

ABSTRACT

The maternal identity crisis of the empty nest phase is the primary subject area presented in this dissertation. The qualitative research described in this thesis is framed within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, in an approach grounded in phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy. A semi-structured interview and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis were used to analyse the material provided by 18 mothers of adult children.

The dissertation consists of the Introduction, five chapters, the Conclusion and a bibliography. The first chapter explores a social and individual perspective on motherhood. A variety of historical and present-day ways of understanding the maternal role are presented. Collective aspects of motherhood resonate with individualistic understandings of the parental function. The second chapter focuses on the question of identity crisis as a response to changing life circumstances. By experiencing a turning point, a person is usually confronted with an invitation to redefine the previously core beliefs. Undertaking the mental effort to find order in the newly created reality, the individual has a chance to rebuild the identity by using the potential of the biographical learning. Separation from the family home of adult children is understood as an area of change for mothers. In such a moment, a woman has an opportunity to undergo a crisis that will lead her to redefine the situation in the relationship with the offspring, as well as to gain experience and knowledge that enriches her entire lifelong development. This turning point of motherhood emerges as a learning field. The third chapter provides a description of the methodological aspects of my research. The fourth chapter presents the categories of maternal identities emerging from the narratives and the paths of experiencing the crisis of the empty nest phase explored in the interviews. The fifth chapter includes a review of the socio-cultural and andragogical contexts of the empty nest phase. The manuscript ends with a Conclusion that provides my research reflections and a synthetic summary of my study.

The issue discussed in the dissertation has particular relevance in the social sciences, especially in pedagogy placing the lifelong learning at the centre of interests. There is a research gap on the topic of the motherhood experience of the empty nest phase. The knowledge deficits are expected to be completed by this dissertation.

Keywords: identity, motherhood, empty nest, femininity, mothers of adult children, narratives, the biographical learning