happened. I got very lucky. I got very lucky.

Claire's new position required her to work in English so not speaking the native language fluently was not a problem. Her work was conducted in English.

It [was] a multinational and business all over the world and business you know, from foreign countries was always in English so my English was my strength, you know, was sort of my leg up.I did projects in other countries and mostly in Asia. So I had many projects throughout Asia actually, that I would work on. And they were, you know, sometimes they were in countries with an English common law history so the law was actually familiar, like the company law.

Claire and Shana moved for their partners and found opportunities abroad that expanded their careers and provided exciting international opportunities.

Staying Home

Valerie, Betty, Tammy, Sue and Nancy did not work for pay while they were expats. When asked what she did while she was overseas, Valerie explained:

Me, personally? I had stopped working so I was just a mom. The kids were small enough. I wasn't doing [volunteer] things. I think I was just chasing a baby: making a baby, having a baby, and chasing a baby. That was pretty much it.

Tammy had a child right before her first move to Europe.

He was given the opportunity to go and I was seven months pregnant at the time when we found out. So they wanted to send him immediately, but he said, "I've gotta wait until my wife has her baby." So he left the day after she was born.

Seven weeks after their daughter was born, Tammy was able to join her husband. His job was demanding and it sounded as if she was expected to fend for herself in the new country.

They had three different divisions so he was called over to run a division. So we were put in a, they had a guy who was leaving who sort of arranged housing for us. And that was that. It was just me and the baby at home all day.

Sue also moved overseas with a baby. She had left her full-time job when her first child was born and had a part-time job for a few hours a week as a consultant in mediation. Her husband was an independent computer programmer and could work anywhere in the world. He wanted to return to the pastoral town where he was raised.

The circumstances which led us to move there were that my husband is [European]. He's from [Europe], he was raised in [Europe]. He was born here in the states but he was raised in [Europe] and he's always had aspirations to go back and live there but sort of forever. So I kind of said sure why not. At the time we had..I was pregnant...we were planning it when I was pregnant with my second. So I had my [daughter]. She was 18 months when we started talking about it. And I just wanted [my son] to

be in the states for a few months just to get...to make sure he was healthy and he was. So we ended up moving when he was 11 months and [my daughter] was two and a half.

Sue's husband wanted to raise his children in the same place where he grew up. Sue agreed to this move even though she knew it would be hard to resume her former profession.

Nancy was the only participant in the study who went overseas late in her husband's career. Her husband had been an executive in project management when he was contacted by a recruiter for a job in the Middle East. They wanted him to run one of their offices in the Persian Gulf region. Nancy and her husband were grandparents and had some reservations about taking a job overseas, especially when they found out two new grandchildren were expected within the year. Then they thought about it and decided that there was nothing really limiting them from this adventure. Nancy had just lost her job because the owner of the business was retiring and closing shop. Her mother had recently passed away so she no longer had caregiving responsibilities and all her children were grown and out of the house. Her husband's company was going through a phase of down-sizing so although there was no immediate sign of losing his position in the fall of 2008, the tenuous economy made him rethink his options. He mentioned to his wife that he was approached by recruiters. According to Nancy her reaction was as follows:

Well, why haven't you mentioned this to me before?"

He said, "Well, ya know. We're not gonna."

I said, "Well, it wouldn't hurt. You know. Why not? Let's see what they're offering. And I had a nephew who was living in China and we were kind of getting feedback about the ex-pat life that he was living and I had another nephew who was living in England. So one is in China; one is

in England. And we're getting lots of feedback on how they really enjoy their experience. Um, now they were much younger, obviously, with families, so their experiences were different. But we're kind of listening to them and I'm looking for an adventure.

My mother hadn't died yet when they were first calling us so you know, I said, "Well you know, how can it hurt to find out?" So (my husband) got in touch with them and I think it took about two weeks to kind of get an idea of what they were offering. And it sounded great. I mean the package they were offering him was amazing. It was amazing. It was, was, something that we thought "Okay, I'm not working. This can kind of make up for the salary that we're missing from my earnings, yet have this great adventure. Our children are grown and they're all out of the house and they're definitely now kind of on their own. You know, we weren't seeing as much of them and you know, we were kind of feeling the empty-nest syndrome anyway, so it was like, "Oh, this might be a really good time." And the only problem was, was my mother. 'Cause she was still alive and doing beautifully. And it might have caused a difficulty within the family not to have had me still doing what I had promised that I was going to be doing. So we back-tabled it a little bit and then my mother died. And it's like, "Okay, we're going for sure."

The opportunity for international employment came at a time in Nancy's life when changes were already in place and she was experiencing life changes such as her employment terminating, her children starting their own families and her mother dying. Nancy no longer had the filial responsibility to care for a disabled parent and her husband's long term job no longer looked secure. His company was going through serious personnel cutbacks and even long-term employees were cautious. Given these changes, Nancy was willing to 'consider an adventure'. Knowing that her two nephews were enjoying their international assignments made it easier for Nancy to entertain the job abroad. They explored the opportunity mainly to keep their options open in a tight economy where her husband was facing fierce competition due to his mature age and the recent glut of laid off workers in his field. They saw that this move would be quite lucrative at a time when most jobs in the US were scaling back benefits. Nancy did not

need to find additional employment if her husband took this job. She could enjoy the adventure.

Moen (2006) described the time when couples launched their children, and were still physically fit in their 50's and 60's as the Third Age. For Nancy and her husband, their time in the Middle East gave them an opportunity to date each other, enjoy travel and get in shape. They were exploring this new phase of the adult life course, the Third Age, a time without parental obligation.

The stories shared by study participants appeared to support the idea that the life course is becoming more customized and contingent on the abilities of people to self-evaluate and plan. Participants took initiative to apply for positions abroad and coordinated plans to move overseas as couples. They demonstrated planful competence and the ability to anticipate what obstacles they needed to overcome such as visa issues or taking the chance that they would have to wait to find a job. Despite these skills, how much agency did these participants really have in forming their own life course path? Although these positions afforded participants some autonomy and self-determination, the choices they made were not unlike their peers in the US. These participants chose the job that would give them a high standard of living and afford them other privileges. Privilege lends itself to a more flexible life style.

Claire, Eileen and Chris followed their partners and put an emphasis on doing whatever they could to keep their relationships strong. A person's twenties is seen as the time to find a life partner and marry. With the exceptions of Terrance and Kara who did not travel with a partner, participants who were employer sponsored went abroad with

partners. If they had children, the children were babies, toddlers or elementary school when they first went overseas. The children were still easily mobile.

On the surface, it appeared that participants made choices that were out-of-the-ordinary. Upon closer analysis, it became apparent that the choices made were very typical for participants' educational status. Although, going overseas to work may not have been the most common choice among their peers and seemed unique to them, it was typical for their class. The choices made to personalize their biography were within keeping with other similarly educated Americans.

The image of a Chinese menu comes to mind as a way to describe the type of constraint that was at work. In a Chinese menu there are at least two columns of menu items. There is a list of ten menu items from List A and maybe another ten items from List B. The person ordering is asked to choose two items from list A and two items from List B. They can make multiple combinations from the four items they select but they are still constrained by only twenty menu items. In a similar fashion, respondents may have mixed up the order in which they selected to do life events but were constrained by the life event selections. These constraints were from their social class, employer demands, and economic opportunities. For example, Lena traveled after undergrad, took entry level job, married, returned to graduate school. Toby married after undergrad, took entry level job, traveled, another entry level job and returned to graduate school. The customization of the timing of events may have varied but the choices were not unique. Studies claiming that the life course has become more customized tended to show that the sequence of life course events were more varied in early adulthood (Heinz, 2003;

Mortimer et al., 2004). The sequence options may have changed in early adulthood as the path to employment became more varied for young adults (Mortimer et al, 2004; Heinz, 2001a; Heinz, 2003; Kerckhoff, 2003; Pallas, 2003) however, the type of options have not greatly changed.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

In this chapter, I showed how the family monitored the life course of its members and worked to constrain some of the life course decision making of individuals. There appeared to be structural lag with familial expectations that were mediated through the language of ‘exceptions.’ The family exerted its influence through a series of rewards and sanctions.

Couples voluntarily accepted a more institutionalized life course when they started a family. Marriage and children added additional voluntary constraints on the individual life course leading to a phase of life with more normative and standardized behavior. Participants looked forward to a time in their marriage when they had launched their children and returned to a more customized life based on what they wanted to do rather than what they needed to do for their children. This Third Age (Moen, 2006) was seen as a time of greater freedom.

Family Monitors the Life Course

Hareven (2001) claimed that the timing of life course decisions was increasingly an individual choice rather than a familial expectation. However, it was evident in this study that the family functioned as a monitor of life course events and roles. Families notified participants when it was time to move on to the next stage of the life course and

reminded them when they took too long in one stage or another. Families also administered sanctions against participants who breached taboos and strayed too far from the traditional path of expected life events.

After her time working overseas at an international school, Brittany returned to her parent's home and started to look for a permanent job. She had picked up some part-time work while looking. Her father not so subtly told her it was time to get a serious, full-time position.

I went back home and stayed with my mom and dad. [I] went back to a couple of part-time jobs that I had done previously. I woke up one morning and my dad had taped a want-ad for high school [language] teacher, to the coffee maker. And I said, "Dad, that's great, except I have a degree in [social science]." He's like, "I don't give a damn, get your ass to that school building."

Brittany continued:

So I went to the school building completely unprepared for the possibility that I might ever wanna actually be a [language] teacher. It had never even crossed my mind. I walked into the school building on a Wednesday afternoon and dropped off a resume and an application. The lady at the office said, "You're here for the language job?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "Hold on just a second." It was so fast. I sat down and she came back five minutes later with the principal. And he's like, "I'd really like to talk to you for a few minutes and just kind of see who you are, what you're doing." And I sat down with the principal on the spot. He interviewed me, hired me, and I started the next day. I've been a language teacher ever since.

Brittany described the incident as, "completely unexpected and [a] complete, total life change." Her father knew what she was capable of and he knew that she had a language minor as an undergraduate and a Master's in Teaching. Since teaching jobs were scarce in her rural area, Brittany's father was willing to think more broadly in order to help his daughter move on to the next phase of the life course, full time employment.

Donna's mother also nudged her to action. Donna described her mother as a socialite who had an interest in travel but married instead. According to Donna, this personal interest in travel may have prompted the mother to encourage her daughter to travel. After completing her Master's degree in teaching, Donna taught for a little while but she was really looking forward to Divinity School. When she didn't have the money to go back to school her mother encouraged her to fill out some forms for an International Scholarship Program.

I had friends who were in education so I started doing that and I started teaching but I sort of..... My mother stuck these forms in front of me and said fill them out so I said, "Okay." I said, "Wow! Okay."

Donna received a scholarship in Africa and stayed in Africa for most of her adult years.

In addition to encouraging participants to take action, families discouraged certain actions that they considered a violation of life course norms. For example, Brittany's mother did not approve of the move to South America and expressed her displeasure by not speaking to Brittany for the first few months of her trip to South America.

My mother was not supportive of me traveling abroad. She did not speak to me for three months while I was in South America. So I didn't have anyone to really reach out to. I called home and spoke to my dad occasionally, but it was not aI didn't leave for South America on particularly good terms. So it was a challenge to make that sacrifice and travel anyway and then to be there alone, by myself with no real support system and have to kind of figure it out.

Brittany endured the silent treatment from her mother while she was abroad.

Eileen's situation illustrated how families imposed themselves in a situation when they thought a breach of the standard life course had been made by a family member.

Eileen had been in a committed relationship with her partner, Gary, when the partner was

sent over to Europe for a two-month training program. Gary called her several weeks into the program and said he would like to stay in Europe for a while longer, maybe two years but would only stay if she was willing to join him. She found a way to transfer within her company to the European office and joined him. Before she left for Europe she received disapproving feedback from her parents and his parents.

My mom was just so angry. My dad didn't say as much but my mom, she just was...I don't even remember what she said exactly, but basically I think she used the expression: "Well, why would he buy the cow if he can get the milk for free?" I said, "Mother!" This is coming from my mom who actually got married at 17 and she was pregnant. "Mom?" and I got, "Times were different back then." I said, "Mom! Really?" I think she thought I was gonna be completely taken advantage of. She was worried. But I said, "Well, I wanna do this."

Eileen's parents not only were unhappy with their daughter's choice to move in with her partner, they imposed sanctions and did not come to visit her in Europe for a very long time.

Gosh, my parents didn't come over till maybe June or July, so I had been there well over a year at that point. Like I said, they were not happy we were living together. None of them were. But they came at the end. Gary's parents came at the really end and we actually did a cruise through the Baltic Sea with his parents at the end of our stay so that was fun.

Eileen not only had to deal with her parents' monitoring her breach of religious and social expectations about cohabitation, her boyfriend's parents also were critical of the couple.

Gary's dad didn't say much, he handed me a 10-pound note and he goes, "Use this for a marriage license." This is before I left [for Europe]. Gary was already gone. I looked at him and I said, "Why don't you talk to your son? This is not me. I'm not gonna ask him to marry me." He goes, "[clicking tongue] Oh." Like, because quite frankly, I think if Gary asked, I would have gladly said yes, but I wasn't gonna ask.

Eileen wondered why she was the one getting all the complaints and feedback on the couples joint cohabitation decision, especially because none of the parents expressed their dissatisfaction to Gary.

The vocal ones were Gary's dad and my mother. My dad, I knew, was unhappy but didn't really say anything and same with Gary's mother. I think of all of them, she was probably the most open minded. But she didn't really say anything. But none of them said it to Gary, only to me. I kept complaining to him, like "What is going on? Why aren't you getting any of the heat?" Well he was 4,000 miles away. I suppose it was easier to give me the hard time.

Clearly the parents had gendered expectations and saw Eileen as the one who should discourage cohabitation before marriage. In the next passage, Eileen expressed that she had daughters too so she 'gets it', this phrase implied that she too would pass on the gendered expectation that her daughters not move in with their boyfriends before marriage so that no one takes advantage of them.

My parents love Gary. Back then they weren't so sure about him. But I think you know, when they came to visit, apparently Gary asked my father for his permission for us to get married and my dad was so excited and at that point, that's when their like of Gary sort of...I shouldn't say that, they liked him. They just weren't really sure of what his intentions were, which I get it, I have a daughter. I get it.

Eileen's parents relaxed their sanctions on the couple once Gary went through the traditional ritual of asking for the father's permission to marry Eileen. Gary's proposal also signaled his intent to enter into the next phase of the life course with Eileen. By following tradition and asking Eileen's father for permission to marry Eileen it implied that Gary would get 'back on track' and follow life course norms and customs from that point on; a return to tradition so to speak and reassurance that cohabitating and breaking with expected norms was an exception due to unusual circumstances.

Eileen justified the breach in religious and social expectations on the grounds of extenuating circumstances.

But I said, “Well, I wanna do this,” and I didn’t even go this angle but I said, “Why would I,” I’m thinking now. I mean, it wouldn’t have economically made sense. Rent was just crazy expensive over there. It would have been, we would have just eaten up all of our money in two rents had we done that and it just wouldn’t have made any sense.

Since rent was so high she couldn’t live independently of her partner and she saw cohabitating as a way to keep their relationship intact. There was a justification to her actions similar to her mother stating, “Times were different back then.” It appeared as if Eileen wanted to reserve the option of warning her children about pre-marital cohabitation and still remain credible. She wanted the children to know how to do it right according to their religion. She mentioned at the start of the interview that her children did not know about their parents living together and she mentioned it again later in the interview. It was a secret she did not want divulged to the children.

And so we lived together. My parents didn’t love that. My kids don’t know that but we lived together over there.

It may be in this way that life course expectations are forged. Parents pass down to children the social norms they received from their parents of what is expected for men and women, for example, no cohabitation before marriage. These rules become the strict understanding of the ‘generalized other’. Then parents provide qualifiers to the ‘rules’ that created extenuating circumstances such as ‘those were different times back then’ or ‘rent was just crazy expensive over there. We would have just eaten up all of our money.’ The life course expectations become customized and modified on a never

ending case-by-case basis until the rules instilled for the 'generalized other' becomes the rarer exception and the norm changes to reflect the new reality.

In the previous example, Eileen's parents did not see Gary as an acceptable partner for their daughter until he expressed his intent to marry her. In this example, Donna experienced a much more severe reaction from her father when he found out that she had already married what he considered an unsuitable mate. Donna had married an African man at a time when race relations were very strained in the US.

My father tried to strangle me because I married a black man. He was really racist. Literally, he tried to strangle me. He came home drunk one night while I was visiting and he put his hands on my throat. This was after he knew I was married to a black man but before I had my son. I had told my brother that I married but I hadn't told my parents. So he tried to strangle me. Obviously I survived.

This incident fueled by alcohol spoke volumes to the father's sanctions about choosing a mate that they consider to be inappropriate. Donna said that her mother did not have a severe reaction to the marriage because the mother was raised by an African American nanny and thus had experienced a warm, loving relationship with someone who was black so the mother was more accepting. Living in Africa gave Donna the freedom to marry whomever she wanted without familial interference and to live her life as she saw fit.

Families not only monitored the timing of life course events for others in the family such as when to get a job, when to move out on your own; they also monitored the role expectations for these various times in the life course. The family instilled these norms through cautionary tales such as "why buy the cow if you can get the milk for

free” and then had the ability to justify variations to these norms, “they were different times back then” or to impose sanctions such as not visiting.

Filial Responsibility

Families tend to provide the majority of care to older adults with chronic illness (Pavalako, 2011). However, there is a gendered division of labor to this care. Families view caregiving for older relatives as woman’s work (Pavalako, 2011; Chappell and Penning, 2005) with women providing the majority of hands on care such as personal care, meal preparation, housekeeping, dressing and bathing. Participant families in this study were no exception. Donna and Abigail both described how caring for an aging parent became their job despite having brothers who lived much closer to the parent. In families, men tend to take on more of the financial caregiving, transportation or yard work.

Donna returned from Africa to care for her mother even though her brother was living with her mother at the time.

I came home to downsize my mom into an apartment. My dad had died and my mom had macular degeneration. None of my brothers would help so I did it.

Donna found caring for her mother to be emotionally rewarding and she was happy to have the time with her mother before the mother’s death.

Glad I came back because we had 2 ½ years. When my mother was having problems, my brothers didn’t lift a finger. I just knew it was time to come back. “I always knew I would come back [to the US] but I’ll go back to [Africa] again.

Much like many other women, Donna felt responsible for the care of her mother. In fact, most women can expect to provide care for older family members

sometime in their life (Chappell and Penning, 2005). Caring for an aging parent is an expected part of a woman's life course.

As a teenager, Abigail took care of her mother and brother because the father had passed away and her mother was ill. When Abigail was a young adult her mother's situation stabilized and Abigail was able to live in another state from her mother and have an independent life. Then as Abigail was in the middle of negotiating an international job opportunity her mother was hospitalized.

She had congestive heart failure and I remember having to negotiate my salary on the pay phone at the hospital...So she was in the hospital and then we had to find a nursing home for her. It turned out to be a calamity, a crisis. My brother couldn't care for her and take her into his home. He still lived in the area.

Rather than turn down the job, Abigail negotiated a later start date for the new job until her mother was settled into a nursing home. Abigail then adjusted her schedule to include frequent trips in to see her mother. Despite having strong career ambitions, Abigail made arrangements to oversee the management and care of her mother including handling the logistics of residential placement, bills, and accommodations. According to Chappell and Penning (2005) women are also more likely than men to be able to provide caregiving to an elderly family member.

Similarly, Toby described how his wife made frequent trips from Asia to the United States when his mother-in-law had cancer. Toby noted how lucky they were that his wife had the ability to give this time to her mother. Toby's wife was a new mother and had already scaled back some of her job responsibilities to care for her newborn. She

was employed in the family business and her client had no problems with these arrangements.

[My son] crossed the Pacific four times before he was one. [My wife] would go back and spend a month with her mom with the baby and then come back to [Asia] and spend a couple of months with me. Then go back and spend a month with her mom and dad. So all of that was very lucky where we were at a point where she didn't have to work....It was very, very hard but it was also really lucky in that she could spend a lot of time at home. She was there when her mom died.

Toby's wife's "luck" was the flexibility she had in her work. While she was physically home taking care of a young infant at this time she was technically still working and had a client to keep happy. However, her time was more flexible and did not require her to go to an office so she could spend a month at a time back in the US.

It is quite common for families to consider the woman caring for young children at home as available for other family needs. These flexible employment situations make her more "on call" for family obligations as well. Toby's wife fit the description of the well-researched, woman-in-the-middle role. She had young children to care for as well a parent who needed help.

Toby's wife was really lucky to have sisters. In order to reduce the stress on any one member of the family, the siblings all pitched in. Toby noted a shared sense of filial responsibility between his wife and her three sisters. The distance of living in Asia created a challenge but not an obstacle for providing care.

All the siblings were rotating through. My wife could spend a month and then another sibling would come in for a couple of weeks and leave and then another one would come in for a couple of weeks and leave. Then my wife would come in for a month. That's kind of how they were rotating to be there to help her dad.

I wondered if it was the father who was ill whether it would have been seen as such an urgent family caregiving crisis or would there have been an expectation that the mother could handle the caregiving of her husband on her own.

Unlike Toby's wife who was called in to care for her mother with an acute illness, Nancy helped care for her mother who had a long standing disability. Nancy's mother had been in a severe auto accident when the mother was in her forties. The long term effects of the accident left the mother with some disabilities. For the most part Nancy's father was able to care for his wife through the years. However, as the parents aged it became harder for him to do all the caregiving so his children helped on occasion. Finally when Nancy was laid-off from the family business because her father wanted to retire (possibly to provide more care to the mother), she started to help her father with the care of her mother.

I had just transitioned out of my career of 20-years into just being a caretaker for my mom. It was a short time. Why this all kind of ended up happening at the right time, going to the Middle East, is that my mother died suddenly, unexpectedly, only after about three months of my being with her.

While caring for her mother, Nancy did not realistically consider the offer for her husband to move to the Middle East. Once she no longer felt obligated to care for mother and her father was still physically independent, Nancy and her husband pursued the offer in the Middle East.

In the three preceding cases, daughters carried out the role that was expected of them. They helped the family in a time of need. However, was it really a choice? What

would have happened to family harmony if Nancy and her husband left for the Middle East and the mother had not passed away? Nancy speculated.

And the only problem was my mother because she was still alive and doing beautifully. It might have caused difficulty within the family not to have had me still doing what I had promised that I was going to do. So maybe we back-tabled [the decision to go abroad] a little bit and then my mother died. And it's like, "Okay, we're going for sure."

Would Nancy have left a large hole in the caregiving schedule? Would the family have resented her departure or blessed her good fortune? It was hard to tell how Nancy's family would have reacted if they left while caregiving. However, Sue's extended family was not forgiving under similar circumstances.

The role of hands-on caregiver in times of illness usually falls first to a spouse and then to a daughter or daughter-in-law (Montgomery and Datwyler, 1990). While undergoing chemotherapy for cancer, Sue's mother-in-law and father-in-law stayed in the garden apartment of Sue's home. With this arrangement, family was close by in case the mother-in-law needed help while undergoing treatment. After chemo therapy, Sue's mother-in-law intended to return to Europe for the remainder of her life. Sue and her husband planned to move to Europe, as well, so they put their house on the market.

So we moved to [Europe] and it was under strange circumstances. Ted's mother was having chemo. She had cancer. While she was having chemo, she was staying with us in our house in our apartment in the basement, on the garden level. We thought that she was going to go back to [Europe] with us so we put the house on the market thinking it would take six months to sell. The first people, who saw it, bought it. So we had to go. What we should have done and this is where the guilt comes in, we should have stayed and taken the house off the market or just not done it until...Well we thought she was gonna be fine. She was finishing her treatment and then her plan was to go back to Europe. So we thought we would all be there. She died three weeks after we moved to Europe. She died in the States.

Sue and her husband did not expect the mother-in-law to pass away so soon, nor did they expect a quick sale on their house. Regardless of their good intentions, the husband's family still saw Sue as shirking her caregiving duties for both the mother-in-law and father-in-law. Later in the interview, Sue said that relations with her brother-in-law and his family were strained because of the way Sue and her family left the US while the mother-in-law was ill.

I think because of the whole issue with Ted's mom, his brother's wife was angry that we moved, didn't like that we moved to Europe and left his mom there in the states. You know, they weren't happy.

Sue's reluctance to accept the caregiver role for the mother-in-law and later for the father-in-law led to strained relations with other family members. If she would not accept the caregiving role, a gendered role in that family and an expected obligation of a good daughter-in-law, then she would not have full family membership. Although Sue did some caregiving of her mother-in-law while they lived in the US, the fact that the family moved and left the mother-in-law in the US was almost seen as abandoning her post for an obligation she had already accepted. Withholding family membership manifested itself by excluding Sue's immediate family from larger family dinners. Despite Sue's immediate family living with her father-in-law, only the father-in-law was invited to family gatherings.

Ted's family that lived 45 minutes away didn't really incorporate us into their lives at all. You know, they just sort of went on living. They would have [my father-in-law] come over for Sunday dinners but we weren't invited.

This was the family's way of imposing sanctions for not carrying out caregiving duties in the US and seeing the mother-in-law all the way through her chemotherapy.

Sue continued to resist the role of caregiver even when she lived with the father-in-law after he was widowed. Sue's father-in-law, expected Sue to assume the traditional female role of housekeeper and caregiver. Sue attributed this caregiver expectation to cultural differences and the role of women in this European country.

It was a little interesting because the role of women is a little different there so I very much felt while I was there that I was Ted's wife and the mother of his children. And you know, it felt like I was expected to...and really I'm not a domestic goddess at all, you know. So [my father-in-law] would do things like if I would make dinner, he would leave his dishes out for me to put away or something like that, just really traditional, sort of traditional in terms of genders. Yes but Ted wouldn't say, "Hey Dad put your own dishes away," or anything. It seemed...that's what was hard on the marriage.

These caregiving role expectations seemed quite similar to traditional US expectations of wives, mothers and daughter-in-laws. However in the US, Sue could negotiate with her husband the role of mother and wife. She could include the role of musician, part-time professional, and volunteer. Now that the other relatives were in close proximity, Sue found it more difficult to customize and negotiate her role with her husband, Ted. Rather than being freed from extended family expectations by moving abroad, Sue was immersed in it. Her inability to play the role determined for her by the extended family led to a difficult time in Europe and hurt feelings. Because Sue would not care for the family members with the traditional fashion, her husband's family did not consider her a full member of the family and agreed to the sale of the family farm to Sue's husband if Sue's name was not included on the deed so in affect her husband's family excluded her from membership in their family.

Maintaining the expectation that women provide the primary caregiving role appeared to be a balance of consent and coercion (Estes, 2005). Abigail, Donna, Nancy and Toby's wife dutifully came to their family member's aid and cared for frail parents during their time of illness. They did this voluntarily. Even Sue volunteered to assist when her mother-in-law was going through chemotherapy. However, the extent of care Sue provided was judged by the family to be insufficient given the circumstances and they imposed strong sanctions. Full membership in the family was withheld. In the US and away from extended family, Sue had more opportunity to negotiate her role in the marriage.

Shared Biography and Freedom from Extended Family

In the previous chapter, I discussed how participants' who went abroad in their twenties had a desire to create a unique biography that would distinguish themselves from others and make their lives seem more unique or at least different than their parents. In this section, I showed that participants also sought out a shared biography which would be experienced only with one person or only the immediate family. The concept of a shared biography is very intimate. It is a part of the self not available for witness by most people, only a select few.

For several participants, Eileen, Tammy, and Nancy, moving overseas had the unexpected advantage of time away from family. Living abroad gave these couples personal time together without all the obligations of family. Additionally, they had the opportunity to create a personal, intimate time together that was 'their time', a personal experience, a shared biography.

Eileen focused on the joy of spending time with just her partner when they lived in Europe as a young couple without family obligations to worry about. The fact that they only had each other to rely on made their relationship stronger. Granted they were still in the courtship phase of their relationship. This experience gave them an opportunity to rely on each other.

It was such a fun time in our lives, it really was. We were away from enough that you wanna be away from, family. But when you're together and you're on your own, it's kind of nice to rely on one another. You make your own traditions. You experience things together. When you're home, it is family and birthdays and holidays and everything else. You're expected to do all of the family things and then there's not as much time for just the two of you. It really was a good bonding experience for both of us. That sounds selfish. You understand what I'm saying. I think if I explained that to my mom, she wouldn't quite get it. It's just your way. You do rely on one another a bit more rather than relying on family and everything else.

Eileen and her partner, Greg, could decide what was important to them and not worry about the opinion of family members regarding what they should do and when.

Tammy echoed Eileen's sentiment that her relationship got stronger because she and her husband only had each other to rely on when they moved to Europe. Tammy had been married for several years and was a new mother when she went overseas. Clearly they were out of the courtship phase of their relationship. Yet only having her partner to count on was an intimate situation for Tammy. She realized that both members of the couple had to have a desire to live internationally. These were shared goals. They both needed to have a high level of respect for each other because they were going to need each other. The combination of shared goals, need and respect brought the two emotionally closer together.

Nancy was the only participant in the study whose first expat experience came late in her husband's career. As mentioned earlier, Nancy had recently retired from a job she held for about twenty years. It was interesting that Nancy also mentioned the freedom to spend time alone as a couple without family to be one of the most positive aspects of living in a foreign country. Nancy had been married for about 30 years at the time of the interview, yet, going overseas with her husband created the opportunity for stepping out of their well-established roles in the family and exploring a new side to their relationship, time as a couple.

Our relationship changed in that it was much more just the two of us. I mean here we had this whole huge family that we were all very much involved with and busy and children and grandchildren and all of a sudden it was just the two of us, very interesting. It was a whole new time in our relationship. I mean never has it been just the two of us and now we were just the two of us. It was great. It was very fun. It was very different.

Nancy and her husband had more one-on-one time to explore their interests outside the realm of family life when they lived in the Middle East. Without family obligations, the couple had time to be self-absorbed. Although she was not able to work while she was in the Middle East, staying home and pursuing domestic activities was a welcomed change from employment for Nancy. Moen (2006) described this phase of the life course as the Third Age. She had worked in the family business for many years. Although Nancy and her husband had been in the empty nest phase of their lives for several years before moving abroad, they were so involved in family life that they had not taken time for themselves as a couple.

Both Nancy and Sue showed that the sense of bonding and shared biography was a result of getting away from family more than it was from leaving the US. For example,

Nancy and her husband bonded as a couple even when they returned to the US and moved to a city a few hours from the rest of their close knit family. The family was just far enough away to be absent from their daily interactions. Nancy reported that in many respects their lives now in the US were similar to their time in the Middle East because it was just the two of them in this small Midwest city.

Along similar lines, Sue felt closer to her husband when she was in the US and not living in Europe with her husband's family. When Sue lived in Europe, she missed her egalitarian, US marriage. While in Europe, she no longer felt she had a shared biography with her husband because they resided in the same town in which he was raised. Sue felt like a newcomer to a story that was already in progress. She stated:

The thing was [that] my husband and I were no longer a team. It was no longer he and I forging our life together on our own. Now I had become this adjunct part of his life as the mother of his children, you know. It just felt very...It just didn't feel very good. He was very much a North, his last name is North, he was very much a North there. We would go to [a beach town] or whatever and he would say, "Oh, I remember the time that blah, blah, blah..." We could never get away from his history there. So I felt like our shared experiences were fading away. Now it was just me assimilating into his world.

Sue discussed how she felt it was difficult to plan the life she wanted because of the 'family' and the history her husband had in the home town. Sue noted that her happiest times in Europe were when she and her husband moved a few hours away from his home town and they could form their own life together 'without all the drama' from family members. The extended family wanted a say in where she lived and where the children attended school. These were life course decisions that Sue considered private between

her and her husband. According to Sue, once they were back in the US the marriage went back to the way it was before they relocated to Europe.

To Be or Not To Be Parents

Becoming a parent was one of the major steps in the life course and life course studies often asked what age a participant was at the time they had their first child. Participants in this study discussed parenthood in the language of choice. Yet for some it was not a conscious choice. For example, Terence's initial step into parenthood was unexpected. He was in a transcontinental relationship with his girlfriend when she found out she was expecting a child. Shortly after the birth of their first child, his girlfriend and child moved to the US. Terence had not considered becoming a father before that pregnancy nor did he think of himself as the marrying kind. He commented that he was too busy having a good time. When his girlfriend moved to the US she cohabitated with him and he made an effort to learn her language since he neither one spoke the others language. After the birth of the couple's second child, they married. Terrence told me that he changed his views on marriage because "South American women know how to treat men right." This was an obvious comparison between US African-American women and South American black women. Terrence did not see himself married to or having children with an American woman of color because in his opinion they did not know how to properly treat an African-American man. Throughout the interview, Terence spoke with confidence about his professional accomplishments and would smile when referring to his days as a bachelor and uncommitted man. When he told me the comment about how South American women know how to treat men right he did so in a

serious tone with no smile on his face or chuckle as if he was trying to make the point that this was about respect not sex.

In a society where having children is the norm, people do not need to explain why they want children they only feel a need to explain why they do not want children (McMahon, 1995). This was the case for Tammy who mentioned during the interview that when she married she didn't want children.

We just wanted the house and maybe a dog and some nice cars. That's really all we had. We didn't want children. But he took a job traveling and that was, I don't know what happened but at the same time, it popped into our minds that maybe we wanted a child and you have one child, you have to have two.

Tammy and her husband originally didn't want children yet at the age of 30, something changed for Tammy. Were life course norms so strong in society that people choose to have children even if they did not want children? McMahon (1995) gave two explanations for this type of reaction. The first was that people felt the pressure to conform to societal norms, although they were reluctant to do what was expected. The second was as time gets closer to when couples lose the potential to have children, it was easier to have children than accept the identity of "childless" couple. Tammy had three children in all. Whether it was peer pressure or reluctance to accept the identity of childless, Tammy conformed to expectations. Living overseas offered her the opportunity to stay home to raise her children with the help of paid caregivers. Her husband's salary was enough that she didn't have to work and still could afford household help, vacations with and without the children and custom made furniture that

was displayed in her home. She also commented that having domestic help watch her children enabled her to do many trips and activities with her girlfriends.

Transnational professionals are known for postponing relationship and childbearing decisions (Fechter, 2008). Like many well-educated professionals, career often took precedence over reproduction until participants faced the possibility of not being able to have children. According to McMahon (1995), well-educated women tended to put off having children until the ‘right’ circumstances were achieved such as finding the right partner and achieving financial success.

Toby, Shana, Kara, Abigail and Lena focused on their careers for a long time and then realized the biological opportunity for having children was closing. Additionally, McMahon noted that references to the biological clock were not really discussions about when to have children but whether to have children. For example, when Toby was asked, “How did you come to the decision to have kids in [Asia] instead of waiting?” he replied:

We had been married 14 years before we had kids. It was just a matter of [my wife] starting to yell that her clock was ticking. If we are going to do this we have to do it.

Toby and his wife were married right out of college so it was not unusual that this couple waited a few years after marriage to have children. However, 14 years after marriage is a long wait. Toby was waiting for his wife to make reproductive decisions for the couple and she was more aware of her biological limitations. According to McMahon (1995), having children was seen as something women wanted more than men and was therefore, considered by men to be a woman’s decision. McMahon (1995) noted that middle-class women want to be personally accomplished and financially prepared before they have

children. Toby and his wife were well-established in their careers in Asia. They had authored a book and they owned their business. Asia was home. Toby's wife met the middle-class woman's criteria for being personally accomplished and financially prepared (McMahan, 1995). Toby's wife was letting him know that they could not postpone the decision indefinitely and they needed to choose to have children or remain childless.

Shana postponed having children and focused on her career. The idea of not being able to have children and winding up childless like her colleagues prompted Shana to "activate her option to have children" (McMahon, 1995). She was reflective in taking stock of the career people around her and looking at her own position in the company.

I also reached a point where I was working for a few years and then reached a point where I wanted to have some kids. But I also knew that I couldn't balance the type of job I had. I was traveling all the time. There weren't many women who had children who were in senior positions. I was one of....I mean there were but... women... and I noticed that women who...who were in their 40's and 50's either didn't have....or weren't married...or didn't have kids....or were married and didn't have kids and I thought I'm not sure I wanted to end up that way. So I actually left [the network] to consult and I became pregnant and had Oscar over there.

Shana did not equate motherhood with coming home to the US immediately. She made a decision to have children and scale back the demands of her job while living in Europe. She became an independent consultant for her previous employer.

Upon returning to the US, Shana chose to stay at home to raise the children rather than continue with part-time consulting work.

That's another reason I didn't go back to work because I knew I was going to have another one. Also I am one of these people that, I'm not good with.....you know we delayed having children 'cause I knew I wasn't going to be the type of mom who couldn't live with having the nanny or

do day care. You know, unless I had to. 'Cause to me having a child I wanted to be part of it. You know for me personally the whole point of having a child is so that you have you or your husband, you know someone in the family is there for the majority of the time. And the work I had I just was never... I mean, my husband and I were like passing ships in the night. I'd be off 'cause a lot of, .. most of..., my conferences were over weekends or I'd have evening clients or working or whatever.

Shana knew that many of the jobs at her level would require a significant amount of travel and take her away from time with her family.

Like Shana, Kara was in a high powered position abroad that required a lot of travel. Unlike Shana, Kara wasn't married when she started to reflect on the job and what she wanted out of life but she was about the same age as Shana.

I had the freedom to do what I wanted including if I needed to work late that was not an issue. And it definitely, it got to the point where it almost became a problem. You'd start worrying that they're taking advantage of me because I don't have a family or I'm, what kind of loser am I that I'm spending so much time at the office. I was traveling a lot for work so you know, there were days you'd go home and realize, "Is this all there is?" 'cause I built this thing and it's a little bit lonely sometimes. But at the same time, I had these great relationships with the people I work with.

Kara realized that she did not have family to come home to after work and she questioned whether this life she created was enough for her. She recognized that she was coming to the end of her reproductive life and a potential mate was nowhere in sight. She had dated a few local men but there was no real long term relationship.

Middle-class, professional woman tended to wait for the right relationship before having children (McMahon, 1995). Shortly after realizing that she might end up permanently alone, Kara reconnected with an old beau living in the United States but passing through Europe on a business trip. They rekindled the relationship and she moved back to the US. They married a year after and started a family. Kara wanted to

get “on track” with this new life transition. She was aware of her biological limitations and did not want to miss the opportunity to be a mother in a traditional breadwinner/homemaker relationship (Moen 2003). She had her first child at 38, another at 40 and the last at 42.

Once we got married and I got pregnant, I thought, you know, I think, at the age of, I had my first child when I was 38....I just felt that if we were going to hope to have children, I don't think I can mess around with traveling. I was responsible for Brazil and Argentina so I had to be traveling there every three weeks and that just sounded like that's not a good business position for somebody who wants to have children.

Kara left work to become a full time mother and follow a more standard life course for her privileged status. If she did not reconnect with her old beau and marry, she may have found herself continuing on the life course path of the single expat woman describe in Fechter's (2008) research as putting off marriage and children for the sake of the career.

Limiting Fecundity to Manage Both Career and Children

Donna was not willing to forgo children for the sake of her career but she did decide to limit the number of children to one so that she could continue to pursue her career. She described her husband as a good caregiver and the more nurturing of the two, a good candidate for the role of primary caregiver. This arrangement was unconventional in both Donna's American culture and her husband's African culture, especially in the 1970s. He agreed to this arrangement despite wanting four children. It was common in his African culture to have more children.

He was more nurturing than I was so he raised our child and I could travel and do what I needed to do. I had told him that I only wanted one child and he said he was fine with that but he really wanted four children. He wanted four children but I only wanted one. I could only handle one. I couldn't... I just couldn't handle more.

Limiting fecundity to manage both career and children has been seen with professional, career minded couples such as academics, scientists and business leaders. What was unusual in this situation is that the husband was the caregiver. Did Donna limit herself to one child just in case social pressures would later demand that she raise the child as the primary caregiver or did she think her husband was only capable of raising one child if he was the primary caregiver? Men usually leave the child bearing decisions up to the women whom they see as primary caregivers (McMahon, 2003). Although this was a reversal of roles in a breadwinner/homemaker model, it was still the same breadwinner/ homemaker model typical of Donna's class standing.

Not Choosing Parenthood

Not all the participants chose children over career. Abigail faced the same choice and opted not to have children.

I could be wrong but I think every woman decides whether to have children or not; because with us it is biologically determined. You know, we don't have an open window into our seventies.

It sounded as if Abigail was receptive to having children but not if it meant accepting the stereotypical role of mother and housewife. She did not want to sacrifice her career.

Moen (2003) showed that when there were two careers in a family and the demands of childcare and other domestic responsibilities were brought to bear, it was primarily the wife who scaled back her career goals in order to accommodate these time demands.

I asked if Abigail discussed with her husband before they married whether they wanted children. Abigail responded:

No, no we were both, at that point when we married, I was 28, he was 32, we were planning our careers still and we were planning on getting MBAs

and launching careers in the private sector. So no it was like most professionally orientation people we delayed. We thought we would delay having children and we'd probably thought we had this perpetually open window but that's not the case, especially for women. So I was the driver of that. If I had insisted on having children he probably would have agreed. But I know that I would have had to be a single parent. I saw that if we had children I'd have to stay home, you know, full-time or I'd be juggling, the house, cleaning, child care, social calendar-stereotypically.

Abigail came up with a creative way to “test” what her experience would be like if they became parents. She may have sensed by now her husband's penchant for traditional roles.

[I] decided during that period that I didn't want to be a single parent. That if we had had children, if we had made the decision to have children, I finally made the decision for myself and said, “I don't want to raise children alone.” You know how I figured it out?

So I tested it. I forgot to tell you. I talked to my husband and I said, “Could we host, through one of these [student exchange] programs, could we host a [European] exchange student and have him/her come and live with us for a year?” And he agreed. I don't think he knew what he was getting into. But that was my way of testing what he would be like with one.

Whether the parenting ‘test’ was an accurate assessment of her husband's willingness to participate in raising his own child was questionable but it appeared to provide Abigail with some peace of mind that she made the right decision about whether to become a parent.

Amanda and Lena were much younger than Abigail. They too had focused mainly on careers. The window of possibility for becoming parents was closing although they remained hopeful that they would be parents someday. Amanda had been married approximately 8 years at the time of the interview. She was age 35 and very involved

with her career. When asked if she had any children, she responded, “Oh, we’re thinking about it, yeah, yeah.”

Along the same lines as Fechter’s (2008) ‘expat girl’, Lena was a single woman in Europe and asked herself, “Where is this leading.”

When I first got there, kind of being alone that was a challenge because I have a lot of good friends and I like having friends around. So at the beginning that [being alone] was a challenge. I remember kind of distinctly thinking about at some point, “Where is this leading? What is my next step?” like because I was there. Am I gonna stay here forever? Am I gonna come home?

I asked Lena, “Do you have any children?” She replied, “No children. No. No, we hope... we hope, you know, we’re still hoping, but um....” Since she was not married to an American, I asked her, “Had you ever considered or discussed the possibility of having children overseas?”

You know, when we, not so much, because we met kind of the end of our overseas time. And so we, we didn’t really, um, you know, we were just getting married then, so we didn’t really say, “Oh, let’s stay here and have children in [Europe].” So um, you know, we’ve since talked about it. Um, we just have had so much going on in our lives; it was kind of put to the back burner a little bit.

Putting off child rearing toward the latter stages of reproductive possibility was common among working professionals (Furstenberg, 2003). Lena and Amanda were holding onto the potential identity of themselves as mothers (McMahon, 1995).

To Work or Not to Work - Gendered Expectations

According to Heinz (2003) life course research was the study of relationships, not individuals. For example, parents needed to decide how they would divide the work of caring for children. They could have one parent stay home and have primary

responsibility for childcare, or they could both work and negotiate the distribution of caregiving responsibilities, or they could hire an outside caregiver such as an au pair, nanny or pre-school. There was a variety of possibilities for couples with children to explore and their final decision would likely be a combination of factors such as their financial ability to manage on one salary, their desire to personally care for the children, the type of resources that they have available in their community such as day care.

Just as the work distribution of parenting was a conjoined process between marital partners; it also had been a gendered process with much of the gender bias based on outdated institutional arrangements (Moen, 2003). Many private and public institutions structured employment opportunities with the concept of the unencumbered worker who had someone to handle all the non-work related aspects of daily life so that the worker could focus solely on their job (Acker, 1990). “Existing family structures also rest on the foundation of this breadwinner/homemaker template” (Moen, 2003). The person who had the better job and earned more was seen as the primary provider and the other spouse was somewhat disadvantaged and needed to scale back to accommodate time conflicts with work and raising children. This person was usually the woman (Thomson, 2013; Hochschild, 1989).

Over the last thirty years the composition of the workforce has changed to include more women. Other changes included a more contingent workforce and increased volatility in employment. It has been the norm to have both parents working and seen as dual career families (Moen, 2003). This strategy helped reduce the family’s risk of financial insecurity during periods of unintentional unemployment. Yet women still

managed the primary responsibility of raising children (Thomson, 2013; Hochschild, 1989).

The expectation that women scale back their career aspirations in order to take care of children and maintain all the ancillary duties to support the unencumbered worker was disadvantageous to some of the study participants. Donna, Betty and Abigail were all from the same generation and came into adulthood during a time when women's liberation was a political issue. All three wanted a career, were well educated and looked forward to new social freedoms. All three married men who did not want to compromise with spouses about their lives and careers. Abigail and Betty were both expected to scale back their career goals when there was a conflict with their husbands' career. Betty's husband asked her to leave a job that she loved in order to travel overseas with him. During their marriage Betty had sole responsibility for the care of the children. Betty did not have a premarital discussion on role expectations or childcare expectations. Her husband expected priority in decisions regarding careers. Although Abigail chose not to have children so her conflict was not over raising children, Abigail's husband was not willing to relocate for her job. These husbands subscribed to traditional norms about husbands and wives, even though their wives were more inclined to want more egalitarian relationships.

Donna also was influenced by historical times and the women's movement. She expected women to be able to have equally exciting careers as their husbands. As discussed earlier, she hoped that her husband would be satisfied with one child which she found manageable with a career. However, Donna stated that the cultural norms for her

husband's African country encouraged many children. His own personal expectation to have four children made it difficult for him to accept just one child. The couple divorced.

The inability of Donna, Abigail and Betty to conform to their husbands' traditional ideas about gender roles, work and life course expectations led to these three women getting divorced. They grew up in a time where they expected new opportunities for women and more egalitarian marriages not to be bound by gender roles.

Other participants in this study used to their advantage the gendered expectations about women scaling back work or leaving altogether to care for children. As women in the labor force is now the norm, women of privilege find they have more options for how they will divide the labor of childcare and work. Chris and Kara appeared to use motherhood as a convenient and socially appropriate way to leave the labor force when they were feeling 'burned out' from their jobs. Thomas (2013) wrote that the standard family life course of stay at home mother and working father was an ideal that couples still tried to attain when possible. Chris and Kara were in a privileged position to have a choice whether to stay at home full time or manage a career.

For example, I asked Chris if she had planned on continuing with the same company when she returned to the US, Chris replied, "You know, I didn't know. I ended up quitting." Chris had quit her job before returning to the US.

Yeah. Um, I quit, I think in June. No, I must have quit in May before we left. I just didn't feel like I wanted to do what I did before and yeah, and I just . . .

Chris was asked if she quit because she was pregnant.

No I didn't. No, I didn't quit because I was pregnant. I quit because I'd had it. I needed something new. I was so. Even though I really respect and

enjoyed the company and I think they were really good to me. I don't know. I think just after five years . . .

During the interview, Chris sounded almost apologetic for not returning to the labor force once she was back in the US and had morning sickness under control.

And then when I started feeling better to start looking for a job, I was already showing and it just didn't. And I just was so not ambitious at all. I was so tired. It was really bad. I was not a good pregnant person at all.

I asked Chris whether she was working outside the home at the time of the interview.

No, I never went back. After I had my daughter and then I had my son and now I just find myself so busy with the kids' stuff and my husband is traveling a ton but every time I start to look again, it just became apparent we'd have to get a live-in, au pair, or something like that and 'cause it would really, wouldn't really make that big of a difference, big picture-wise. Retirement, that's really what, the factor that is, is affected by my not working right now. But I feel like, eh, I should be home now.

Chris seemed torn between wanting to work or feeling it was socially expected that she work and wanting to stay home with her children. She stated, "I should be home now."

She looked at returning to work in economic terms and stated the additional expense of a nanny ruined the financial advantage of working. She didn't see her work as making a significant financial difference to the family after taking into account the work related expenses. She saw greatest financial loss was not contributing to retirement accounts.

The expenses if I go to work, well, it would just be with the kids. I'm at the school almost every day volunteering and I can just really be there. Whereas if we had to have a nanny and I was traveling all the time like before because I would... I would either be in New York, Dallas, or Los Angeles because that's where the main hotel headquarters are. Okay, so if I got a different job and I worked here in [the city], well, I'd be in sales and I'd be driving all over [the city], which to me sounds awful. I'd literally take a job traveling to [the airport] and fly somewhere [rather] than drive around [the city]. I can't even imagine it. I think it sounds awful. So that's kind of where I'm at with going back to work. So yeah, but I miss it. I miss it.

To be available for her children, Chris could not afford the time commitment or travel her previous type of job required. In her eyes, the small economic difference did not compensate for the opportunity cost of not spending time with the children.

This was where the concept of retelling the life story to match current situations appeared (Demos, 1992). Chris noted that the type of work she would like to do would require travel but she could not do that with primary childcare responsibilities since her husband traveled for work as well. The option to work locally “sounds awful” to her because of traffic congestion yet she stated that she missed working. Was she really missing work? It sounded as if children were constraining her choices of employment. Since she was not interested in doing any of the positions she could obtain, working was not worth time away from the children. Chris was in a financial position where the family could financially manage on one salary so she could choose not to work.

Kara also gave up work to spend her time with the children. As the passage below suggested, this had been a fortuitous time to bow out of the work force because she was getting tired from the demanding job.

I think I didn't have difficulty you know, with the motherhood transformation. I really loved it. I mean there were definitely exhausting times and you know. But a part of it was I was still burnt out from working. I was kind of grateful to switch into not having to deal with the phone calls and the, I was in a job where literally I would be called like 3:00 in the morning from colleagues in the Philippines wanting to ask questions about whatever 'cause they, a customer called they need to answer them quickly about whatever and then I'd be calling Latin America in the evening from home to finish business with them. So, and then the constant traveling and every time you get to a hotel room you just get to this depressed state of, “Oh, I just don't want to be here. I don't care how many great restaurants I can go to. I'm in Buenos Aires. Everybody else would be so thrilled to be here.” You just get to this stage where like, “I'm so tired of this,” you know. So I think in a lot of ways I was lucky to

have enjoyed all that and reached the point where I was just... It was a pleasure to stay home with children and just focus on what they were doing, waddling around on the carpet, you know. And just knowing the real drudgery of offices and all the business world, so full of drudgery. I have no illusions that changing diapers was just another... easy work by comparison.

Kara wanted to enjoy her children while they were little. She did not anticipate having time for family life if she continued with a job that required significant amounts of travel and middle of the night phone calls. She was financially able to afford staying home with the children and welcomed the opportunity for a different type of labor, looking after her children. Kara like Chris had reached a point in her career where she welcomed a change. The job Kara held included large amounts of travel and she did not consider it compatible with the demands of motherhood.

Now that women have more options for customizing their work and child care arrangements, some women expect to scale back to part-time work while their children are young or use alternative work arrangements such as working from home to avoid the need for childcare (Meiksins and Whalley, 2002). Women who have invested in education and time in a career may not want to totally give up their career for children. For Claire, the solution was to stay home while the children were little. However well planned, this did not work for Claire because family finances did not permit her complete withdrawal from the labor force while the children were small.

For people with more limited finances or those who still want to work, part-time work is a good choice. Eileen originally thought she would scale back to part-time employment when she had children. She enjoyed the job and the people who worked with

her. Then the company was bought out and she feared that the option to work part-time would be unavailable and she would lose her job.

I was there about 11 months and then our [company] was bought by [a bank] and my whole division was eliminated. And so I was out of a job, which I hated because I always thought, ‘Oh, I’ll work part-time. It’ll be a great place to do that.’ But then not long after I found out I was pregnant, the whole rumors of being bought were there and I’m thinking, “Oh shoot. The pregnant lady’s gonna get chopped.” So I had the opportunity to go back. I was interviewing. I don’t know why. Well, I do know why. When it’s not your decision to stop working, it’s harder to accept and so I was interviewing when I was pregnant and then post-baby I was interviewing and I actually, a group of people that I worked with went to another organization to form a group doing the same kind of thing. And they offered me a position to work from home for them. It was perfect. I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t. ‘Cause I had these delusions thinking, “I could work full-time and take care of the baby.” That wouldn’t be – but I was all excited, all excited, and then I was like, “I can’t do it. I can’t do it.” So that was when I stopped.

Eileen’s transition from working full time to stay at home mom wasn’t easy due to the buyout of the firm she enjoyed. She envisioned having the opportunity to step down her hours to part-time since her employer knew her capabilities. That all went away when her firm was bought by a bank. As a first time mother she didn’t really know what she could and could not handle with a baby so she continued to interview for new positions. Finally when she was offered new employment, she realized that she couldn’t handle working and taking care of a baby.

The position that they offered me was perfect. I just couldn’t bring myself to have a babysitter watch my son. I just didn’t want to do that. So Yeah. And my husband was, he didn’t care. Whatever I wanted to do. So yeah. I changed my mind. But it was my decision at that point, not somebody else telling me I couldn’t do it.

When asked if she had any desire to go back to work now that her children were in school she replied:

Sometimes, but I don't think I could do it all. You know my father asked me that a couple of years ago and I said, "Dad, you know what? If I could find something else," 'cause my job is at [my children's school] now, in the pre-K, and I said, "You know, it would be interesting to do something maybe 15 hours, 20 hours a week, but I would wanna be there in the morning for them. I would wanna be there at pick-up. And then, I don't wanna work when they're off." And that's when I said, "Who's gonna hire me?" I wouldn't wanna work in the summer. I don't wanna have camps scheduled for them all summer long so as nice as it sounds to do something; the overriding thing for me is I don't. I wanna be there with them. So the work would certainly be secondary and, especially in this work environment, I don't know who would hire me. It would have to be a special kind of something and I just thought, you know, my five year-old, she's little. But the 13 year-old, and that's the other thing, I've got kids that need. I have a couple with reading disorders and one with ADHD and you know, there's therapies and others and sports and it's just a bit much. And if I weren't on top of it, then that would be a bad domino effect, I'm afraid.

Eileen had a full job as the caregiver of four children. She volunteered at her children's school, spent time coordinating health care and took her children to after-school sport activities. Eileen was constrained by the structure of the labor force that was in conflict with the educational calendar for children. Children were dismissed from school at 3pm and most jobs continued until 5 pm. The children had summer off from school and most jobs only permitted two weeks of vacation. I discuss more on the constraining effects of children on the life course in the next chapter.

Tammy, Chris, Kara, Eileen, and Valerie all chose to stay home when their children were young. This kept with the life course expectations of well educated, Caucasian women who preferred to stay home and raise their children if they could afford the opportunity cost of the woman's lost labor (McMahon, 1995). These women were able to financially manage on one salary.

Living overseas enabled Mark and Valerie's family and Tammy's family to easily afford living on one salary. Mark and Valerie made a decision to have Valerie stay home to care for the children before they accepted an international assignment. However, living internationally made it easier to manage on one salary and having a stay-at-home wife made the international assignment easier for Mark because the couple did not need to get a work permit for Valerie. When they were first expecting children, they considered the extra income from Valerie's income not worth the time away from the children. They could make due on Mark's salary.

My wife, Valerie, really loved it [living overseas] and she was not, she did not have a career. That was probably a pretty important variable here. She, when we had our first daughter, we agreed she would be a full-time mom and she didn't have great professional aspirations and she was a media planner here in town and just didn't make so much money that it was gonna make a huge difference. So we put a stake in the grass at that point and said, "We'll figure it out on one salary going forward."

Sue, on the other hand, wanted to work part-time while her children were young but the move to Europe made it impractical for Sue to work. Originally, she chose to work after the birth of her first child. She had her mother-in-law living with her and enjoyed her job. After the birth of her second child, her son, she reduced her hours to part-time consultant and worked only a few hours a month.

At the time that we went [abroad], I wasn't working. I stopped working when I had my second one and I was working as a mediator. Then I quit when I had [my son].

Sue was living in the US when she became a part-time consultant for the firm which she previously worked for full-time. Her work was sporadic and maybe accounted for 10 hours a month but it kept her connected to the previous employer and involved in her

profession which was mediation. The family moved to Europe when her son was 11 months old.

I hadn't worked for 11 months, full-time. I hadn't worked full-time but part-time. I sometimes do this occasionally now although I have just recently taken on another position, part-time. But I'm a part-time trainer of mediation skills and communication skills at the Center so I would do that once or twice a month, for a stipend, not a lot of money. They are a non-profit and so that's what I would do. So I was still involved as a trainer.

Sue and her husband planned for her to continue occasional and part-time work in the field of meditation if possible while they were living in Europe. "We researched a head of time. We also planned."

Well, I kind of decided to not work full time until [my son] is in first grade; if we could afford it, which we couldn't really. I could have, it is crazy, but our trip to [Europe] did not work out at all. But the plan was that I would stay involved with the Center [previous employer] and on a very part-time basis and then try to find [something in Europe]. I mean if I could have gone on part-time that would have been fine. It's only since [my son] has started 1st grade this year that I've had that entire chunk of time every day. A lot of time I don't know if I even have that chunk of time every day.

When I asked, "What were some of the obstacles to working overseas?" Sue replied:

One was that we were not near [the major city]. I need a big city I think for what I do. It was a two hour commute. They didn't have the motorway from [the countryside] to [the major city] at the time. So it was a 2-hour commute and who would have watched the kids? I don't know. It would have been really tricky.

I asked Sue if her husband had any difficulty picking up with his job when he moved to Europe.

No he didn't. That was one thing I was really resentful of because his life seemed to continue as it always had. Pretty much worked all the time, not all the time. He worked and he's a really good dad and very involved, extremely involved. But I was resentful of the fact that my life was totally

turned upside down and his was just, he was still working a nine-hour day. You know, he had dinner on the table and everything was the same. It was pretty much the same. Whereas my nine-hour day, that nine hours is a very different experience for both of us.

Her response showed the difficulty with which she was making the adjustment to full-time motherhood although she interpreted it primarily to living in Europe. Sue wanted to work part-time and continue to have some time for herself to explore her other interests such as music but her adjustment to forced full-time motherhood in Europe was compounded by feelings of isolation, not having 'a place of her own' while she lived with relatives and not feeling a 'sense of self'. She also resented that she was the one to adapt to so many changes and not her husband.

As the passages above show, women are usually the spouses staying home to care for the children. Some women welcomed this opportunity as a way to exit the labor force for a break; others resented the expectation that they sacrificed their career options, still others planned for a time of reduced employment in order to care for the children. None of the women interviewed wanted to try to juggle full-time employment and full-time child rearing. Out of all the men interviewed, only Cliff accepted the job of primary caregiver to the children. This was more a situation where the circumstances dictated the solution than a choice of preference.

Originally Cliff prepared for a career as an interpreter but then found that he enjoyed teaching. However his specialty was not in high demand so he became the primary caregiver of the children.

I really like what I'm doing anyway. I found teaching is something I really enjoy, find very rewarding. Yeah, as long as it's not the main income, it's okay. My wife has a good job and also I'm able to, you know. The kids

are getting older now, they don't need me as much, but when I was younger, I really couldn't get a full-time job. I needed to be, you know, able to get the kids, pick 'em up or whatever. I had two summer jobs where I was just trying to maintain my experience and you know, things, my resume. I wasn't doing it for the money because all my money went to like summer camp or a babysitter, all of it. I made zero, just maintaining my experience and contacts and such. You know. And you don't wanna do that too much. You wanna be with your kids, instead of somebody else. (Laughs.) So I really, it really wasn't in the cards for me to have a full-time career.

His observations were similar to the mothers in the study who expressed that the added expenses of working negated their earned income. He could manage his expenses with the income earned from his wife alone and invested his time caring for the children.

[My wife] has a wonderful career. We don't need to anyway, so. We want to have a family. So, ah, like ah. It worked out pretty well. You know.

When Cliff was asked if he and his wife discussed staying home with the children, he replied that "It kind of fell into place."

My wife would have preferred for it to be the other way around, you know, me working full-time and her home. I think it would have been better, too. She would have done a better job than me. But it just is the way it worked out, yeah, as long as one of us. It worked, that's the way it needed to be pretty much. It just happened to be me. I don't even think it would have been even a question of me talking about it if I was a woman. (Laughs.)

Cliff described some of the difficulties of a man raising the children. He did not feel it was appropriate to seek parental advice and support in the same manner that women go about forming their support networks. He did not want to establish relationships with "these men's wives" in play groups and felt his opportunities to volunteer at the school were limited by the fact he is a man.

Yeah, like [at the children's school], I mean, what am I gonna have relationships with these men's wives? Over there? I'm not particularly

involved in [the children's school] because I'm a man. I've talked about with, like. I have a friend who's a pilot. He's home two weeks every month. There are like three other parents, you know, where we live, men in similar situations. They have their own little group. 'Cause they're not gonna hang out with the wives. I mean, there's this like a social milieu in [the children's school]. Women, they bring in their husbands for jobs or something. You know, ah, I'm just not gonna be hanging out with ah, wives. You know what I mean? I don't think [it is] necessarily appropriate. So it's a little bit of a disadvantage there in that respect, you know. It's mostly women are in this position.

In addition to not wanting close female relationships, Cliff found that there was a stereotypical type of job for the fathers at the school so his role as a volunteer would be limited. Fathers would be called in for special projects, usually nights and weekends. Men did not hold positions on committees. This limited his ability to volunteer at the children's school during the day.

The decision to have Cliff stay home put the couple in the best possible position to maximize the benefits of his wife's specialized skills and maximize her career which in turn enabled the family unit to maximize their income and still hold to their ideals about having a parent raise the children.

Summary

How are people constrained by the life course and how much freedom do they really have to customize their lives? In the Chapter Three, I discussed participants' desires to customize their own lives. Yet, many people chose paths that were typical of their class and gender. In this chapter, I showed that the family plays a large role in monitoring the life course of participants through positive support and sanctions. Several participants appreciated their time abroad because it enabled them to be independent of

the extended family and make decisions on their own or in partnership with a significant other. They were able to write a joint biography with their partner.

The life stories of participants in this study showed that the process of becoming a new parent and starting a family of one's own, facilitated in standardizing the life course. Most of the participants that wanted to create their own life story stayed within the constraints of class and gender when becoming parents and dividing domestic labor. They adopted the breadwinner/homemaker model. Moen (2003) considers adopting this model, postponing childbearing, limiting the number of children and hiring nannies to all be ways in which people bend their personal lives to accommodate their work lives, instead of conforming their work lives to their personal lives. What may seem like a personal decision was not independent of the labor structure. While unattached people in their early twenties may have some ability to create their own biography, when people developed attachments to other lives through marriage and parenting their ability to customize the life course became more constrained. With more attachments came more push toward the standardized life course.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHILDREN

Toby put it succinctly, “Kids change everything.” Children change the life course from one where customization and innovative life planning is acceptable to one where standardization and predictability is expected. Becoming a parent means accepting more structural and social control over the direction of your life and the life of your children. The state, educational systems, religious institutions, child welfare organizations, the extended family and even the general public dictate what is expected of parents and monitor how well they are managing the life course of children (Crittenden, 2001).

Much parental labor goes into managing the life course for children. People are less likely to take risks when they have children or deviate from expected life course patterns. The parents’ lives have a period of conformity to the standardized life course for the sake of the children. It is this standardization of the life of parents that made many participants look forward to the time when they could launch their children, shed the social obligation to conform and could go back to a more customized life course arrangement.

Becoming a parent means accepting more structural and social control of one’s life course. In the colloquial, people refer to this phase of life as ‘settling down.’ They

understand that they are more tied to the social system and accept these constraints as part of parenthood. During the settling down phase of adulthood, parents prepare for the environmental and structural needs of raising children. Participants in this study varied on their combination of settling activities, but the list of activities included 1) going back to the US or moving closer to extended family; 2) accepting a job with better financial compensation; 3) deciding on the parental balance between work and caregiving; 4) finding a permanent residence with significant consideration given to school districts; and finally 5) selecting a network of friends with children to act as ad-hoc parenting advisors and confidants.

At the time of the interview, 16 of the 20 participants had children, and one participant, Brittany, was pregnant with her first child. Fifteen of the 20 participants had all or the majority of their expat experience without children in their family. Only four of the participants became parents while living overseas: Shana, Toby, Claire and Donna. Some of the participants, Mark and Valerie, Betty, Tammy, and Sue chose to go abroad when their children were young or school age.

For three of the participants, Shana, Toby and Claire, most of their time abroad was childless but then they had children abroad and returned to the US to raise the children. All three expressed how enjoyable their time abroad was and that they were living as residents, not on temporary assignment. However, having children created new concerns with living abroad. Shana was concerned about the healthcare system in her foreign country. Toby and Claire were concerned about the education system in the new country.

Shana tried to recount all the medical problems that concerned her as a new mother. She told her story in a series of starts and stops.

You don't have a pediatrician out there...you have a local GP. You see a pediatrician is a specialist. And [my son] was having some things that were different, you know, like rashes, high fevers. There were things.... I was concerned the medical care might not be....I mean it turned out to be he had a speech delay but other than that there was no other issues. It took him a long time to walk but in time....He had no issues beyond that. But there were a lot of weird illnesses viral, you know viruses. Scary like he was in the hospital once and I felt.... That was one thing that brought us back. I did not want that. I would have been very happy to have stayed there the rest of our lives. I was ready to be there forever. It was probably one of the hardest decisions we made.

If it wasn't for her concerns over her son's health, she may have stayed in Europe indefinitely. Her concerns over the healthcare system helped her to feel that she made the right decision to move back to the US when more US opportunities opened up for her husband's job. Shana expressed it was a combination of her son's health, her husband's job opportunities and her desire to be closer to her family that combined to initiate the move back to the US. I asked Shana where her family was and she said the Northeast coast of the US. She was living in the Midwest US but still felt as if the extended family was close. Shana was getting the structure in place for raising her children. When she returned to the US she stopped working, her husband improved his employment situation, they felt as if they were closer to family and the medical structure was in place.

Claire was a perfect example of how "children change everything." Claire's story highlighted the way having children contributes to settling down. Many of Claire's decisions made it more difficult for her to raise children but these decisions were made with her expectations of what motherhood should entail.

After six years of marriage and living abroad, Claire and her husband were resigning themselves to the fact that they may not conceive children of their own so they explored leaving Europe, and Claire applied for a transfer to an Asian city. They tried to re-imagine their lives as a childless couple traveling the world instead of settling down and becoming parents. Claire appeared content to remain abroad when it was just she and her husband.

Then I got pregnant. Actually, I didn't think we were going to get pregnant and at that point I, we thought we might go and live in Asia. So I asked them to transfer me to Asia because I was doing all these projects in Asia anyway and ah, Claude...we were in another recession and Claude's company was folding so we thought we would go to Asia. ... And then I got pregnant and no longer, that changed the whole plan 'cause I did not, not only did I not want to go to Asia, but I also didn't intend to keep working. So I... once my daughter was born, that's when I left my job. And then at that point we decided to come back, to come to the states. So we left in 1997 after she was born.

Once Claire realized she was going to be a mother she changed her focus from career to children. She knew that she wanted to remain at home to raise her children while they were small; she wanted a progressive style of education for the children; and she wanted to help her children with their school work. She couldn't picture doing any of these things in Europe.

I could not see myself as a stay-at-home mother in [Europe]. I really couldn't. I mean, I didn't know any [European] women who stayed at home, at least among my company and otherwise. Everyone seemed to, you know, you took your maternity leave which could be extended sometimes. It was six months maternity leave plus you could get, you could take two years unpaid I think. But women always came back. They would have their children and then come right back. At least that's what I saw. In my company, I don't know how they managed it.

It was interesting to note that Claire observed local women who had their day care and pre-school subsidized by the state. She did not observe other expats.

They have, they call them crèches. It's basically a nursery. So your baby would go into a crèche. It's publicly financed, so you pay almost nothing for it. Um, some people would have nannies. People of means would have nannies. And then at three, maybe even a little younger, maybe even two and a half, pretty young, they can go into what we call pre-k or nursery school. Um, so you know, everyone does that. That's not like, that's state funded. That's part of their national education program that starts at three and everybody does it. So you do the crèche for the infants and then they go into nursery school.

Clair saw herself as a stay at home mother while her children were little. She focused her expectations of staying home for the first five years before the children reached school age.

It's just a personal thing, but I did not want to, I wanted to stay at home with my, I wanted to stay home with my children when they were young. I just wanted to. So I knew that I wasn't going to keep working for, you know. In my mind at that time, I was thinking, "I won't work for five years or something, three or five years or whatever." I decided well while my children were little.

Claire envisioned herself home alone if she remained in Europe with no other mothers around her for support.

And so anyway, I knew, and I also knew that if I stayed at home I'd be alone [in Europe]. Like there are no networks. Like there are no moms staying at home and I can't say none. I'm sure if you go to a park in [a major European city] during the day, there'll be moms and children, but I didn't know any and ah, so I thought, um, and my husband's an Americaphile so he was happy about the idea of living in the states so that's what we did.

Claire was under the impression that European schools were more structured and rigid than American schools. She implied that American schools could give her children a more progressive environment than European schools which she considered rigid.

And then I knew, I also knew, this is a very big part of the decision to leave. I knew that I could never be happy with my children in a European school because it's very, very, severe and rigid and traditional. And I didn't want any of that. Um, I wanted a really progressive school environment; more progressive than I've ever found, actually. Because I think with the No Child Left Behind Movement and everything that ever proceeded that, I mean, we've kind of driven all the creativity out of the classroom. Not all, because schools like [your child's school] and [my child's school] they're still doing a nice job within the limits of their flexibility but there was no way I could have survived with my children in a [European] school, from what I had heard of it. I mean, I think it's just a very.... Just imagine yourself in the 1950s like. I don't know if you might have gone to Catholic school. The nuns, you sit in your seat; you open your book; you don't talk out of turn; you get hit on the hand; you... There's nothing fun; there's no group work; there's no collective work; there's no. It's just a very traditional. And you know; it's 20 years later now. Maybe things have evolved in some way, but at that time I just absolutely knew that I could not tolerate that.

Claire envisioned motherhood as helping her children with homework, a task she could not manage if her children were learning in a language in which she was not fluent, although the father was fluent.

And I knew, you know, I wanted to be involved and I knew that I probably wouldn't be able to help them very much with their work, with their writing for example. Writing is my strong skill and I couldn't, you know, adequately help them learn to write in [a foreign language].

In addition to wanting better schools for her children, Claire talked about the importance of extended family. When I asked how she broached the subject of returning to the states with her husband, she replied:

It was easy. I mean we were just. He always knew. I come from a very big family, a very close family; eight siblings. I think he knew and I knew that I probably couldn't stay away from them forever, you know. That, like he has no family in [Europe] other than his parents and I have a very large family here, a lot of sisters and their spouses and their children and my parents so I think we both knew that we probably weren't going to stay in [Europe] forever 'cause I wanted to be closer to my family. And he wanted to live in the states so there was no problem. He had been in the

states. He had done two summers at [a US University] when he was like post-grad, just studying language and then he had been in New York for a year and he was very happy to return. To him it was an idea that pleased him so. It was just kind of obvious. I mean I don't think that it was sort of, we were on the same page. It wasn't even an issue between us really.

The above passage used the phrase "I think he knew and I knew that I probably couldn't stay away from them [family] forever..." Yet it appeared as if remaining close to extended family wasn't a priority until the couple was expecting a child. Before they were pregnant, they planned to move to Asia. Once they moved to the US, they chose to live in a major urban center that had a large international population rather than relocate to the area where the wife's extended family resided which was four states away. At the time of the interview the couple was considering a move closer to the wife's family primarily for financial reasons. Their oldest child was now a freshman in high school.

The cost of living is very low there. I would be near all of my family so I wouldn't have to spend my vacation time going to see them. I could go on vacation somewhere else. The cost of living would be very low. I mean a house there is very inexpensive. The schools are really excellent.

Claire never did remain at home full time when her children were young. Due to financial pressures she worked part-time.

So financial those first two years were, actually, financially it's been a strain all along because I had to work full-time. I had my second daughter. We got pregnant right away when we got back to [the city]. We got back to [the Midwest] in 1998 and I got pregnant right away so she was born and then I got an offer from my friend who had gone to law school to work for him, but I didn't want to work full-time so I was working part-time, like 20 hours a week. The job wasn't right for me, but it was so, I wasn't happy in the job but it was so flexible and the pay was good. I couldn't walk away from it.

When I asked if she was able to work from home, Claire replied:

No, I went to the office and. It was all right. It was fine. I started at 24 hours. I had a nanny. And then that eventually had a big problem with her because it appeared that she would, that she was putting my daughter in the bathroom when she would cry and locking the door. That's what it appeared was happening. So we fired her and at that point, I decided I wasn't going to give that job to anyone else so I worked fewer hours at that point and um was only working like 10 hours a week for a while.

Claire never obtained everything she wanted from moving back to the states.

However, she stayed home part-time, helped the children with their homework and found an outstanding school for her children although it was never as creative a school as she would have liked.

[M]y priority in life is to find a progressive classroom environment. And unfortunately my timing is bad because my kids are going into school just as all of these you know, Child Left Behind and all this standardization and all the accountability and all of this stuff is happening that is restricting everyone's ability to do more creative things in the classroom. I never got what I wanted actually. But that said, I've been very happy at [my children's school].

It appeared that Claire's expectations of motherhood and raising children involved being close to extended family, staying home full-time with the children until they were school age and then helping them with their homework. Her decision to repatriate to the US was based more on this expectation of motherhood than the reality of her situation.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Sue's ideas of settling down with the children included moving to Europe and living on her husband's family farm. This too was a decision based on the romantic image of what settling down with children should entail. It did not work out for Sue and when she returned to the US she looked for a 'forever home' that was located in a neighborhood with good schools. Although Sue considered herself more

of a city girl, she was willing to live in the suburbs for the sake of her children and their education.

According to Furstenberg (2003), settling down among privileged families usually occurs in people's late twenties or early thirties when they are in established jobs and their children have been settled in schools. Furstenberg continues to describe the process by which families select residential communities as a way to buy into quality school systems. Once children start their education, parents are less likely to relocate.

Managing the Life Course of Affluent Children

As noted earlier, participants in this study were well educated and came from the upper quintile of the population in socioeconomic standing making them more affluent than most Americans. Raising babies and toddlers appeared to be similar for participants who had children abroad and for those who raised children in the US. Both groups of participants established social contacts through play groups, children's activities, neighbors in the park and pre-schools. There was a learning curve related to finding resources, making friends with other people who had children and learning how to use time. These activities assumed that there was a parent available to invest time in going to the park and play groups or at least invest in a surrogate caregiver such as a nanny to do these things with children. These tasks seemed to be a bit more challenging for people abroad as they navigated new cities, tackled language barriers, and adjusted to minor cultural differences.

I asked Tammy, "How did you deal with having a baby and being over in a new country?"

I was not happy.....Well, you have your expectations of what having your first child is going to be, and it's all you know, wrapped up in a pretty bow. And going over there, you know, nothing's stroller friendly.

She continued to discuss the challenge of being a new mother and adapting to new local surroundings. As a new mother, Tammy had to make a big effort to seek company, break the isolation and tend to her domestic responsibilities.

I didn't have a car, so I had to walk or ride my bike everywhere I went. And that's okay. But when you have a baby on the front and try to balance a [bike] cause they had these carriers on the front. And you can only carry so many groceries on the bike. I did have a friend who had a baby the same age and she was, I don't know, maybe a half mile away so I would ride my bike over to see her. We'd just hang out together.

Tammy had mentioned, "you have your expectations of what having your first child is going to be, and it's all you know, wrapped up in a pretty bow," so I asked her to expand a bit more on what her original expectations were of motherhood.

Well, I really didn't know. Um, we waited a long time to have children, so to have her. We were living in [the city] at the time and I don't know, you just. You know, you watch TV and read the books and that's what you think it's like. I think every mother goes through that. It's always a big surprise.

Tammy stated that she developed her views on motherhood from watching TV and reading books. She saw herself 'on opposite ends of how to do things' with her own mother. She befriended another new mother when she moved to Europe and 'just hung out together' probably sharing techniques on childcare and providing emotional support.

Tammy described how her own first child was a challenge and not what she expected from the books she had read.

[My daughter] was her own person, very challenging, wouldn't sleep, very strong willed. Still is. And you should take those hints when they're babies 'cause that's how they'll be when they're adults. Um, and then my second,

or my first son, very easy. Just the easiest baby ever. And then my third was... he was easy too. I had, I just thought I was goin' to have another one of her so when they were easier it was a breeze. And they were friends. They played together and all that.

Adjusting to motherhood and the new European environment was a challenge to Tammy. Motherhood was not what she expected from books and television due to a 'challenging' baby. Many mothers go through this adjustment. The adjustment was magnified due to the difficulty of navigating foreign languages, locations, and lack of long time social supports. The location was not what she originally envisioned when she first pictured motherhood and taking her baby out for walks in the stroller. She had to navigate the new environment where she didn't speak the language and figure out how to be a mother all at the same time. Isolation and loneliness complicated the situation. In Tammy's words it was as if she was asleep. "And you know, I, I didn't realize how, I sort of woke up after about six months. It took me a while." Tammy expressed many of the issues facing new mothers, post-partum depression, difficult babies, and lack of knowledge about how to care for an infant. These issues were magnified due to the absence of family, isolation, difficulty with foreign language and lack of knowledge about the local culture. While she was trying to learn how to be a mother she also was learning how to adapt to her new surroundings. It took time for Tammy to get the structure in place for raising her children.

The experience of raising babies and toddlers overseas was very similar for the expats in the study. Provisioning (DeVault, 1991) was a high priority and a more difficult task because of the need to learn where to purchase supplies and what unexpected items were required for local conditions. Sometimes getting the needed

things to raise a toddler involved waiting for the shipment to arrive from the States.

Valerie shared this comment about her toddler waiting for their shipment from the US to Europe.

[Europe] was three months and it turned into six. Um, with our daughter learning, I would probably say her first sentence, “Toys coming? Toys coming?” And she waited every day when the doorbell rang. “Toys coming? Toys coming?” “No toys aren’t here yet.” And then the box arrived with all her toys.

Two participants, Tammy and Toby noticed cultural differences with the way locals reacted to babies at restaurants. Tammy realized that it was initially awkward for her to permit strangers in Europe to take her child while she dined at a restaurant.

The biggest surprise for me is we ended up putting [my daughter] in a backpack no matter where we went. And if we went to a restaurant and she was fussy, they would come and take her from me and let me eat, which, at first it’s a little frightening that someone’s going to come and take your child because we have such paranoia about that here. And they would just take her off. They would take her back to the kitchen and everybody would ooh and ah over her and we could have our meal in peace. Ah, they did that several times and it was lovely. And we’d sit her, we had this backpack that would sit up like a chair so we’d just stick that in a booth or on the floor next to us and they’d just give her breadsticks and she’d make a terrible mess and they were fine with that. It was – they love babies. You know, the minute they get older they don’t like ‘em too much, but they love babies so that was, it was really an eye-opener for me that we could take her anywhere. And we did.

Toby found a similar reaction to his children from local business owners in Asia.

As I said we lived on this escarpment and so right underneath our apartment was this very big hill and at the bottom of the hill was a small river and there was a ramen shop, a mom and pop ramen shop that we went to a lot. It was owned by a grandma and a grandpa and we would show up and grandma would whisk the kids away and grandpa would make us a fantastic meal and [my son]and [my daughter] would be taken off into their house and played with and fed. We got to sit, just the two of us and have beer and talk to grandpa.

For some of the participants such as Toby and Tammy, finding a nanny or household help was one of the perks of living abroad in a community where domestic labor costs were low. Tammy was able to afford domestic help during her extended time in Europe.

Yeah, I wouldn't have been able to do all my fun stuff without help. And I think that ruined my children. 'Cause they still think somebody else is gonna do it and it's not gonna be me.

Even though Toby was living as a local and not with an expat benefit package while he was in Asia, he found it more economical to have a nanny for his children than to afford the cost of day care for two children.

We ended up with a Filipino nannie, who... [my daughter] was hers. Her name was Sally. She was a wonderful, wonderful woman. They had a full time babysitter because it cheaper than to send them to daycare.

It was typical for nannies in this Asian culture to both watch the children and do the housework. When asked whether the nanny was also a housekeeper or just nannie, Toby replied.

No and that drove her nuts because we told her, "We are hiring you to take care of the kids not the house, not cook. We don't want the kids in front of the TV while you're cooking. We can cook. Your job is the kids." And we would come home and there would be dinner. And it's like, "Sally," and she's like, "It was easy, it was easy, I just did it while they were...they were napping." And it's like that's not your job, you can go lay down with them, you can sleep." "Oh, no, no, no." "We want you with the kids." So that was really hard to convince her of that. It was really hard when we left because Sally was just so in love especially with [my daughter], but also with [my son].

Toby had difficulty getting his nanny to understand his western cultural expectations that all the nanny's time should be spent nurturing the children and not doing housework. In a study by Wang (2013), expat volunteers at a Chinese orphanage came in conflict with the orphanage's Chinese caregivers, *ayis*, which means "auntie" in Mandarin. The *ayis*

had many children to care for so they focused their ‘logic of care’ on cleaning and maintenance aspects of caring for the orphans. They focused on physical labor. The expat volunteers on the other hand wanted to focus on the emotional labor of nurturing the children. This was similar to what Toby experienced with his nanny. She wanted to focus on domestic work of caring for children but Toby wanted the nanny to focus on nurturing the children. Wang concluded that the person’s logic of care was based on whether or not they could afford to have someone else do the physical labor or “dirty work.”

Expats who raised children abroad had similar issues to participants who raised their children in the US. For example, meeting people and finding other children for your toddler to interact with was a task for both participants living abroad with small children and those who returned to the US. Children and parents progressed from babies in the park, to toddler in the play group, to mother’s volunteering part-time with children’s school or activities.

Tammy recalled what it was like adjusting to motherhood and her new surroundings overseas.

I lived right next to a really beautiful park, City Park. And it was just a perfect place to go for a walk. You need to clear your head or just get out. It was literally across the street. So I spent a lot of time in the park. That was a lot of our weekend activity, just going to the park, ‘cause the park just fills up with people.

Toby and his infant son spent most of their time together in the park as well.

When Toby’s mother came to visit Asia she accompanied them to the park.

She quickly realized that she was the grandma of the star of the neighborhood. We spent all our time in the park. We were right across

the street from the largest park [in the city]. And you just spend all your time walking around in the park with [my son] and letting him sit in the stroller.

Returning to the US required the same type of network building and active creation of opportunities to meet people with children. When Shana returned to the US and had her second child, she needed to set up a social network of other moms.

Well first of all you have to make new friends so you know we signed up for [Sing-a-long]. So you know [Sing-a-long]? Okay, 'cause I did that with [my son] and I made a whole group of people that way and on the playground you meet moms. Then when [my son] was at preschool... and that's a coop program where parents are expected to volunteer and help out. Uhm so I got involved there and I got on the board there and eventually I became President of the board there. So I got....And then when I came down from it I became (motions with head over shoulder in the direction of her children's current school to signal her current involvement with the elementary school) so my life became...very involved so I would say my job is helping hopefully to improve the education system being there to help them out.

Shana was very conscious of the fact that making friends and establishing a support system of other parents with small children involved effort.

Play groups were also popular with expat parents both in the US and abroad. Sue reached out to a playgroup in Europe that had several international women in the group.

I got a call from a mom's group, It was called [Could You] which means care and support, or something so I was thinking at the time, [my son] was 11 months, [my daughter] was 2 and a half. This one was in [the village] so I joined this group and, you know, then you had play dates, kind of circle through the play dates at certain houses, whatever. So we did that and different events and outings.

Tammy met people and adjusted to Europe by participating in a playgroup she found through the local international women's group.

I joined this women's group in the beginning, the first year I was there. And that helped a lot to find out who was in the area. So we did make

some contact with some English speakers. I don't think I had too many [local] friends in the beginning 'cause my [ability to speak the language] wasn't that good. So I relied a lot on my American and British friends the first time. And we had play groups and stuff. A lot of them had small children so that made it easy.

Kara had lived overseas and on the east coast of the US for so long that when she returned to her home town in the US she had to establish new networks.

I tell this story a lot. I'm so lucky because, I got back here. I was very focused on [my husband], our first year of marriage. We're having a baby. It's all very exciting and then we had our high school reunion, probably about eight months after I'd given birth. So I made plans to go to that. While I was there I bumped into a woman who I certainly was good friends with in high school, but hadn't seen in forever.... And as we chatted at the reunion it turned out that not only did she also have a child almost exactly the same age as mine, but she lived about four blocks that way. You know, everybody else had come in from the suburbs and you know, they were living all over the place. Here she was just living in my neighborhood. So as we were talking, she said "You have to join our playgroup." There's these great women and we all take Gymboree classes and we get together every week at the park," or you know. And I had thought, I said, "Great, fine." Again, to her credit, she didn't let up. Like we left that night, anybody else would have never called me again and she made a point of calling me the next time they were getting together and she said, "You know, I'm not gonna be there because whatever, but you should go." And again I have to give myself some credit because anybody else might have said, "Well, I'm not gonna go if she's not gonna be there," but I was just, me and my kid, what else have we got to do? So I went over to this girl's house I'd never met before and stuck myself in there. It took a couple times of doing that where I didn't know anybody but I'm going anyway. Pretty soon I was just part of that group and was very fortunate because we became a very tight-knit little group, not just the women but also the husbands got involved. They all got to know each other. It really was a great way to have your first kid.

Kara compared her experience moving to a new city with that of her sister's.

Then my sister had her first in New Jersey and moving to a town she didn't know anybody because that's where they chose to live. And she struggled and she would report back like, "You know, I'd go to these little, Mommy and Me classes and everybody else seems to know each other and they are not letting anybody in. You know, I do not feel like I can join

up.” Um so that’s where I really understood, like thank God for [my old classmate]. She just, it’s a couple times now I’ve benefited from somebody just being that generous with what they’ve got. It’s really, really strikes you.

These women demonstrated the unseen labor that goes into raising small children.

Whether they were moving abroad or back to the US, they needed to set up social networks with other people who had small children so that they could learn more efficiently where to buy appropriate goods, how to navigate the local community and establish social arrangements for their children. This task also aided in providing company for mothers who felt isolated while caring for young children. For families moving abroad, these tasks were further complicated with language barriers.

Parents in this study were very good at managing the expected life course of their children. Furstenburg (2003) noted that children of affluent parents are usually wanted before their birth and are planned. Parents invest in preparing for the children through selecting quality medical care, infant equipment, attending birthing classes. Privileged parents expect childcare workers to be more than custodians of the child’s care but contribute to their intellectual as well as emotional development. The selection of play groups, preschools, and activities are carefully thought out in order to give children every advantage (Furstenburg, 2003). All this management takes a lot of labor on the part of the parents. When children get into school part of the labor of managing the life course is handled by the school. The school setting contributes to which social groups children will engage and how they proceed academically.

Timing of Education

Families with small, not yet school age children had less to consider when going abroad than those with school age children. The most pivotal factor for families living overseas was the timing of the children's education. For families with children in school, the timing of when they went abroad was very closely tied to the school year. Parents went out of their way to arrange overseas moves for summer break so that their children would be able to begin the new school at the start of the term. Mark noted that one of the first issues the family handled when accepting assignments abroad was school arrangements.

[T]he issue for us has never ever been about to do it or not do it. It's always about, what are the logistics of maintaining the house or what about the pets or what schooling, the applications for schooling for the children.

Additionally, families paid attention to what grade the children were in and the educational, social, and developmental ramifications on the children based on the timing of the move. For Tammy and her husband it was easy to accept a second position abroad because the oldest child was only six so there wouldn't be a large disruption in her daughter's education.

So, um, we came back [to the States] for several years and the opportunity opened up for somebody to go over and run the entire office, which they asked [my husband] to do and he said, "Yes," really without blinking. Um, so we had three children by that time. And my, Cindy, my oldest was six and the youngest was two.

Generally speaking the earlier a child was in his/ her educational development the more willing the family was to go abroad and the more willing they were to uproot the children. Mark and his family returned from their first foreign assignment when his

oldest daughter was in first grade. They were in the US for 4 years before accepting another assignment abroad.

[My oldest daughter] came back [from our first tour abroad] halfway through first grade. [My youngest daughter] was doing her kindergarten kind of thing. So when this [second opportunity] came up, [the oldest] had finished fifth grade; [the younger girl] had finished second grade. So they had tiny roots. But they had enough roots that it wasn't, not that I think we would have ever done anything differently, but I think we were sensitized to the notion that you just, you know, there was a little bit of a sell that needed to go on with these guys.

Mark and Valerie were careful about how they presented to the children the idea of moving and they wanted to make sure it was presented in a positive light so the children would not be fearful of change.

And I still remember the day we pulled them into one of the rooms of our house and saying, "We've got some big news. We're gonna have a big adventure. We're gonna move to [Europe]." And there was a look on their faces, both of them; where they were processing it, you know. And almost, you know, there was a very pregnant pause. "Can we go see the Leaning Tower of Pisa?" And they, and I am convinced that part of the, and I do believe this is true in the ex-pats experience, our attitude, my wife's and our attitude, was unfailingly. "This is gonna be so cool. We're gonna have so much fun." Ah, and they, there was never a shred of trepidation.

The children took their cues from the parents and focused on the positive opportunities such as seeing the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Betty also tried to ease her children's adjustment to a foreign country by couching it in a positive light and using their cultural exposure to the cuisine of the new country. Betty went a step further by engaging friends from the local Girl Scout Troop to provide additional support to the children about how special this opportunity was for young girls.

[My younger daughter] was just finishing first grade, in first grade. So yeah, they were all excited about it at first. And, actually really throughout, they were excited about the idea. We took them out to their

favorite restaurant. We asked them where they want – what’s their favorite restaurant; that’s how we broke the news to them. So, and they were all excited about it and they had a lot of support from their friends, you know. Everybody thought this was a really cool thing to be doing so, you know, their Girl Scout troop made arrangements to write letters and keep in touch and did all sorts of wonderful send-off sorts of things, so. It was all very much on a high as we were getting ready to go. But it kind of, once we got there, it was a different story. It was suddenly, “Oh, wow. This isn’t home.” You know.

As children advanced in school, made social connections and got closer to the end of high school, families were less likely to relocate because of concerns about uprooting the children. Despite the fact that Eileen’s husband was on the job market during the interview, she was unwilling to consider another international assignment.

Plus, given his age, he’s eighth grade and heading to high school and boy, he’s not the easiest kid socially to begin with, with everything that he’s got goin’ on and tryin’ to put him into a new environment and new everything else, oh my goodness, that would be a hard road. We’d do it if we had to I guess, but not willingly.

Kara also entertained the idea of returning to Europe with her children now that she had secured European citizenship. She wanted to share the international experience with her children.

[E]ven this year I was very gunning towards trying to get the, take the kids and [my husband] and live abroad for a year this year because I thought before that whole madness starts of seventh grade, eighth grade, trying to get into high school. You know, I’d love the kids to have an experience abroad. I miss it; I would love to do it, you know.

Then she reconsidered because it would be difficult to get her child into a competitive high school in the urban area she lived in if the child missed 7th grade in the school district.

‘Cause the whole struggle with the high school piece here means I don’t wanna sabotage my kids by taking them out for a year that actually turns

out to be pretty critical for getting into a school that they like here. And it's, you know, it's one of these crazy situations where I'm the one who, you know, wanted to stay here so put them in this position where they have to make it into a high school.

Concern with interrupting a child's education was strongest when leaving a US school and /or returning to a US school. Mark's family moved from one European country to another before returning to the US. He reported a smooth transition from France to Germany but the transition back to the US caused the younger daughter to seek her own solution.

Everybody came from France to Germany and for [my older daughter] it was her... we were there four years and for [the older one] it was her sophomore-junior-senior year and freshman year at [college]. She graduated and went back a year, ultimately ahead of us. For [the younger daughter], it was seventh grade, eighth grade, freshman year, sophomore year. And she, when we got re-pated, she was the one who said, "I really," you know, "would like to stay."

Repatriation half way through high school was a scary situation for Mark's daughter. It was easier for her to consider transferring to a different international boarding school in Europe than returning to the US school system without a social network.

The younger one even, we got repatriated halfway through high school and she stayed [in Europe]. She wanted to stay. She finished high school in [Europe]. In a school that she had no connection to 'cause she did not want to go back.

The younger daughter chose a boarding school in a country where English was not the native language because schools in English speaking countries attracted foreign born borders who preferred to speak their native language in their down time. She wanted a non-English speaking school where English would be spoken after hours as the common language of varied nationalities. As an international student she had something

in common with other students. In a small Midwestern school in the US she would feel different.

[O]ne of the discussions we had, um, when we considered the whole, “Does [my younger daughter] come back with us or not?” is that we didn’t like... we thought she’d get a better education overseas. And that was the number one priority. Um, and, to look for that type of education in the states, at quote a prep school or something like that, was gonna cost literally just as much as leaving her there. And she was, she was very aggressive with us in saying, “Mom and dad, I’m not afraid of being the new kid in school. I just, I wanna stay here.” She didn’t wanna stay in her high school in Germany, which was odd to us. And the interesting dynamic was, both that school and the school we found in France, they had um, boarding capabilities. But because the German school was an English as a first language, all the boarders were kids from Asia, the middle east, um, um, you know...and so they were all international kids and what would happen – what the day students knew, was that when those kids went back to their dorms at the end of the day, it was their release to talk in local language again. They had to spend pretty much all day speaking English and this was their [time], and so being an English-speaking kid in that dorm, my daughter felt like she was gonna be far more isolated than not, so she, you know. Whether it’s torturous logic or not, she kind of made sense for us, so she opted for, and she loved, we knew she loved France and she knew the language and Nice was a pretty cool city.

Mark’s wife, Valerie, had a different view of her younger daughter staying abroad to finish her education.

No. No. And I, to be honest, I was glad she said it before I did, ‘cause I was thinking it. ...And um, if I could have said to her, “Oh, you know what. We’ll go back to the farm [in the US Midwest]. There’s a handful of kids you’ve kept in touch with. You’ll go. You’ll join the tennis team. You’ll meet those friends and then you know it’ll just kind of snowball and you’ll have friends before you know it.” I couldn’t have said that with a lot of confidence. I didn’t have any way to say, you know, don’t worry, you’ll meet these kids in art class or band or whatever.

Valerie knew it would be difficult for her child to transfer to a US school in the Midwest and fit in with the other children. She knew how bored her child was on the annual

summer trips to their farm in the Midwest and she knew the education in the US could not compare to the International school the daughter already attended.

Betty's two daughters repatriated back to the US but it was more difficult for the older daughter to adjust socially than it was for the younger daughter even though each daughter had been away for the same amount of time.

I was trying to do the same thing I had done on the other end and help them ease back into things and we came back into the same community so they had the same groups of friends at school, but a lot had changed. You know, in their minds they were coming right back to the same social circle, but these were girls in upper elementary and junior high and that's an icky time under the best of circumstances... They knew a lot of people, but yeah, they couldn't just pick right up where they left off and for each of them kind of on different timelines, the groups they were with dissolved and they reshuffled into other, you know, a couple friends they kept for a while, but a couple friends weren't friends anymore even right away and that was kind of, I'm trying to think now. [My younger daughter] I think fell back with her group a little more easily. She was still in elementary school, one more year in elementary school. The Girl Scout troop was still together and so some things seemed a little more normal for her on the short term, but [the older daughter] was the one who was I think kind of disillusioned. She'd had a really tight group before. There was a group of kids that she was part of that looped with a teacher from first to second grade, the same group and they were just really tight knit, really bright and creative and fun kids and that was her, and it wasn't the same anymore.

To add to the difficulty of repatriation, Betty's children were more advanced academically than their American counterparts in school so the children not only had to deal with issues of social acceptance but they also needed to contend with finding the appropriate academic level.

So I knew by the level of what they were doing at the International School in intensity that they were gonna be way ahead of the game when they came back here. So I made some contact with the school and I got what I suspected, the kind of reaction I suspected, which was like, "Oh well. Get them back here and test them because surely they're going to be behind." So I said, "Well, we're just gonna preempt that," you know. "What testing

has been going on while we're gone?" And I arranged and the company did pay fortunately for all the tests to be sent to the International School. They administered the whole battery: the ISATs, the Iowas, the whatever cognitive abilities they were doing and all of that, just gave them the whole battery. The International School people were going, "Really?" You know. You guys do all this? But we did all that so I would not have any arguments when we got back or delays getting in place where they were supposed to be.

Betty was able to have her daughters placed at the right academic level but the culture of the school did not appear to challenge the children in the manner they were used to overseas.

They got placed in their gifted programs. But they were still, [my older daughter] especially in eighth grade, was bored silly. A junior high, they were more worried about their teeny tiny little feelings than they're going to challenge them academically, get them ready for high school. So she was just, you know, it was a breeze for her. She didn't have to work and she had a teacher who didn't teach her math class so she basically learned to teach herself out of her textbook and she had a French teacher that was an absolute joke. The lady was just incompetent.

According to Betty, the younger daughter didn't need to try hard to do well in school so she became a lazy student when she returned to the US.

The junior high year was a real downer issue. Had it continue at that, at that scenario, I don't know, she, [my older daughter] might have become a really lazy student, which is what happened to [my younger daughter]. [She] will need to get by. Learned on how little she could do to get by. And she, I even compared writing samples, I mean, what she was being asked to write two years earlier in the International School and she would write a four-page essay and it was all grammatically correct and the teacher was [holding her to British spellings with the ou's and things like that. And then she gets back and the junior high asks her to write one paragraph and she just plops it down in five minutes. And I said, "You know, you could probably write two," and she said, "Well, the teacher doesn't want me to."

Similarly, repatriation back to the US was difficult for both Tammy and her children.

We'd been there so long that we were looking to buy property. And this was where we were going to be. This was life for us. That was home. Not here [in the US]. And um, you know, I would come here but I couldn't wait to get back home 'cause that was, I just felt more comfortable there. So coming back home [to the US], ah, I just felt like a foreigner. My kids felt like foreigners. I still feel today that I don't fit in. I feel like I, I think about it every day probably, still. Of course I have reminders all around me but um I just had a conversation with my kids the other night which really surprised me because they feel the same way I do. It's that they don't fit in.

Part of the difficulty for two of Tammy's three children was the sense of not fitting in culturally.

It just was they didn't have the popular culture from here. So people talk about TV shows or what's the new fad and they didn't know it. Um, people would talk about, "Oh, you remember that." And they'd go, "No." So they might get teased for that because they just weren't up on what was going on here. They didn't have a lot of American history. My daughter had to ask me the other day where Virginia was. You gotta be kidding me! I had to get out a map and show her. So, we struggle.

Tammy's youngest son who had a slight learning disability and struggled with foreign languages felt more comfortable with the return to the US. He was at the end of elementary school. This was in sharp contrast to his sister's return to the US when she was 15 going on 16.

[My youngest son] doesn't; he feels fine here. He was excited to come back 'cause they speak English here. But the other two, they just said, "I don't fit in here." They can't quite find their niche. So my daughter comes back, she immediately gets into drugs and alcohol, the whole thing.... um she didn't fit in so she went with a group that accepted her. That's how I look at it. And ah, um, [my older son] had a bit of a struggle kind of hooking up with some people 'cause he just had a hard time making friends in the beginning. I think he still does.

Tammy described how the older children didn't know any of the neighborhood children when they first returned to the US.

They came back, they didn't know anybody. The neighborhood kids were, I mean they were still living here but they didn't know them anymore so they just sort of met people at school. And you know, they'd invite them to a football game and then they'd go drink under the bleachers. It was a cool thing to do, for that group. And it was just what she needed, just what she needed to fit in.

Coming back to the United States was awkward for expat children but going to the foreign country and entering a new school was not as difficult if they were going to an international school. This was due to the turnover rate at the international school. Children did not feel like 'the new kid' and had a better chance of making friends. Mark recalled the ease at which his children adapted to the international school.

Well, they plunged in. And, um, I would say that um, I learned. I mean the one cool thing about international schools is that the stigma of being a new kid simply isn't there like it is in other schools because there's such churn all the time in terms of... And what's interesting is every, 'round about March, April, there is a "hold your breath," collective "hold your breath" period where kids find out who's stayin' and who's goin'. And that's, you know, after a year, that's a little traumatic if you've made some friends and suddenly they walk in, they're sayin', "My dad says were goin' back to Texas." Or "We're goin' to, um, you know, we're goin' to Asia next," or something like that. And, but, um, you know, so that was, that was an interesting. And generally, it was just like, over probably three or four years you probably had a near turnover of everybody, but it would be you know a handful every year, in every class. And, but kids are remarkably adaptable.

For younger children meeting new foreign friends was a rewarding experience and fun for the parents too. Tammy's older son was just entering kindergarten when they went to Europe.

I just remember [my middle child] coming home the first day of school. "Mom, I made two friends in school today. One's name is Doggie Day and another one's name is Penguin." And I was like, "it was Doggie Day and Penguin was it?" It was an Asian name. It was hilarious, his interpretation of that. They, you know, the kids did very well in the beginning.

Families had the ability to choose to go abroad and leave the US for employment or to maintain a job. The timing of the children's education played a large role in their decision to accept the offer to go overseas. Unfortunately for some of these families, Tammy and Mark's families, their choice on how long they could stay on overseas assignment was limited by the employer. They could choose to return to the US earlier than agreed but they could not stay longer than the employer wanted them overseas due to many issues such as work permits, relocation contracts and other expenses. Whenever possible, participants tried to plan the move home during institutional school transitions such as the end or start of a term. Betty knew when her husband's overseas contract was coming to an end. She was able to plan the transitions and came home a few months before her husband finished with his assignment abroad so that she could prepare her children for school in the US. "I came back with the girls in August pretty much just in time to start school." Her husband arrived home about three months later.

Tammy's family had their time overseas end very abruptly. In other words, they were limited in their ability to plan the timing of the return trip home for the best transition period for their children. Tammy discussed how poor the timing was for her older son in the middle of the school year.

He was in seventh grade. And we came back at a bad time of year. We came back in March. So for the company there was no consideration about when they were sending you back. "Please, at least let 'em finish out the school year."

When asked if she had any ability to negotiate the return home, Tammy replied:

No. I couldn't afford my rent. I couldn't afford, well, school was already paid for but I couldn't afford the rent.

Mark also wanted more time to transition his children out of high school, however, his employer was willing to work with him and cover half the cost of his child's boarding school in Europe so she didn't need to repatriate home before high school was finished.

So you, again, you, knock on wood, you say, "I'm happy. I got eight years out of it." I really wanted... I was desperately wanting to get two more years to get [my younger daughter] to her college. That ultimately worked itself out anyway. And the company actually paid for one of the two years she stayed.

What all these participants intuitively knew was that continuity was good for children's development (Clausen, 1993; Elder et al, 1984). The timing of life course interruptions could have long lasting influences on children's lives (Clausen, 1993; Elder et al, 1984; Palas, 2003). Some schools were more egalitarian than others in the way that they tracked students. Kerckhoff (2003) compared the way students were tracked in Germany, England and the US to show that disruptions in school pathways were hard to move in and out of and students could lose academic advancements if they relocated frequently. They would not be able to return to the track that they previously occupied. Betty fought hard to get her children placed at an academic level that was challenging to her child so that they would not fall behind their current level of educational attainment. She also made sure that the children were able to enter school at the start of the school year, which was the traditional time for transitioning to a new level.

In Germany and England, school systems are more closely tied to the labor market than the US school systems (Kerckhoff, 2003). This type of tracking, as well as potential language barriers, makes it difficult for expatriates to enter the local school

system when they are in a foreign country, and they need to look to expensive private international schools for educating their children. In the US, high school students have shown more agency in matching part-time jobs after school with their career aspirations (Mortimer, 2003).

Betty, Valerie and Tammy realized that their children were not returning to the same social groups that they left, even though they were returning to the same homestead and school system. The children had left their social groups for a matter of years, the children in the groups matured and changed as did the expat children. Elder (1983, 1993) noted that studies of the life course must look at cohorts in relation to time and place. The children returned to the same place but their cohorts changed over time. Tammy's children had a particularly hard time adjusting to these changes. Betty and Valerie were skilled at minimizing the disruptive effects of changing schools. Both Betty and Valerie demonstrated a variety of skills to minimize the disruption in their children's academic careers and maintain academic continuity.

Maximizing Advantages and Minimizing Disadvantages

Parents in the study minimized the disadvantages of moving abroad and maximized the advantages. They actively considered the added benefits they could bestow on their children if the family relocated overseas. These benefits included such considerations as an expanded world view, a higher standard of living or private schools. The most obvious disadvantages focused around disrupting and re-establishing a network of friends and services for the children such as starting the school year mid-term, finding new doctors to handle specific medical issues, and replacing current enrichment activities

with other activities. In short, giving up the advantages that the children were already receiving from the networks in which they were engaged.

Planning and analyzing the benefits of various options is certainly a requirement of agency and the contingent life course (Heinz, 2003; Kerckhoff, 2003). These parents had the ability to look ahead and consider the various outcomes of their choices for the children and made decisions on what choice would maximize their children's life chances. Parenting and managing the children's life course was a continual effort to increase opportunities for the children's growth and development while minimizing disadvantages. In the following example, Toby tries to prevent his child from discrimination at school.

Toby originally planned on staying in Asia and managing his business but he had some concerns over his children's education due to difficulty with his son's day care.

[My wife] went back to work and we put him into day care. And it was interesting that [my son] would come home with bites on his arms and we would get called saying [your son] is a problem. You know, and it's like he's biting other kids and we're looking at him. **He's** covered in bites! And we can't complain very well so we don't and you're telling us, you know, **our** son's the problem. It could have been, we don't know. We had a very diplomatic [local] friend get involved and she was quite certain it was that they were singling him out.

Toby had set up a thriving business in Asia and had employees all over the world. When the business ran into some legal issues due to various technicalities of how it was set up by a foreigner and employed mainly foreigners, Toby decided it was easier to sell the business to a friend who was a local citizen than it was to pay the fee and correct the problem. This decision was prompted by his concern over the long term education of his children.

Well we could have solved the problem for about 30 to 50 thousand dollars. And we considered it but [my son] was two and a half, three. [My daughter] was one and a half and we were starting to look at what are we going to do for schools. We had a lot of friends...and all of them were saying, you know, telling us about all the disaster- stories of their kids being in [Asian] schools. They're, they're [racial slur] kids, they're Caucasian kids. And it wasn't from the [Asian] kids. It was from the teachers. Most of the problems were from the teachers.

When asked, what problems his friends were experiencing in the Asian schools, Toby replied:

Just flat out discrimination. Just everybody else gets a good grade and you've got the exact same answers and you get an F, kind of stuff, just flat out. Discrimination is completely legal in [this Asian country] and teachers are highly revered and can do whatever they want. There's no repercussion or anything. So [these Asian] schools probably when they were young would have been fine. But we knew we were going to come up against it eventually and the only other two options were English language schools where the tuition for preschool was more than Harvard. I mean it was so expensive. I literally went on line and it was like this is \$1000 more a year than if I sent him to Harvard because everybody there [in the international school] are expats. Everybody is working for Coca Cola, or for Microsoft and they don't care how much it costs. They write it off. But I couldn't afford it.

Toby and his wife chose to move back to the US to raise their children, primarily for educational purposes. When I asked, "Do you see yourself going back?" He replied, "I would in a heart-beat if we didn't have kids. I'd move [there] tomorrow. I think it's the most wonderful place in the world to live." Toby didn't want to move back to the US but he considered it a better place to educate the children.

In this scenario, Toby left "the most wonderful place in the world to live" so that his children would not experience a disadvantage in school. He could not afford private school so returning to the US for a public education was seen as the alternative that was better for his children so they did not experience overt discrimination.

Other instances of parents who reduced their children's exposure to disadvantage would include Valerie and Mark's story about their daughter choosing an international boarding school over a US school so that the daughter was not seen as the odd person out in a fairly homogeneous environment. Another would be Betty's efforts to find the correct academic level for her children so they didn't lose ground in what they had learned overseas. Betty's children chose to stay at grade level in the US but in advanced standing rather than skip a grade and feel awkward socially with older children.

Parents with privileged standing in the US tried to manage their children's academic and social lives in order to accumulate advantages for the children that would make them more competitive as adults and ensure that they kept their privileged status (Furstenberg, 2003). They did this by selecting play groups to expand the child's social skills, enrichment activities such as ballet, music or sports to improve the child's skill set, and schools in neighborhoods with high quality educational systems. All these efforts helped families maintain intergenerational advantages and privileged status.

In contrast, Furstenberg (2003) showed that parents from working families tended to stress ways to minimize exposing their children to dangers or negative life events rather than looking for ways to promote opportunities and autonomy. Children of poor parents were more likely to be unplanned and possibly unwanted at the time of conception. These children were frequently in families with unstable unions. The parents in this study are replicating social patterns for the privileged class in the way they focus on accumulating advantages for the children and minimizing their disadvantages.

One area of study within life course research is the analysis of how people from similar backgrounds or cohorts wind up with very different lives (O’Rand, 1996; Dannefer, 2003, Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Marshall and Mueller, 2003; Sackmann and Wingers, 2003). One explanation for this is the concept of cumulative advantage and disadvantage. Merton (1968) is often cited for coining the term the Mathew Effect which refers to a passage in the bible.

For whoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance; but whoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath 13:12.

The Mathew effect is the tendency for healthy people in good neighborhoods to be able to garner advantages such as safety, education, and cultural capital. People who are disadvantaged to begin with, either through poor health or poverty, continue to be at risk for more bad situations to arise such as crime, drugs, dropping out of school, and worse health. Studies have examined the Mathew Effect in the areas of education (Entwisle et. al, 2003; Gamoran, 1992) and health care (George, 2003) in order to account for cohort variations later in life so in terms of the Matthew effect, these parents are no different in their life courses from upper middle class parents in the US.

School Expenses

The other main factor to families moving abroad was the expense of private international schools. If the company sending the family overseas was willing to cover the cost of an international school then the family was more likely to travel. Claire considered the possibility of moving overseas but found the tuition at international schools to be too steep.

And so, I actually, I looked at all the school possibilities and you know, if you have \$40,000 and you can go to the American School ... or the International School.... You know, if you get an ex-pat package and maybe someone pays that for you, I mean, otherwise, we couldn't pay that.

Chris stated that she wouldn't mind going on another international assignment if the opportunity came up and the company arranged for the extra costs now that she had children. The cost of tuition appeared to be a big concern.

Oh yes, we'd love it. It's just harder now, because we would need, you know, school tuition for two children and we'd need an apartment, you know, triple the size of what we had and um, but we would go if someone was willing to pay. If the package is there we'd totally go.

Families living abroad as local hires were less likely to attend private school and needed to consider the children's ability to adapt to local schools. According to one participant, Shana, children who started at a local school and moved within that system were not as disadvantaged as those children who came and went. Shana recalled.

[My husband] had an opportunity where we could have been back but when it comes to school.... schooling is very hard....

According to Shana, European schools were more rigorous than American schools and therefore, American educated children would not get into the new school at the right track.

I mean, yeah and also schooling would have, you know, sort of brings a whole different element into light. My friends are doing very different routes for schooling. One went to the international school, one went to a parochial school, not a parochial school...well I guess it would be a parochial school but I don't know what they would call it over there. There is a name for it, church school I think they call it. One went to a Jewish day school. One went to like a private school. So uhm I saw their different experiences. Every time I'd go back I'd talk about their experiences and I thought, you know, we would have to be on that track with them and it would be hard to just jump right back into it because right

now to get like for example our... What the equivalent of sixth grade would be is like the equivalent of high school like he'd get into a really good, whatever, I don't know what they call that secondary school, whatever it is, it is very, very difficult to test in and all that. There is no way.

Claire echoed Shana's view that European schools were harder than American schools so it would not be easy to move from one system to another.

Then the question becomes if you go to the American School..., you have a high, you have an American high school degree so you're not really qualified to go to the European universities with that degree. The American High School in [Europe] is some place for people who are just passing through and they want the American degree; 'cause that won't get you into high school, or college in Europe. You need their International Baccalaureate. Their Baccalaureate they call it. You need a Baccalaureate. So like, school's around here that offer IBs, that's good for a European family. They get an IB and they'd be able to go to school in Europe, but my girls aren't on track for an IB you know.

Three of the families would have consider another overseas assignment if their children didn't have learning disabilities. Issues with coordinating services, therapists and setting up an educational support system compounded the difficulty with entering another system. Eileen was adamant about staying in the US while her children were still in school.

No, and honestly with the kids and like I mentioned, we've got some learning issues here and there and the thought of picking up and moving, even domestically, scares the behoojie out of me because I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh; I've got all the therapies lined up. I've got all, you know." And the oldest one is the one with the ADHD. He's on the swim team and swimming is so good for him. So he loves that and he has that and I'm thinkin' a change is so hard for him in particular. I'm thinkin' if I tried to throw that, a wrench into that, I mean, well, if that's all that comes up, then we may have to do that. But hopefully it won't come to that. 'Cause that just upsets the whole apple cart. You know, I think for the others it wouldn't be quite as bad, but for the oldest one it would be really difficult.

For Claire, her youngest child's difficulty with foreign languages took any possibility of returning to Europe off the table until after the children finish their education. The language barrier was too great and would exacerbate existing learning difficulties.

Yeah. Yeah. But we're not going to because the main reason is because of schools. So my older daughter is bilingual. She has a gift for language. And then my younger daughter has a deficit. My younger daughter finds it difficult to speak [another language]. She's dyslexic. So this is like a thing, something that's very hard for her and she doesn't speak [another language].

Tammy acknowledged that language issues made living overseas more difficult for her youngest son and he was happy to return to the US even though he had been in an English speaking international school.

They, you know, the kids did very well in the beginning. School was never an issue, really. [My two oldest children] picked up [the language] pretty quickly. [The youngest] did not. He never did, really. He didn't like it too much.

The above passages showed that one of the largest obstacles for families with children to going abroad was the issue of education for the children. Parents did not want to disadvantage the children educationally just for the opportunity to take a job overseas. Private international schools minimized the adverse effects of switching schools because they adhered to an English or American system of education and did not cause the language problems that a local school could cause in the new country. However, these schools frequently could not accommodate children with special needs. One of the other advantages to an international school was that it was not uncommon for children to enter

mid-year if needed and the frequent turn-over of students normalized the adverse effects of being the new child in school.

Parents are Accountable to Society

Parents are accountable to the state for managing the life course of their children. They have social obligations to provide food, clothing, shelter and an education to the children. Parents are expected to keep the children out of the way of harm. Parents are not legally obligated to provide enrichment opportunities for their children such as music lessons or painting classes. Yet, parents do have social pressures to make sure their children are well behaved and attending school. Even though Donna was not the custodial parent of her child after the divorce she still felt that more of the responsibility for her child's behavior was assigned to her rather than her former husband.

My son didn't get along with the stepmother, he liked his siblings. I didn't realize how much he didn't like living with the stepmother for a long time. She was abusive. Anyway, he started getting into trouble and hanging out on the streets with other street children, peasants. They blamed me! They always blame the parents, especially, the mother. It is never the child's fault. Well, I thought he was going to school. I didn't know what was going on at home and how his stepmother was. So I took him for a while. I sent him to the US in 1996. He lived with my brother who adopted him and he could have an address in [the US] and go to school there. He did a year and a half of high school in [the US] and then he went to college. My mother helped with that.

Donna took control of the situation once it was made known to her and found a way to provide for her child that enabled her to also have a career overseas that involved significant amounts of travel.

Summary

This chapter showed that children have an expected life course much of which centers around school and transitions through school. The decision to go abroad was greatly influenced by how the parents assessed their children would adjust to overseas life both in school and out. Parents with small children were more likely to take the opportunity to go abroad because they felt it was not a significant disruption in the children's education. Parents of junior and high school children were more cautious about moving either abroad or back to the US for fear of adversely affecting the children's education. Other factors such as health care services and discrimination influenced parental decisions to return to the US. Parents expended effort to maintain the continuity of the children's education as much as possible.

Parents also utilized much effort maintaining the life course for children, planning opportunities to enable the children to gather advantages and skills and keeping the children from disadvantages such as interruptions to their education. The act of becoming a parent increased the standardization of the life course because parents were obligated by the state to provide for the children. Parents in this study were primarily from a privileged, educated class and held professional positions. They behaved in ways that were expected of their class and sought to maximize opportunities for their children. Parents considered how their decisions affected the children either positively or negatively. When possible parents looked to minimize adverse risks and maximize advantages for the children.

CHAPTER SIX

TRANSITIONS, CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

In this chapter, I discuss transitions and changes in the life course. I also examine the way people maintain continuity in their life during transitions. Life course transitions are short in duration and reflect a change in role, status, location or state of being (MacMillan et al., 2005, Settersten, 2003). Hagestad (2003) notes transitions are “points at which new states or roles are entered” (p. 135). All participants in this study, by the very nature of the research criteria, had two types of transitions in common, at least one transition out of the US and at least another transition back into the US. Some participants had completed this cycle more than once.

Transitions are “embedded within larger trajectories” (Elder and Kirkpatrick, 2003, p. 55). Trajectories take place over an extended period of time and may contain several transitions (MacMillian et al, 2005). A person can have several life course trajectories operating simultaneously but in different spheres of life (Settersten, 2003). It is helpful to think of trajectories as careers where there may be more than one transition but the direction of the career path remains constant. For example, students who complete high school and then transition to college follow a standard path or educational trajectory. George (2003) counters “trajectories are not synonymous with the sociological concept of careers” because trajectories do not necessarily follow pre-designated steps toward a specific outcome (p. 162). Pallas (2003) considers trajectories to be attributable to the

individual, whereas, careers and pathways are a product of the social system. Trajectories often signal involvement with social institutions over time such as school, family, or employment (MacMillian et al, 2005) and what happens in one trajectory can influence what happens in the other trajectories (Settersten, 2003). People often coordinate their trajectories in order to avoid asynchronous trajectories that may create role strain (Settersten, 2003).

Transition in the life course reveal much about the way people think and plan their next steps in life and construct their own biographies. Mortimer (2003) shows that people exercise personal decision making to anticipate life course events and assess opportunities. They utilize personal agency to plan their lives and calculate the possibility of being successful with their selections (Freund, 1997). Personal transitions are based on opportunities, as well as, assumptions, hopes and desires (Shanahan, 2000)).

Life course opportunities may be constrained by forces outside the individual's control such as public policy, laws, race, gender, age or economic times. People can only make life choices from available options and they tend to weigh and assess their ability to be successful with each option (Kerckhoff, 1993). Planning the life course and making personal decisions is often an imperfect plan constructed with the options available at the time (Heinz, 2003).

Elder (1999) shows in his study of children from the Great Depression that the age at which people experience historic events and social change can influence the options available to them over the whole life course. Similarly, Cohler and Hostetler (2003) note that the life course of individuals reflect the social and historical changes that

are experienced by their cohorts. As times change, so does life course expectations (Elder, Johnson, Crosnoe, 2003). For example, transition times from entry into the labor force to any type of skilled or permanent job are increasing compared to what they were in the mid-twentieth century (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013; Mortimer, Staff and Oesterle, 2003). This is partly due to informal paths to employment in the US compared to some European communities such as Germany with more formalized paths from training to work (Leisering and Schumann, 2003). However, it is primarily due to tightening economic circumstances where what was once an entry level job is now filled by people with more experience because of increased competition and fewer positions (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013; Kalleberg, 2000). The economic opportunities for the current cohort of college graduates are not as easily attainable as it was for college graduates from the mid twentieth century.

Lives are lived in time and place (Settersten, 2011; Elder, 2003; Heinz, 2003). The economic, political and technological conditions of the late twentieth century are not comparable to the mid twentieth century (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). At midcentury the US was at its peak of an industrial, manufacturing economy. The expanding economy made it easy for high school graduates to find well-paying jobs right after graduation. Unions and public policy combined to provide a large majority of workers with a living wage, safe guards against lay-offs and retirement plans. The full-time workforce was comprised primarily of men. Women who worked made up the contingent workforce choosing to take part-time or temporary jobs that coordinated around their domestic

responsibilities. Moen (2011) describes this as the breadwinner/homemaker model of labor.

Changes to the US economic system starting from about 1979 have contributed to a new post-industrial, service economy characterized by more jobs in service sectors, decreased manufacturing and just-in-time employment practices (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). Women now comprise a large segment of the full-time work force and many people take flexible or part-time jobs not by choice but out of necessity.

These changes to the economy not only impact work trajectories, these also impact educational trajectories. College degrees no longer guarantee a good job after school, so some new graduates postpone labor force participation by entering graduate programs (Heinz, 2003), traveling, or volunteering/unpaid internship. If the labor market is tight, new college graduates are more likely to apply to graduate school (Pallas, 2003). People with college degrees are more likely to return to school than people without college degrees, and those with the most job continuity in midlife are the least likely to return to school. Mills and Blossfeld (2013) describe education as the repository for the otherwise unemployed, highlighting that people prefer the role of student to that of unemployed person. The increase in educational enrollment during times of tough economic times also speaks to the fact that people assess their options and position themselves to create anticipated opportunities.

Bridging

Bridging is intentionally using one social state in order to position oneself for another social state that may be too difficult to achieve without the bridge step. Bridging

is a transitional state that links two other states. In this study, education appeared to be used as a bridge for transitions in and out of countries and employment. Six participants -Donna, Abigail, Brittany, Lena, Terrance and Cliff - went abroad as young adults and used education as a bridge to get into the foreign country. For four of the participants, this educational opportunity evolved into future employment.

Donna initially went abroad with a fellowship, “Well it is very simple, I got a fellowship, I applied and I got a fellowship.” Abigail started out with an educational opportunity that expanded into paid employment, “I spent my junior year at [the Foreign University]...and also went to work as a student assistant in my first quarter at college as the student assistant in the junior year in the [overseas] office.” Abigail was in a combined state of both student and worker. It was this dual role that helped her to transition into full employment.

Similarly, Brittany started her employment first as a student and completed a graduate practicum before transitioning to employee.

I had majored in [a foreign language] as an undergraduate, but was also a student athlete, so because of my commitment to athletics, I was unable to travel abroad in a more traditional student setting. Because of that, I looked at ways that I would make sure as a graduate student that I would be able to live abroad and fulfill some of my graduate requirements.

It is interesting that Brittany wanted to make-up for missing out on the experience of going abroad as an undergraduate student. It appeared as if she considered the junior year abroad to be an expected life course event.

Lena’s first trip to Europe was more of an unstructured, 3-month leap-of-faith, where she made living expenses as an au pair and took a few random classes.

Yeah, I went for three months. Decided I wanted to, you know, I was gonna make myself figure out how this was gonna work. Took some classes, some classes at a kind of like, not a very structured program and au paired.

Lena then came back to the US and planned for a longer time abroad as a Master's student.

I was there for a few months, then came home and then went back for a Master's degree there. Kind of came home; regrouped; got a little bit more money; went for a Master's degree and when I finished that degree, it was my goal to still prolong, just a little while longer with any kind of internship."

Lena used education as a short term way to try out a new country. Her master's program was longer than a tourist visa would allow and shorter than an employment contract.

Lena also used the internship as a way to try out a new place of employment before committing to full time employment.

Cliff worked for a few years after obtaining his undergraduate degree, but he was interested in learning more about Eastern Europe. He signed up for a summer study abroad program. "It was just a way to get into the country. It seemed very difficult. You need visas." The class was Cliff's ticket into the new country. Cliff stayed for five years. When asked how long he was overseas he replied, "Five years, well, three years on my own and two years I was in a Master's program in Philology." He went over as a student and then took three years off from education and lived off savings and odd jobs before returning to the role as student.

Additionally, education was used as a bridge to smooth re-entry to the US after some time abroad. Six participants - Toby, Lena, Cliff, Terrance, Donna and Betty - used

this technique to smooth their transition back to the US. After months of bicycling and teaching English abroad, Toby and his wife returned to the US.

So we ended up going to school and we realized how much after about a year, how much we missed being abroad. We weren't ready to live here [in the US]. So we...my wife got her teaching license. I started working on my Masters just for something to do while she was getting her teaching license. 'Cause we wanted to get better jobs when we went back to [Asia].

Toby and his wife used education as a bridge to a better job and as a preferential status to unemployed person.

After about 10 years of working in Europe, Lena and her new husband decided to come back home and further her education.

At some point you have to say, you know, am I gonna be here and just see my family every six months? Or am I gonna go back home. I knew there was more opportunity here [in the US] and we wanted to sort of start our lives here. Then I had also kind of been accepted to my doctoral program. I kept deferring it.

Lena could have transferred to the US office for her work if she wanted to return to the US to see her family. Getting married and coming back to the US did not require that she leave the organization. She used the opportunity to make changes in location, relationship and career. However, she maintained ties with the old company to work occasionally while in graduate school thus easing her transition from worker to student. She held a dual state of both student and employee.

It appeared that it was easier for participants to transition to education upon their return to the US and then look for employment than it was to go directly to employment as Donna found out from experience. Donna had a slight twist on using education to bridge the gap between life overseas and coming back home. Initially, Donna returned

home to care for a sick mother and tried to get a local job based on her career experience in Africa. After some difficulty she decided to go back to school. I asked Donna what she did while she was in the US caring for her mother. She replied, “I went to school at [the University].” So I then asked if she decided to go to school before returning from Africa and she confirmed that it was an afterthought.

No that is something that came much later...When I first came back, I was a country bumpkin. I wasn't technologically savvy when I came here. I wanted to use what I knew about African Art and Culture. My experience didn't really mean much here. No one knows about African politics or culture or the type of people I know. The degree in Journalism is what is needed. I am a writer really, I went to [University] for a degree in journalism. That's what matters here.

It was not unusual for people returning to life in their home country to feel a bit out of place and to have their skills and knowledge from overseas unappreciated (Coles and Fechter, 2008). Entering an educational program can be easier than finding a job so it is the path of least resistance and more favorable than the role of unemployed person. Going from an educational setting to a work environment is a traditional path in the life course and can facilitate better employment opportunities for participants.

Similar to Donna, Betty returned to the US after three years overseas to find it difficult to re-enter the work world in the US. “My networking and what I had been doing was pretty much dead and I felt professionally out of it.” After being back in the US for a few months, Betty applied for another master's program. It was an on-line Library Information Science program.

It was a competitive program, I had to apply to. I didn't think I would get in but I did and decided I also had a lot of time flexibility in the program. They wanted you to finish in five years but an average was two, but if you

took one course or four they didn't care. So they had all the flexibility that I needed to do what I wanted with the girls and so that's what I did.

At the time of the interview, Betty had yet to find out if her investment in education paid off with a full-time job. Due to the tight labor market and her need for flexibility until her children finished high school, Betty had taken an intern position in her field to gain experience rather than a full-time paid job. Accepting an internship is a common activity for young people entering the labor force (Lowe, 2001) but is more unusual for middle aged people. In times of tight labor markets increasing numbers of middle age people accept internships (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013).

Participants in the study used bridging to their advantage and shuffled life course transitions to meet their personal needs. They created a more easily attainable bridge from one stage of the life course to another. Considering that participants in this study were well-educated and people with college degrees were more likely to get advanced degrees, participants' use of education as the primary mechanism for bridging was not unusual.

Multiple Transitions and Combined States

Participants in the study used bridging and combined states to ease their transition to new roles or statuses such as student or expat employee. Sackmann and Wingens (2003) note that much of the research on transitions and trajectories deal with single event life course transitions and do not address multiple transitions or lengthier trajectories. They claim that transitions are more complicated than the 'singular status passage' and those trajectories have been all but neglected in research. According to Sackmann and Wingens, trajectories can have various transitional breaks and still be

trajectories. They identify 6 types of transitions: rupture, interruption, change, bridge, return and fusion. Sackmann and Wingens examine four common transitions to highlight the real complexity of what was previously seen in research as one-dimensional. For example, using the patterns of women's workforce participation, working women who decide to leave work and raise children full-time have a 'change' in trajectory or a clean break from one trajectory to another. Sackmann and Wingens identify stopping one trajectory and starting a totally different trajectory as a 'change'. The woman who leaves work to go to school and then returns to work has an 'interruption' in her work trajectory. Workers who take advantage of parental leave policies to hold their place at work may or may not return to their job. While they are on leave they hold two statuses both employed and not employed. Employees may use the combined status of parental leave to 'bridge' their transition to permanently non-employed or they may 'return' to work when parental leave is over. Sackman and Wingens call these states, 'bridging' for those who chose parenting full-time and 'returning' for those who come back to work. They also identify a state of 'fusion' where workers go from a state of employment to non-employment and then return to work on a part-time basis. These people have fused the status of employed and non-employed to create a new status of part-time worker. Sackmann and Wingens give examples of other common transitions that can have various transitional states, such as education to employment; marriage to non-marriage and criminal behavior to rehabilitation. A person can go from school to work and never return to schooling again so this transition from education would be a 'rupture'. However, another person may go from school to a new job and then after some time

return to school. In this case, work would mark an ‘interruption’ in the trajectory of school. Another option would be to fuse work and school at some point and occupy multiple states or ‘combination states’.

According to Sackmann and Wingers (2003), combined states are an important part of how life course norms change. Combined states are compromises between two states and are a response to conflicting role expectations (Sackmann and Wingers, 2003). Part-time work is a combined state between non-employment and work. In tight economic times, people may accept part-time employment if full-time employment is not available. A mother with grade school children may choose part-time work so she can work while the children are in school yet, be home in time for when the children arrive after school. Another combined state, internship, is a combination of education and employment and also can be used to bridge the gap between full-employment and learning technical skills. As compromises, the combined state can smooth the transition between two different states, thereby, giving an individual time to gradually adjust to leaving one role while they phase into another role.

They mitigate frictions between old and new roles by combining the meaning of the old state with that of the new one. Thus, combined states usually reduce feelings of subjective ambivalence and foster feelings of biographical continuity in role changes and across life-course transitions (Sackmann and Wingers, 2003, p. 99).

In the passage above, Sackmann and Wingers note that combined states can ‘foster feelings of biographical continuity’ at the individual level. Combined states can give an individual a chance to try out both roles and delay a decision on what is their preferred role. A worker on parental leave is in the combined state of both worker and

non-employed. They may need this combined state to contemplate the best long term decision while weighing both financial and family benefits. In this study, Lena often used combined states as a way to test out new statuses.

Additionally, combined states fill a need within the larger society experiencing changes because combined states create a way to slowly shed old norms while adapting to new social roles. It is in this manner that social continuity is maintained (Sackmann and Wingens, 2003). Sackmann and Wingens contend that not all combined statuses catch on at the societal level and it depends on the culture in which the combination is utilized. They cite three conditions for a combined state to become popular. First it must address a social problem or role conflict; second it must be innovative and address the social problem better than the old way; and third it must be something the people recognize as being needed. It needs to be legitimate to the people as a way to solve a problem. The combined state must have meaning for the society in which it is constructed and it is the understanding of this meaning that enables the new form to provide continuity. It is through the combined state, adherence to an old status while trying on a new status that enables a smooth transition and innovation in the life course. Combined states can mediate the problem of 'structural lag' (Riley, 1972).

Sackman and Wingens (2003) discuss the desire to maintain continuity, both biographical continuity and social continuity. Transitions are disruptions in continuity. Combined states permit people to hold onto an old state while adopting a new state so that continuity can be maintained. For example, Lena continued to work for her old employer on a part-time basis even though she was a full-time Ph.D. student. Betty

accepted an unpaid internship in the combined state of employee and student so that she could establish a work history and transition into full-time employment with her new career. Terence took classes at night to maintain continuity with his educational goals even though he was working full-time overseas. Since biographical continuity is important why did some participants choose to disrupt multiple life trajectories when they could have minimized disruptions and only changed in one or two life statuses?

Transitions Home and Multiple Life Changes

As mentioned earlier, transition in one aspect of the life course often influences changes in another aspect of the life course (Settersten, 2003). Carr and Sheridan (2001) examined the impact of changes in one sphere of the life course and how it influenced other spheres. They examined the return to college and looked at the influence on family roles. This was significant for women but not for men in the study. Carr and Sheridan examined the transition to self-employment and its effect on the family. Men were more likely to be self-employed if they were empty nesters. Lastly, they looked at the effect of changing occupations on family life and found that people were more likely to shift careers in mid-life if they were widowed or empty-nesters. Although this study showed that changes in one aspect of the life course influence changes in other aspects, Carr and Sheridan did not address multiple changes in a close time frame.

I was surprised to find that participants I interviewed bundled changes in multiple areas of the life course. Was this done to create some sort of economy of scale where participants only experienced one temporal period of adjustment and changes? There must be an advantage to bundling several life changes at once. This was an area for

further research. Intuitively it would seem that people wanted to reduce stressful events by minimizing how many life changes happened simultaneously and take change more sequentially. For example, if people wanted to reduce stress and keep many aspects of the life course the same, then Lena could have repatriated back to the US for her husband's job opportunities and still remain with the same employer through a transfer. Lena primarily came home to get married. She and her fiancé believed that the US held more career opportunities for her husband.

What we did was we got what's called a...we knew we were gonna get married here in the United States, that he was going to come here eventually, because our opportunities here for continued employment and choice of work is a lot more. And so we got, it's called a fiancé visa, a K-visa, overseas. So he went to the embassy there and we applied for that and then, I had to come back to, I think I had to start doing a couple things, maybe planning the wedding. Then I waited probably about two months and then the visa came through for him. So he arrived and then we got married here, in my home town. Then I would say about six months later we went to his home his country and we had a ceremony there as well.

However, Lena reflected on where her life was headed and made a large adjustment when she repatriated to the US. She assessed her long term career and did not see herself staying at the International Organization. She also considered her husband's career options, making manifest the concept of linked lives. She perceived an atmosphere of racial discrimination in Europe at the time and chose to go to the US once she was engaged so that her husband would be subject to less discrimination.

When you work for the [International Organization] you don't have work permission for Europe. You have work permission for your job at the [International Organization] and so you're kind of within that system. The [International Organization] is typically a type of place where you're paid well, you have fat salaries and it's a comfortable place to be, so people do not like move around. I think when I was working there I was probably like, late 20's early 30's and myself and two other friends, we were the

youngest thing on wheels by far. People just do not let go of those jobs. They're very competitive. You look around and say, I'm cashing a paycheck and, but you know, I just, I felt like I had, I wanted to do something different, and then you know, my husband being of African origin, maybe it's gotten a little better now there. But it's just a you know, I thought, he'd have much more opportunities here in the United States than in a place like [Europe], where discrimination is still pretty strong even though it may not seem like it.

Lena stated that it wasn't just one aspect of her life that accounted for her decision to repatriate. She took into account her husband's career, family considerations, her career and educational goals. As she stated it, "all those things kinda came together." People tended to make their life course decisions based on what options were available to them at the time (Heinz, 2003).

In Lena's case, her decision to marry and provide career opportunities for her soon-to-be-husband led to moving back to the US and starting a full-time Ph.D. program. She needed to give up her job in Europe in order to do this but did manage to use her contacts from the European job to obtain part-time work in the US. Lena bundled marriage, moving back to the US, starting a new educational program, leaving a long term job, and starting a part-time job. She could have easily just transferred within her European company to the US office and maintained a full-time job if her goal was to minimize disruption to the life course but still give her husband opportunities in the US.

Eileen also relocated for her partner's job opportunities. Originally she moved to Europe and then back to the US due to her partner's job, even though both times she had a job she enjoyed. She chose to support her partner with his job opportunities and maintain her relationship by relocating with her partner. Her partner, Ned, became

dissatisfied with his job and did not find it challenging, although according to Eileen he found his colleagues to be friendly.

Eileen shared that she had an opportunity to stay in Europe because she was a local hire.

Yeah, but I loved him. And I didn't wanna stay there by myself. I mean, it was sort of an adventure for the two of us. They wanted me to stay. In fact, one of the guys, said, "Dump him. Stay." Ah, but no, I was, in fact we got engaged on the way home.

Eileen had readjusted her life twice to accommodate her partner. Rather than just return home and continue working, the couple chose to get engaged on the way back to the US, adding yet another adjustment. She did not know she would become engaged on the trip home. It is curious that her partner would choose this chaotic time in their lives to propose marriage and add to the many adjustments that they would make upon returning to the US. It may have been part of the settling down process to standardize the life course in preparation for marriage and children.

Depression

Kara, Valerie, Sue and Chris also adjusted to a change in more than one sphere of life upon their return to the US. Kara may be an example of too many life altering transitions happening at once. Although Kara worked for almost a year after returning to the US, she responded as if she saw the transition back to the US, marriage and children as one large life change instead of a series of smaller steps because these were so close together in time and radically different from the fast paced corporate world that she knew. When I asked, "How was your transition back to the US," Kara gave the following answer:

I think it was pretty easy, but ah, it wasn't long. We were probably married a couple of years, had kids you know and... God it's so funny how you try to remember. But I did go through a period of seeing a therapist and I wouldn't, it's hard to say for sure that I was technically depressed, but thinking back on it you think, "Well, why else would I have sought her out? I probably was." And she contended that she felt a lot of the things that I was suffering emotionally were due to the fact that I changed my life so completely and so quickly. She really felt that a lot of ah, um, a lot of the changes in life had come at my expense more than [my husband's] and so she felt like what I was going through was really related to that. And it was one of these things where um, I couldn't help but see the truth in what she said but I also felt to some extent, "I totally get how lucky I am to even have children." 'Cause I remember being in [Europe] and by myself and feeling lonely enough that I really was worried that I wouldn't have a relationship and I wouldn't have a family. So I guess I have to, in the end, I came to that, "Yeah, well humans have conflicting emotions sometimes." At the same time you're so grateful for your children, you also recognize what it cost you to have them in so many ways.

Kara was not the only participant who experienced depression upon returning to the US. Mark, Valerie, Tammy, Nancy, Betty, and Toby, all had periods of self-described depression shortly after returning. Most attributed these to changes in life style and life course. Mark recalled how happy he was living in Europe during his second tour abroad which was longer than a year:

We just had a phenomenal, phenomenal time. I've never been more depressed in my life, literally in my life, despondent, when I got repatriated back from there because I did not wanna leave.

Mark did not plan on leaving when the company called him back to the US. It was unanticipated and appeared arbitrary to Mark. He had no control over the timing of the leave. His life and his family's day-to-day lives would change abruptly without his ability to control the decision.

Mark was more prepared for the move after his third tour abroad. He had some ability to negotiate the terms of his return back to the US. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Mark's boss was willing to accommodate Mark's request for the company to contribute to his daughter's private boarding school for one year due to the disruption the move would have on her high school education. Mark's wife, Valerie, had a hard time with this adjustment back to the US. Mark described it as follows: "Well, I was less despondent when I came back. My wife was very despondent." Mark described the situation:

Well, when I was repatriated, when I was told I was coming [back to the US], I wasn't asked. My boss said, "Here's the plan. Blah, blah, blah." My wife was really, really devastated. She got very, very, very involved in [volunteer work overseas].

Valerie may have been dealing with the resulting change to her role as mother. She was not prepared for her youngest daughter to leave home and go to boarding school. She thought she would be a full time mother for another two years. Valerie now faced an empty nest with her youngest child in boarding school and the other child in college. Valerie's life no longer revolved around school or children.

That's another story. Um, I've told people that when I was in it, I wouldn't have called it depression, but when you look at my behavior, anybody would go, "Oh my God, you were depressed." None of us wanted to come home. And I came, you know, I came home and I would find myself – Mark a lot of the time was working two or three days a week at least, staying in the city. And I would wake up in the morning and wander out to the family room and put on Oprah at 9:00. I'd watch Oprah and then I think I'd watch the View and then the next thing you know, it was the 4:30 news. And I'd tell people, I wasn't unhappy on the couch. But clearly, clearly, I wasn't myself. I just didn't, I was just, I was just this. Very um, again, I wasn't depressed, I wasn't sad. I was just unmotivated. Once the shipment came, um, you know, I was, you know like a white tornado. I was unloading boxes and putting stuff away da da da da. And you have to remember there were no kids in the house. One was at [college] and one was in school in [Europe]. She didn't come back with us. So there was,

you know, Mark was in the city, there was pretty much no reason to get up, get dressed, make a meal, you know. So it was. I mean I would. I mean it was obviously some sort of funk, although I was not unhappy. I was quite happy in my funk.

I asked Valerie, “So when did your funk change?”

I bet longer than I think so I’m gonna say a longer number. Maybe six-nine months. But if I hadn’t, it was a weird thing. If you had called me up and said, “Okay, a bunch of us are doing this” and it was something very involved and required a lot of energy and whatever, I would have said, “Great. I’m there.” I wouldn’t have said, “Um, I don’t know. I really don’t wanna. I really don’t feel like it.” So it wasn’t unsociable, but I didn’t pursue social events. Like I said, if you had called me and said, “Wanna go see a movie?” I would have said, “sure.” I would not have bothered to call you to go see a movie. So I don’t know what I was. But I wasn’t, I wasn’t right. But I didn’t feel wrong. I don’t know.

Valerie was adjusting to the loss of the life she had in Europe and all her volunteer connections. She did not have the role of mother to fill her day-to-day activities and she did not need to do much for her husband who spent many nights at their condo in the city. When she had a familiar role to fulfill such as unpacking and managing the house, she did it quickly.

Although there could be an advantage or economy of scale to changing multiple life phases at once, there may also be a downside to multiple adjustments. It is possible that bridging, combining states and maintaining personal control over timing of events are important techniques for maintaining personal identity during times of transition.

The Art of Transition and Juggling Cumulative Advantages and Disadvantages

Coming back to the US was a voluntary, welcomed experience for Lena, Robert, Cliff, Chris, Brittany, and Sue. They looked forward to the opportunities available to them and/or their spouses in the US. These moves were planned and welcomed where

the participant was taking advantage of new opportunities or settling down. For example, Chris had quit her job shortly before returning to the US. She had just found out she was pregnant so she was happy to return to the US and be close to family during her pregnancy.

All I was doing was throwing up. It was awful. So I was just thankful to be in my own bed, I think. By the time I started feeling better, you know. It was nice I could just hop in the car and see my family. I hadn't seen them in a long time and I adjusted very well. By the time I started getting bored, I had a baby.

Chris speculated on what it would have been like to come back to the US and resume work with her previous employer.

Yeah. So it was like, I think though, it would have been a let-down, moving back and then going to my old company and having to work in the States again just was not as glamorous as working in Europe. It just would have been a big, 'Like I'm so over you' kind of thing, which is one of the reasons why I left. But I was gonna get a new job. But then I was too sick to look for a job.

The move home and change in life course trajectory from work to stay at home mother provided Chris with a socially acceptable role and did not require her to recreate a professional persona in the US. The new job could not compete with the job in Europe so Chris did not mind changing roles.

Cliff returned to the US after a year abroad working as an interpreter for the US military. His wife and newborn child were not able to join him on this assignment because he was stationed on a military base during a war. He accepted the assignment as a way to cover expenses and support his young family. Although he was offered the opportunity to renew his contract for another year, he declined so he could return home and spend time with his wife and child. Cliff described his time abroad as "a lot of

waiting.” He waited until someone needed an interpreter and he waited to go home. He did not want to be away too long from his life in the US. He was in a liminal state, hoping to return to the life he left in the US. As Elder (2003) stated, lives are lived in time and place so there was an opportunity cost for Cliff to remain overseas for too long a period. He would forgo watching the first year of his son’s life while he was overseas. Cliff was happy to repatriate to the US.

How participants viewed the move made a real difference in their repatriation experience. Participants were mostly in agreement about the move overseas and felt it was their choice or a good opportunity for them or their family. Betty was the only reluctant mover from the US to Europe because she was leaving a job she loved. Otherwise, participants considered the move to be optional and an opportunity. The sense of self-selection helped in the adjustment to their new surroundings. For participants who were forced to come home, it was a difficult adjustment. They did not consider the move to be an advantage. It disrupted the lives they had built overseas and they were reluctant to give up the advantages of living abroad to make their life anew in the US. There were opportunity costs to repatriating. For some it was making a new career in the US. For others it was re-establishing a network of friends or schoolmates.

I showed in the previous chapter that participants were from a privileged class with skills in weighing the advantages and disadvantages of opportunities. They were astute at accumulating advantages. Participants who chose to repatriate looked at the US as providing more advantages. Those who were forced by their employer to return did not have the final say in which situation provided them with more advantages. In

Tammy's, Mark and Valerie's situations, employers controlled the move back. Both families had lived abroad for so long that overseas was their life. Mark described his wife as "being invested."

I do remember I was taken aback by how devastated my wife was. I thought I knew her and I thought, I didn't realize how, how much she really liked it. And how much she was invested, I mean, she loved her life.

The move home required them to make new friends, leave the networks they had established in Europe behind and return to a work environment where they were not known well by local colleagues despite working for the same company for many years. It was literally unsettling. They had settled down abroad and now needed to reestablish themselves in a new place and redo all their work.

It is my contention that the loss of cumulative advantage either in the workplace or socially is what prompted some participants to make dramatic changes in their lives when they returned to the US. It was easier to start a new chapter in life than to recreate the efforts to get the career back up to where it was when leaving the overseas assignment. By choosing a new role, participants had an easier transition back to the US. They did not need to compare their new life to their life abroad because it was fundamentally different. Shana describes this process to some extent:

I was probably really depressed, actually. (laughs with self-recognition) The idea of working...I just wanted to get settled in because it was hard coming back 'cause I really didn't want to be here. As I said, it took many, many, many years. We've gone back to [where we were in Europe] three times and the last summer we went back it was the first time I was able to say "ok", "It's ok I'm not here any longer." I mean I was able to appreciate what I had here but it took me that long. I still get sort of emotional about it because we had such a great time.

Shana realized that her life overseas was bound in time and not just place. Moving back to Europe would not solve the situation. She could not recreate the conditions of their life in Europe. They could not create the professional and social networks without a lot of labor and even then the specific people would have changed. They could not easily transition the children to a European school. They would have to give up much of the advantages they already accumulated in the US for the family.

What we had we could not recreate. If we had stayed there it would have naturally progressed...but I can't naturally go back and pick up what I had. And that is what I think; I finally was able to allow myself to understand that last time.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Shana spent her energy upon repatriation to create a new life as a mother and established new networks for her and her children.

Toby also considered what it would be like to move back to Asia. He would not consider the move until his children were finished with school because that was the major disadvantage to living abroad, but he would consider going back. Yet he knew that returning to Asia would be a whole different experience and he would need to recreate a life trajectory one more time.

And it takes a lot to get started there. I mean...and right now we have lost all of our connections and we would be starting in the middle or bottom and it would take... So if we could move our jobs there. I can move my job pretty much anywhere eventually. That would be fine.

Toby uses the language of loss and gain to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of living in Asia. They lost any of the advantages they had while living in Asia and it would take a lot of effort to get started again.

Participants were willing to move if they saw relocation as an advantage to themselves or family. Occasionally, there were disadvantages to moving that could be resolved with financial help from the employer such as reimbursement for international schools and housing expenses covered in the high cost of living cities. Families were not willing to relocate if they saw the move as a disadvantage to the children's education if they thought the children would lose out on an opportunity such as children from the city not getting into a good high school because they missed living in the city during the grade that children would be evaluated for high school selection. Toby, Robert, Kara, Terence, Shana, and Cliff all had concerns about children entering a selective high school. Sue left the city in order to secure her children placement in a quality suburban high school. Robert and Kara would consider moving from their current location to the suburbs if their children did not get into a quality elementary or high school.

Participants also weighed the cost to their career in order to relocate and/or have children. For some participants such as Abigail the disadvantages to having children outweighed the advantages.

It is this concept of cumulative advantage that may explain why participants would bundle changes to their lives. Changing life course trajectories is costly. People tend to gain experience and establish a network by remaining with an employer or social network. They accumulate advantages from these relationships whether it is the trusted employee who is able to work from home (Meiksins and Whalley, 2002) or something as simple as having a trusted friend watch a toddler while running to the store. Disruptions to these relationships and trajectories can cause a person to reconsider if they still want to

stay on the path of the trajectory or move to another. When they leave that network they need to recreate the efforts that were lost. Many people are risk adverse and do not want to recreate the work of finding and reestablishing themselves in a new job. This was the case for Abigail's husband who Abigail described as risk adverse and interested in maintaining the security of his job instead of relocating to another city for his wife's career. It may be easier to change to a new trajectory than to modify the trajectory one is already on.

Continuity Work

Changes to one life course trajectory can bring about changes to other life course trajectories (Kerckhoff, 2003). For example, a move overseas for work creates a need to modify family trajectories and plan for ways to maintain contact with extended or immediate family. It may also cause changes in the work or education trajectories of other family members. Coordinating the way a transition affects the primary trajectory and the way it affects other trajectories takes some thought, effort and labor. It is work to synchronize trajectories in other spheres of life and the trajectories of other family members. I call this continuity work. Continuity work is the mental, emotional and physical work that goes into coordinating trajectories when there is a major transition in one or more trajectories. It is an effort to maintain continuity in the trajectory primarily affected and all the other spheres of life that were or will be disrupted.

Why maintain continuity? As mentioned earlier, disruptions are costly and individuals can lose much of the advantages they have accumulated in a role or status. Additionally, leaving other trajectories unattended and not coordinating these with the

newly adjusted trajectory can leave asynchronous trajectories which create various strains in the life course (Settersten, 2003). Maintaining biographical continuity is important to identity (Sackman and Wiggins, 2003).

Participants in this study demonstrated continuity work in many ways. One area was in coordinating the participant's employment to coordinate with changes in their partner's employment. Shana, Claire, Eileen and Chris all worked hard to find their own employment opportunities overseas either by coordinating a transfer before they left or looking for a new job once they arrived overseas because their partner was initially the person to receive the overseas assignment. If they did not coordinate new employment arrangements they would be left with the decision to either go overseas without a job and have a gap in their employment trajectory or stay back in the US and put extra effort into coordinating a relationship long distance which would be continuity work in their relationship trajectory.

Another area requiring continuity work was the area of children's education. Valerie, Mark, Betty and Tammy all spent time and effort making the transition to schools overseas a smooth transition for their children. Betty and Valerie coordinated the timing of when they moved overseas or repatriated in a way to create minimal disruption to the children's education. Tammy was unable to do this type of continuity work with the repatriation of her children back to the US and then had the labor of managing her children's difficult adjustment back to US school which may have been the strain caused by asynchronous trajectories between her husband's employment and the children's education.

One of the more obvious areas of continuity work would be maintaining one's work trajectory or managing their career. Several of the participants, Toby, Betty, Sue, Mark, Cliff, and Donna, all discussed the difficulty of returning to the US and finding a job. They needed to assess their skills and see how to create biographical continuity between their time abroad and what they would do for employment next. Betty discussed her thought process on this assessment in the following passage:

It's kind of an era of realizing that fully for myself and figuring out what I was going to do to get myself back on my feet professionally and still meet all [my daughters'] needs pretty much all on my own. So I started in, after a little bit of exploration, I debated whether to go back to try and start to teach a program in nutrition, which I would have had to do to start, or to teach or a master's in public health, or I was thinking library information science....

In this passage, Betty did the mental labor of assessing her current skills and experience and compared these to the current labor market. She determined that she would have to go back to teaching nutrition if she wanted to continue on the previous work trajectory. She lost the advantage of any prior experience and would need to make up for it. This required additional labor to redo. For a similar amount of labor, she could start a program in library science or public health and build on her prior education. She opted for a new area of education rather than repeat prior experience. In her evaluation of work options, she also considered how these choices would impact her ability to meet her daughters' needs, both caregiving and financial needs.

Similarly, Cliff took stock of where he was professionally after a year abroad as a contracted translator for the US military. Cliff returned to the US and enrolled in a graduate program while his wife continued with her career. "So I went back to school

and got my Masters of Art in Teaching. It was like a one-year intensive program.” The teaching degree helped him to change the focus of his career from translating foreign languages to teaching foreign languages. Cliff was able to maintain continuity of interest in languages and build a career that was more in demand than translator. He found a teaching position as a foreign language teacher and English as a second language teacher for grades K-12.

Continuity work examines what type of labor is required to maintain biographical continuity and then what needs to be done to achieve it. Participants in this study used several techniques to maintain continuity. As discussed earlier some participants successfully used bridging techniques to create easier paths for transition, some used combined states such as intern to try out new roles, for others it was careful planning of the transition so it coordinated with expected transitions such as the start of the school year. The literature on expats includes other techniques that people use to create continuity in their life when moving overseas such as decorating the new home with furnishings and art that reminds one of their national origin or home town. This is called the hyper nationalized home (Hindman, 2008). Although eleven of the interviews for this study were conducted in public places, nine were conducted in participant homes. Most of those homes, Robert, Tammy, Eileen, Toby, had mementos from participants’ time overseas thus creating biographical continuity.

For some participant such as Shana, Chris, Toby, the work involved in maintaining continuity in a specific trajectory was not worth the effort. For Shana and Chris it was not worth the effort to maintain a work trajectory when they repatriated back

to the US. Chris broke from her old work trajectory and became a full time mother. Shana had been in a combined state of part-time worker and full-time mother before transitioning so it was easier to let the part-time worker trajectory go in favor of full-time mother. Toby changed his career entirely when he returned to the US, although he did spend several months transitioning his former business to its new owner. These participants were willing to forfeit any advantages they had accumulated from the prior abandoned trajectory and try a new path.

Elder and Johnson (2003) note that “the greater the duration of status or social role, the more occupants are committed by others to remain in place. They become more embedded in the social environment” (p. 55). It must be hard for individuals to abandon a trajectory in which they have invested much time and identity.

I found it interesting that healthcare needs created one of the greatest obstacles to relocating overseas. Eileen, Claire, Shana and Abigail discussed their reluctance to move overseas due to the effort it would take to recreate the coordination of medical benefits they had already in place. They could not envision continuity of healthcare for themselves or family members and they worried about the amount of work it would take to try to establish a similar level of care. The effort to get their current system of healthcare coordinated took much effort and developed over time. They did not want to recreate it.

Given the current economic times and push to a contingent work force, the frequency and need for people to perform continuity work will probably increase significantly. With every lay off or change in employment, people will go through the

labor of reevaluating their work careers and employable skills. The onus will be on individuals to show unified continuity in employment if they want to benefit from the social rewards they have already accumulated. They also run the risk of accumulating more disadvantages with each lay off if they cannot successfully coordinate the impact of these changes on other areas of life. Changing employment may also lead to changed geographic location and further need to make an active effort to establish continuity and coordination with other life realms.

The domain of work is not the only area where the need for continuity labor can originate. Mills and Blossfield (2013) discuss the increase in blended families due to divorce. This type of rupture in a marital bond creates the need for extra continuity work by parents and children no longer living under the same roof. They also have the added labor of adjusting to new family members in the event of additional marriages.

A mobile society encourages the need for more continuity labor as people adjust to relocations and assess the relationships they will maintain and those they will let fade. Modern technology can aid in maintaining relationships that want to be maintained by using E-mail, social media and electronic video calling. However, the propensity for global corporations to contract hire and relocate people only on single status may create strain within families. The economic reality may force families to become creative in the type of continuity labor they do to maintain relationships. For example, they may use Face Time or Skype to permit an absent parent to watch a child's recital in real time.

Whether it is employment, education, personal relationships, geographic community or extended family, a more mobile flexible society will require additional

continuity work, reflexivity and assessment on the part of individuals who must assume the risks and responsibilities of change. This is only an exploratory study but I think it points to a need for further research into the area of continuity labor and the work people do to decide what trajectories to keep and which ones to start over.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY

The life course is becoming more contingent as the economy moves from the 20th century industrial economy to the 21st century service economy. The flexible, just-in-time nature of production and labor markets creates an environment where people need to perform more continuity work to maintain a sense of identity and personal biography.

In a customized life course, people are responsible for their own biography. Their lives' take on an individualized aspect and reflect the choices they have made. However, these choices are not made in a vacuum and choices are limited by a person's skills, education, gender, class, race, age and physical capabilities. Much of the developing research in the customization of the life course centers on entry into adulthood and focuses on the variation in sequencing of events.

Although what is considered the adult life course does not begin until someone has reached the age of majority or finished secondary school, this is just a social construct for the purpose of classifying an adult. The actual individual began their life almost two decades prior and has had much of their life course needs managed by parents as well as themselves. Finishing secondary school and college may be the starting point for research on adulthood but the individual had already started to develop interests and trajectories that they want to continue into adulthood. For participants in the study who went abroad after graduating college, there were six who distinctly wanted to continue

trajectories they had begun years prior. Terrance wanted to play basketball. Robert wanted to play music. Toby wanted to bike and Cliff, Lena and Brittany wanted to continue with their language studies. These were trajectories for interests they had that were part of their identity prior to graduating college. It was much easier to think about continuing these interests than deciding on what new trajectory to start as they searched for a career path. Amanda went abroad right after college but she already knew her career path and had invested much in the trajectory of musician. Accepting a job overseas was a way of broadening her options so she could continue on her career path in a field with very few placement options.

This study has revealed that the life course appears to permit customization in early adulthood when a person is single or with a partner. Participants showed a desire to customize their life course and have a unique biography. However, knowing what choices were available and how to obtain those choices was a very social act. Participants who went abroad right after college were largely influenced by their peers or other people. Robert and Toby had heard from friends that they could make easy money in Asia as English tutors. Terrance had heard about the possibility of playing basketball overseas from a friend and Amanda heard about the audition for an overseas position through her boyfriend. When Donna realized she couldn't afford divinity school, she thought about trying her hand at teaching because many of her friends were teaching. It wasn't until her mother suggested study abroad that she even considered the option. Relatives, as well as, friends had a hand in presenting options. Brittany did not consider teaching languages instead of social sciences until her father suggested that she consider

a specific job opening. Even Nancy took her husband's overseas job opportunity seriously because she had a nephew who was working successfully overseas.

Lena, Brittany, and Kara all mentioned the junior year abroad as if it was an expected stage of the life course. Kara did do the Jr. Year abroad but Lena and Brittany wanted to capture a missed opportunity. In short, the choices participants made were socially structured options for well-educated young Americans. That was why the choices for customization of the life course took the appearance of a Chinese menu, when and what choices were made were limited to socially appropriate life course combinations presented by peers, family and social institutions such as the university.

In Chapter Four, I discussed the way family continues to influence the life course by providing sanctions and rewards. It was the family, particularly parents, who managed the early years of the life course and then continued to interject advice or judgment as they feel appropriate. Family played a large role in instilling, maintaining and policing life course choices. As participants moved from single status, to a committed relationship, to parent, the ability to customize became more constrained by family and other social forces. In other words, the life course followed more of a standardized pattern during family formation and raising children. Parents voluntarily assumed a social obligation to raise children according to standardized life course patterns for children. The standardized life course was more predictable and created a stable environment for children.

Those participants who tried to deviate in creative ways were constrained by family, friends or greater social forces. For example, Donna wanted to limit the number

of children she had so she could also have a career that involved traveling but this was not what her husband envisioned as family life so they divorced. Another example that ended in divorce was Abigail's desire for an international career and her husband's expectation of a more stable, suburban lifestyle with job security.

A stable, predictable environment was conducive to child development. Chapter Five showed that parents went through a lot of effort to protect the life course of children. They wanted to provide advantages to the children and shield them from disadvantages. Cumulative advantage was a major force in the decision to go abroad, return home and undertake life course transitions. Families with children paid specific attention to interruptions in expected life course events for children and tried to mitigate the disruptive effects of transitions and loss of already acquired advantages. It was only when the advantages of going abroad outweighed the perceived loss of advantages from staying in the US that parents would consider moving overseas or entertaining other disruptions. Similarly, cumulative advantage was used to assess whether to transition to new life course trajectories. For example, if returning to the US would cause a person to lose significant cumulative advantages from work rather than look for a new job and feel the loss of cumulative advantage, it was considered more advantageous for that person to transition to a totally different life course trajectory such as full-time parent. This sense of divestment in a previous trajectory would frequently cause people to 'bundle' life course transitions and undertake many life course transitions at once such as relocating to the US, getting married and changing jobs all at once. Parents were keen to manage the cumulative advantages of their own lives and the lives of their children. They would

often put their children ahead of their own desires in life such as in the case where Toby came back to the US for his children's education despite thinking of his adopted Asian city at the "best place on Earth."

In Chapter Six, I explored transitions and strategies for maintaining continuity in personal biography. Participants in the study used combined states, bridging and bundling as adaptations to transitions. These transition strategies were used to either maintain continuity in a trajectory or decide to discard a trajectory and go in a different direction.

Continuity work was important to participants because it helped them to maintain personal identity. Sue shared that she had thought about her time overseas while she was mentally preparing for her interview the night before. She wasn't sure of the questions that would be asked of her or how the interview would be structured so she engaged in an existential type of life review of her time overseas. It is in the telling, retelling and review of personal narratives that people make sense of their personal biographies. This is what Sue shared with me when I asked at the end of our interview if there was anything else she would like to add that we hadn't explored.

Just one last thing. It may or may not be interesting or relevant but in the melding of cultures, like, one thing I found was...How am I still going to be me when I'm there [in Europe]? Who am I? Like...who am I fundamentally? That was what really freaked me out and that's why I didn't get involved in the mom's group so much but I did in the music stuff. Because to me that was my strongest identity as a musician and I would have freaked out. And then I immediately tried to find out how to [do my old job]. So I think from that perspective I was trying to maintain who I was at my core while I'm in a totally foreign place.

Sue was involved in continuity work, trying to decide which trajectories were essential to her identity and therefore, warranted attention. She also selected which ones were not as important to maintain and develop such as meeting other mothers in a playgroup where she did not view the much younger mothers as possible long term friends. Sue's identity as a musician and her professional identity were core traits she wanted to preserve but had difficulty maintaining in her new environment. In order to help Sue with the continuity work of maintaining her identity as musician, her husband invested some of their savings to build her a music room at his boyhood home. Ultimately, Sue could not reconcile the various broken trajectories enough to remain in Europe and saw coming back to the US as the only way to re-establish her identity.

As the economic structure moves from an industrial economy to a post-industrial, service economy the need to engage in continuity work becomes more common. The industrial economy promoted a standardized life course which was more predictable. Social institutions also reduced uncertainty and transaction costs by making life more predictable. The timing of normative social and work roles was an important part of the staged life course. When the life course becomes more fluid such as in a contingent workforce, life course stages may overlap and have a more random sequencing based on available options. Predictability goes down. This decrease in predictability may encourage people to postpone life course decisions until what is perceived as a more stable time for them. They may postpone marriage and opt for the combined state of cohabitation (Mills and Blossfeld, 2013). Rising uncertainty may also encourage people to put off raising children. The more children a couple has the greater need to coordinate

family member life courses and there is the possibility of neglecting the concerns of one over the needs of the rest of the family. The coordination of all family members is also continuity work and can be seen in the effort that divorced couples do to make their children more comfortable with the change in family status.

The uncertainty of a flexible economy may cause people to take precautionary steps to avoid financial difficulties. These steps could include 1) accumulating more skills and certifications to customize assets to job requirements; 2) maintain a two working person household; 3) live well below their means and maintain large emergency fund; 4) greater reliance on extended family groups; 5) sustain long periods of family separation while one adult is working in another geographic area; 6) expand global skills and resources such as multilingualism and dual citizenship; 7) maintain several versions of resume and continually update based on skill base; 8) have children attend home school or virtual school to facilitate frequent relocations; and 9) maintain social networks on the computer. People will need to be prepared to repackage, recreate and possibly repair their personal biographies. They may have much invested in an old trajectory and it gets harder to change as there becomes a longer history and social expectations of maintaining a role. People will weigh advantages and disadvantages to determine whether the work needed to repair a trajectory is worth the effort. If not they may change several trajectories at once, bundling, in order to arrive at a new role and new social connections. Continuity work includes assessing transferrable skills and seeing how they can be repackaged for a new situation.

Participants in the study assessed whether they wanted to do the labor necessary in other areas of life in order to maintain their romantic relationships. For example Eileen and Chris found jobs overseas rather than forego their relationship. Kara moved back to the US for her relationship and requested a job transfer.

Most of Chapter 5 discusses the way parents maintained continuity in their children's schooling before, after and during relocation. Parents also tried to maintain continuity in the children's leisure activities by signing the children up for activities they did in the US such as Girl Scouts or horseback riding. Many parents would not move abroad because they feared that there would not be continuity in their children's healthcare. Abigail noted that she would not accept a position overseas if the healthcare was not satisfactory.

In the literature on expats, the issue of housing continuity was discussed. Although it was not a big area of this research study there were signs that participants did try to create some continuity in their home to represent their time abroad. Toby was putting in an Asian bath and had an Asian garden in front of his home. Tammy had beautiful handmade European furniture and antiques in her home and Eileen had pictures of some of her favorite spots in Europe displayed in her home. The task of recreating "home" in a foreign land is usually left to the wife. This expected and invisible labor is more difficult to complete overseas. As Hindman (2008) astutely states, "Thus if it is male labor that brings the couple abroad, it is the woman's job to erase that move" (p. 42) More often than not it is the woman's job to do the continuity work and erase the effect of the move on all the areas of life.

Although many participants wanted to maintain continuity while they were raising children and needed a job for financial security, they did consider what it would be like to take some risks and get more creative in their life course once children had been launched. Parents looked forward to more room for life course customization. Kara, who was trained in finance, looked forward to a new career as a fashion designer and was looking into education programs in that area. Tammy, whose children had recently reached adulthood, was planning to move out of state and leave her children behind in order to start a new chapter in life alone with her husband. Her home was for sale at the time of the interview. Nancy and her husband discovered the benefits of life as a couple during their time in the Middle East and returned to the US with a new appreciation for time without grown children. Toby looked forward to returning to Asia for life as an expat once his children were ready for college. Betty was planning a new career for when her children finished high school. All these participants were not really planning for time in retirement. Claire, Tammy and Sue were still recovering from the economic turmoil of 2008 and saw total withdrawal from the workforce as a long way off. Participants were planning for time without children, a time when they could live their life based on what interested them. Moen (2006) has termed this time in life the Third Age.

There were nineteen Caucasian and one African-American participants in this study. All were well-educated. They enjoyed a privileged class due to their skills and education and were not limited to only seeking employment in a small geographic area. Due to their experience and expertise, they had many advantages and resources and even

had exposure to other cultures. Yet, with all this privilege and flexibility they still chose standardized life course options based on class and gender. If institutions primarily support the privilege class than maybe they saw only advantages to conforming to social expectations. Very few participants thought creatively about how to customize their life course beyond the standard patterns for their class. They reserved their creativity for later life. Those that tried to fashion a non-normative life became divorced.

The study is limited by its small size. Adding more participants may have shown greater diversity in life course strategies. It also is limited by its lack of racial diversity. It would be interesting to compare whether any issues arose based on race. As mentioned earlier, participants in the study were privileged. Seventeen out of twenty participants had in-tact marriages and 12 participants still had children at home. Thomas, Dworak and Kennedy (2013) put forth the idea that despite the variability in family life over the past decades, their survey data demonstrate that a 'standard' family is the goal for most people. They define the 'standard' family as 'a stable partnership with two or more children where all the children have the same parents. Twelve of the participants in this study were able to achieve this standard which may be reinforced because of their privileged status.

This study does suggest areas of further research. Rather than lumping adulthood into such a large age group in order to test whether the life course is becoming more standardized or customized, researchers could look at phases of the life courses, and study the period of time with children separately from time without children. Additionally, more studies could examine the changing nature of family to look at the

systems by which families instill and reproduce life course expectations. Major changes to the economy and the rise of just in time labor may have long term effects of family formation as Mills and Blossfeld (2013) suggest with individuals putting off commitments and parenthood due to volatile markets.

As more men stay home due to increasing periods of unemployment they may contribute more to domestic tasks. Will these men see a need to create places of support such as play groups and network to find information on raising children? Will they invest more time in their family and less on their job with the idea that family is a better investment of their time?

More research could be done to test the idea of cumulative advantage and disadvantage. Participants in this study were very skilled at accumulating skills and opportunities for their children. They thought globally and saw language proficiency, dual citizenship and multiculturalism as important skills for their children's future. If the just in time economy requires people to move more frequently or transition to new jobs, how will this affect an individual's ability to maintain a continuous biography? There are many types of continuity labor that people will have to perform. They will need to maintain continuity of social relationships and may use social media, letter, Skype or phone calls to keep in touch with those they care about. They must intentionally look for times and opportunities to keep in touch and schedule interactions. Maintaining career continuity will probably be the most obvious continuity labor people exert but this entails everything from reworking a resume to fit a job description to timing entry into the labor force for the best possible result. People will need to work on continuity of place and

may cart around picture, books or mementoes to establish home. Additionally, there is continuity of education. People will spend more time managing their own training and their children's education. Transitions require work if homeostasis is to be maintained in other area. Examining the types of labor and adjustments people make to get back on track or feeling like there is coordination in their multiple life spheres is another area for further research.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT LETTER

**Department of Sociology***Lake Shore Campus*

1032 West Sheridan Road | Chicago, Illinois 60660

Phone 773.508.3445 | Fax 773.508.7099

www.luc.edu/sociology

Victoria Russo, MGS
Doctoral Candidate
Loyola University Chicago
Department of Sociology
1032 West Sheridan
Chicago, IL 60660

Subject: Request for your assistance for a study on “Working Overseas”

Dear Sir or Madame:

Permit me to introduce myself, my name is Victoria Russo. I am a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago in the Department of Sociology. I am conducting a research project on the lives of people who have moved overseas for employment and have now returned home. The study is for a Ph.D. dissertation.

The friend who gave you this invitation thought you would enjoy participating in the study and talking to me about your experiences abroad. As a person who also has been an expat, I would like to hear about your time working overseas and how it fits in with your current experiences.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, you may call me at 773-344-6126 or respond to this letter via E-mail at vrusso@luc.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Victoria L. Russo, MGS

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Participant Name:

Phone Number:

E-Mail address:

Date of Interview:

Start Time:

Finish Time:

Thank you for taking the time out today to discuss your career and your life abroad. Before we begin I wanted to remind you that your answers will be confidential. Names and any identifying information will be changed to preserve your privacy. My notes are going to be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office and only I will be able to view them.

The goal of this study is to accurately describe the considerations people have when going abroad to work so there isn't a right or wrong response. You don't need to answer every question if a question makes you uncomfortable or you don't care to answer it, we will just pass over it and move on to the next one. As we discussed in the consent form, you also may stop the interview at any time. However, many people find the interviews to be a pleasant experience and a nice opportunity to recount their stories from abroad. Do you have any questions now before we begin?

Tell me about how you first became an expat? You can start anywhere you like.

What was it like when you first decided to go overseas?

How long did you expect to stay? What, if anything, changed it?

Did anyone discourage you?

Were there other options at the time, if so, how did this decision weigh with those other options?

Where did you get advice?

What type of support or preparation help did you receive from your employer? Job sponsored planning, cultural sensitivity, language training, tutoring

Were there any discussions about spouse's job? How did that go?

Had she/he considered staying behind?

Did you have a time frame in mind for your time overseas? How long was it?

How did you see this move fitting into your career?

How did you go about looking for housing?

Where in the process of going abroad had you looked into housing? Had you already signed a contract? Was it close to the time you would move?

How did your children enter into your deliberation?

Are there any caregiving concerns?

Describe any conversations you may have had about school.

How did you meet people?

Did you find any disconnect between this career decision and other aspects of your life?

What were some of your financial considerations? Taxes, Banking, Credit Cards, Maintaining Homestead?

Do you have emergency plans? Funeral, natural disaster, separation, security concerns?

How many international assignments have you had? How long in each place?

Did you have domestic help or drivers?

Favorite perks about living overseas?

How often did you see relatives, grandparents, parents, siblings?

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VITA

Victoria L. Russo was born in New York City, New York and was raised in Lindenhurst, New York. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from the State University of New York – Binghamton (1983) and worked in mental health for two years where she discovered an interest in helping elderly people. Dr. Russo continued her education at Miami University in Oxford, OH and received a Master's of Gerontological Studies degree (1987). Under the direction of Robert C. Atchley, she completed a thesis entitled, "Factors Influencing Administrator's Decisions About Early Retirement Incentive Plans in Ohio Public Universities and Community Colleges."

Before coming to Loyola University Chicago to complete a Ph.D. in Sociology, Russo worked for several years as a gerontologist, most notably as Certificate in Gerontology Coordinator and Program Manager for Temple University's Institute on Aging, Philadelphia, PA and as Program Director for the Alzheimer's Association, Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter, Philadelphia, PA. Presently, Dr. Russo lives in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is adjunct faculty for the MA in Gerontology On-line Program at Concordia University Chicago. This dissertation is submitted in fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at Loyola University Chicago (2014).

