

# Becoming Mature: A Longitudinal Research Study in Interpretive Sociology

*Partial funding thanks to Office of Research, Fielding Graduate University*

## ORIGINAL STUDY

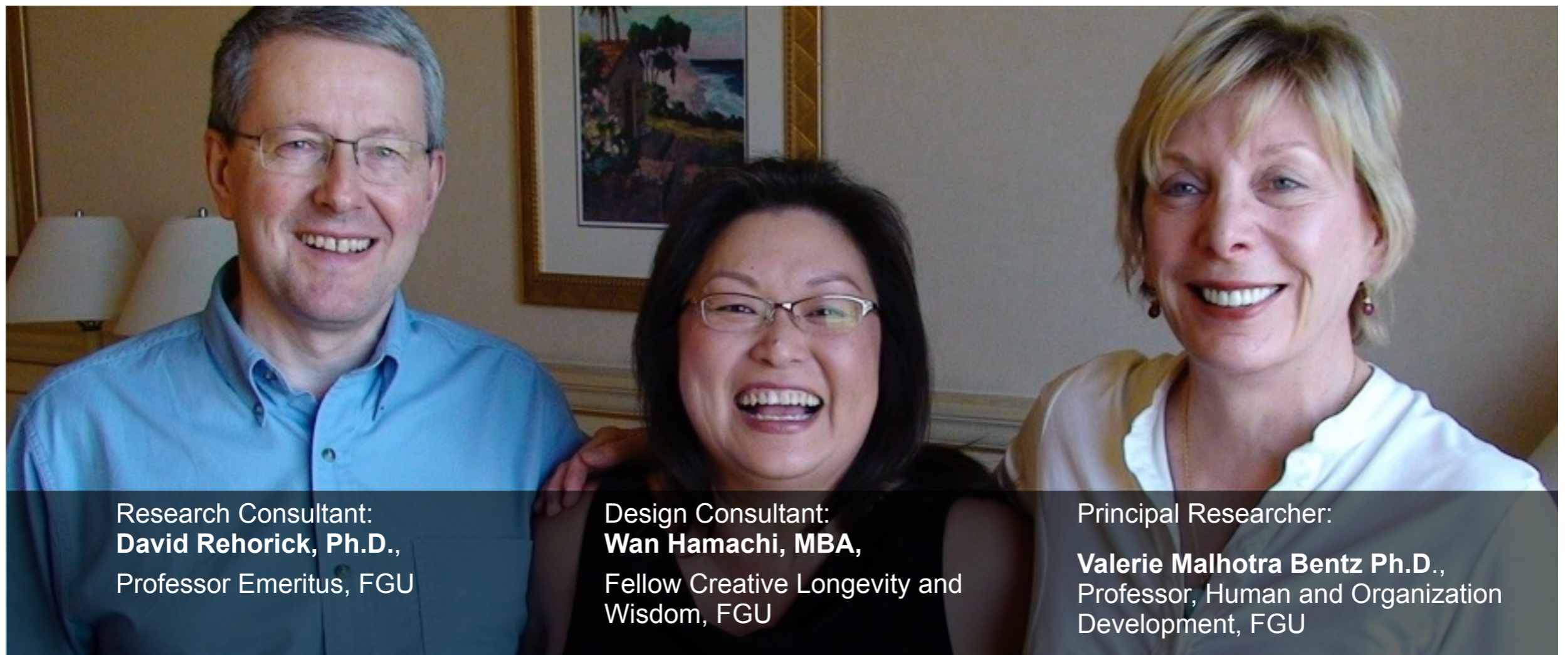
Becoming Mature:  
Childhood Ghosts and  
Spirits in Women's Lives

## FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Becoming Mature:  
30 Years Later

## REPLICATIVE STUDY

Becoming Mature:  
Childhood Ghosts and  
Spirits in Women's and  
Men's Lives

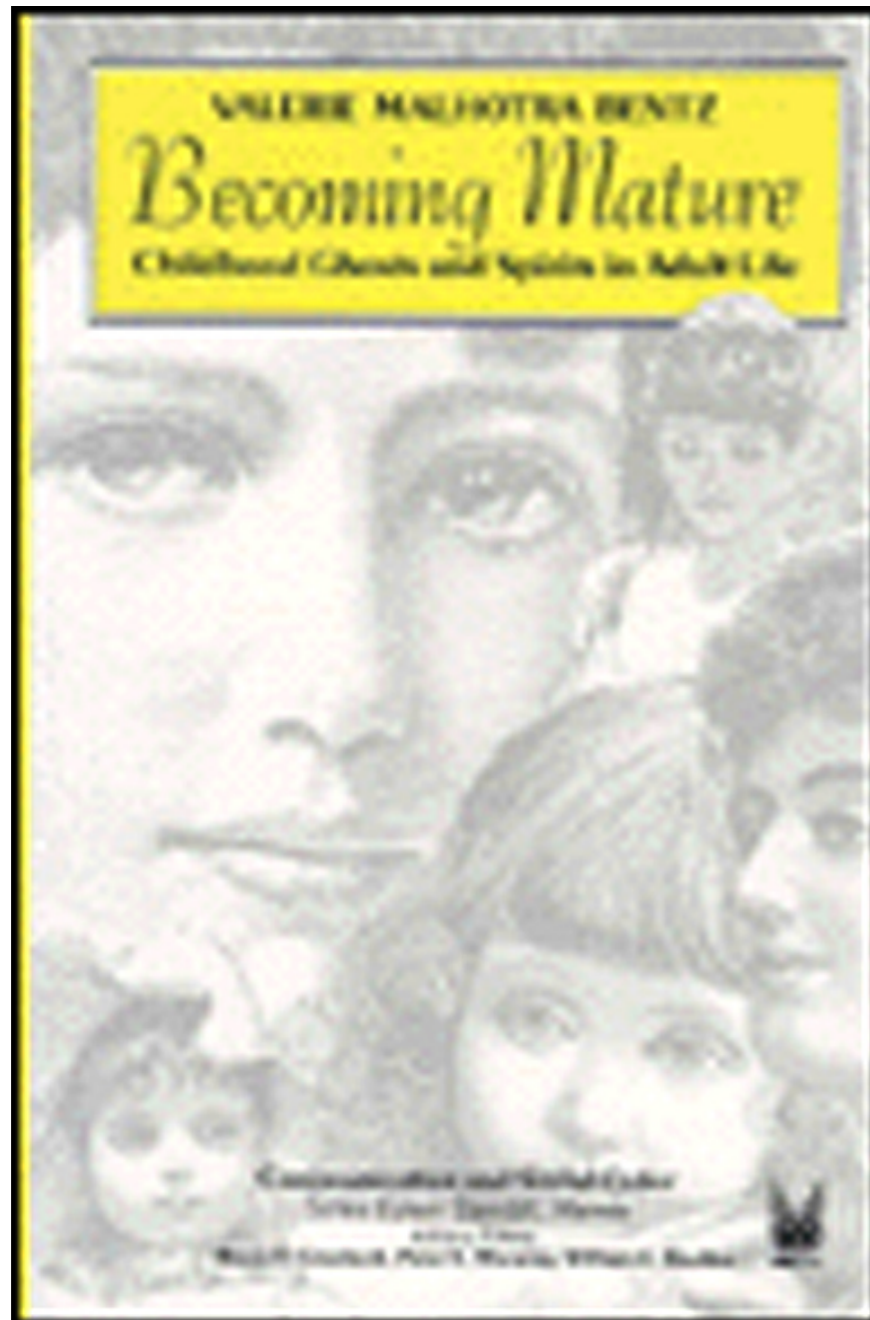


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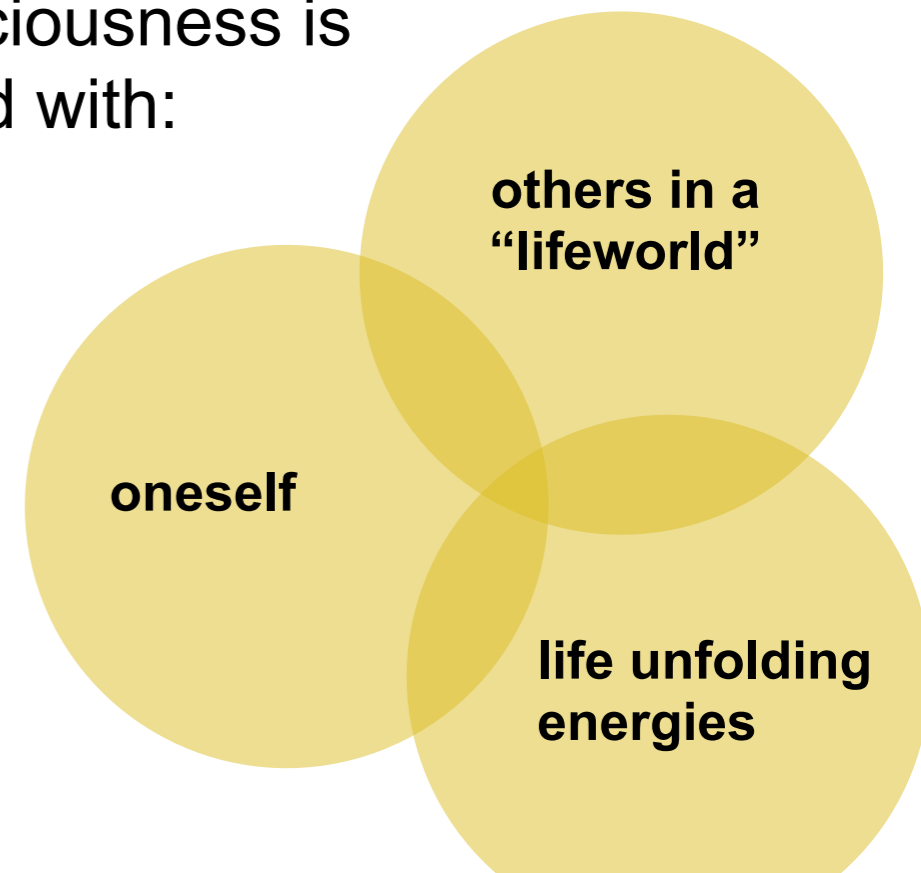
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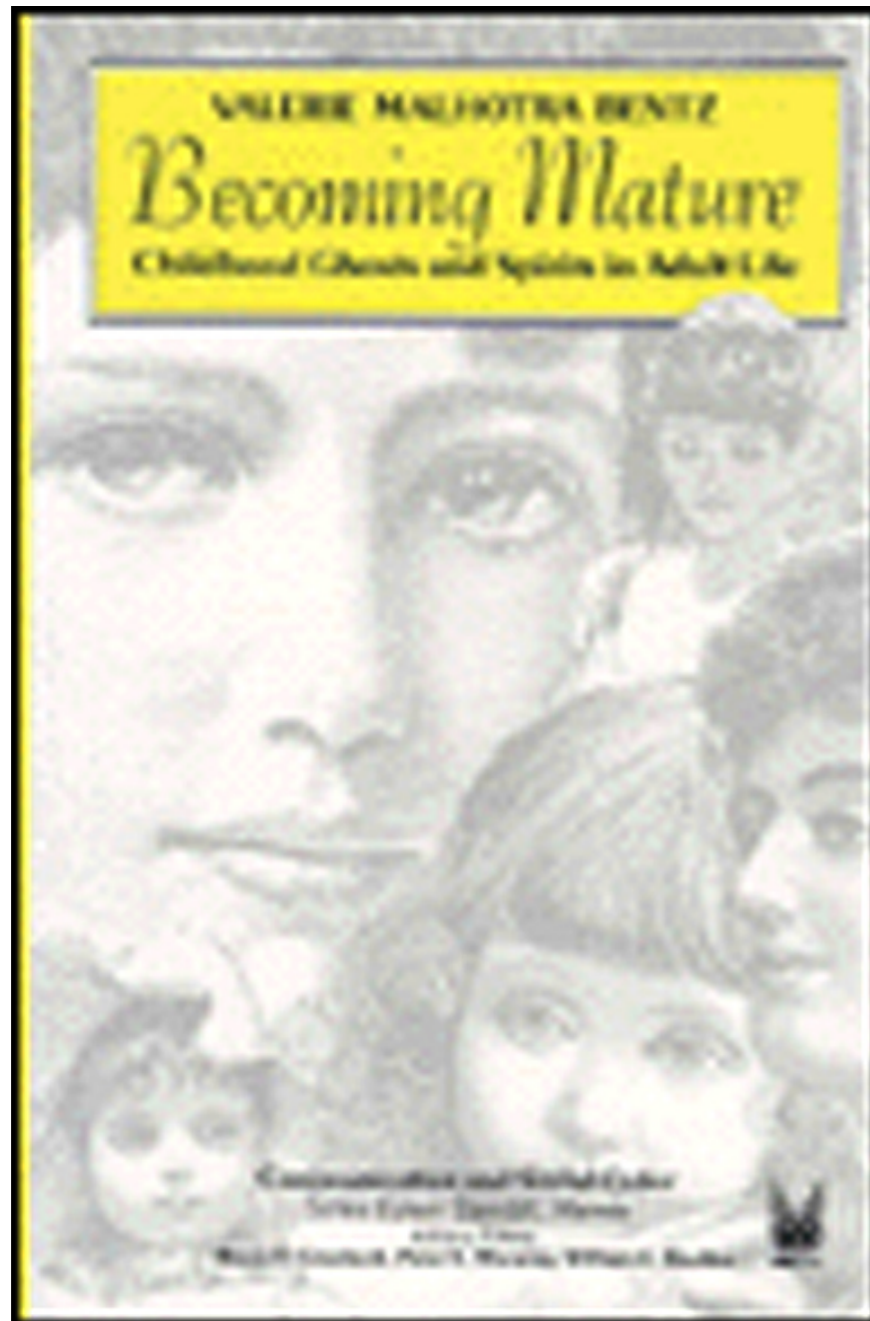
# Original Study / Becoming Mature: Childhood Ghosts and Spirits in Adult Women's Lives



- Published in 1989
- Questions stage theories of development based on biology and culture
- Is an interpretive sociology of being and becoming
- Argues that consciousness is constituted by and with:

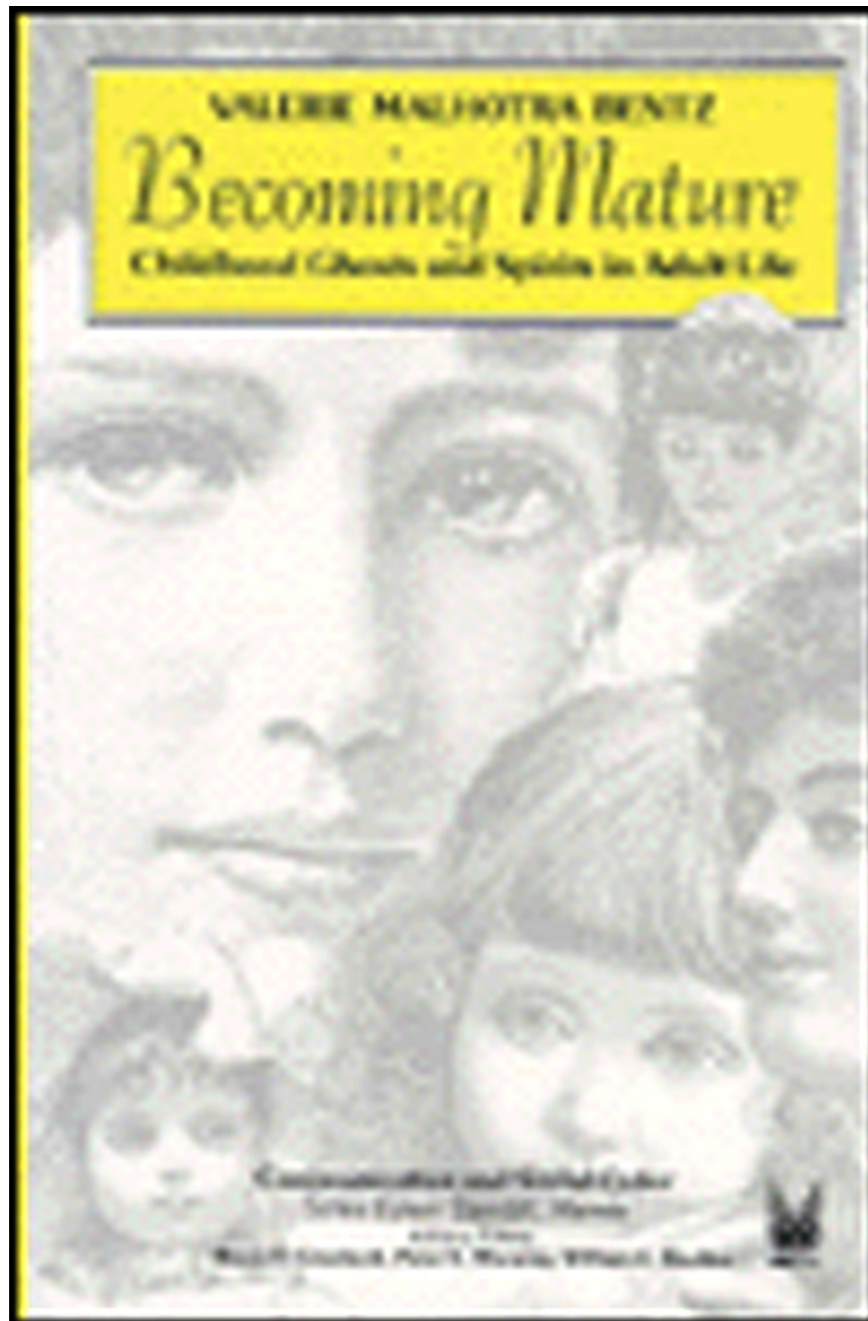


# Original Study (1982 – 1989) Participants



- 53 women participants
- Non-traditional university students, i.e., already had families and careers
- By all measures “successful” and “normal”
- Yet, 51 of the 53 suffered from the “ghosts” of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, poverty, or death of a parent in childhood
- *Note: Names and identities of research participants are disguised for anonymity.*

# Multiple Theory and Data Sources



## **Videotapes**

The beginning and ending of weekly discussions of small group meetings were audio taped for 3 months. They met in five separate small groups.

## **Autobiographies**

Using G.H. Mead's Theory of Self for each seven years of life, the age groupings for the autobiographies were: Preschool, age 6-12, age 13-18, age 19-25 and 26 plus.

## **Daily Journals**

The journals were kept for three months at the time they participated in the study.

## **Home Interaction**

These were audio taped at a dinner time.

## **Time Schedules**

How they used time for an entire week before and after entering the university to see how being students impacted their use of time.



# Abused, Deprived and Happy Childhood & Mature / Immature Parenting Practices

	ABUSED	DEPRIVED	HAPPY
Primary Bond	<i>fractured</i>	<i>Fractured / stable</i>	<i>stable</i>
Mirroring	<i>inadequate</i>	<i>inadequate</i>	<i>adequate</i>
Style of Parenting	<i>double / project</i>	<i>reversal / project</i>	<i>empathic</i>
Communicative Stance	<i>blaming</i>	<i>blaming / irrelevant / objectivistic</i>	<i>congruent</i>
Attributions	<i>negative</i>	<i>negative / mixed / positive</i>	<i>positive</i>
Expectations	<i>positive / mixed</i>	<i>negative / positive</i>	<i>positive</i>
Temporality	<i>stressful</i>	<i>stressful / meaningful</i>	<i>meaningful</i>
Defenses	<i>psychotic / immature</i>	<i>immature / neurotic</i>	<i>neurotic / mature</i>
Dramatic Form	<i>tragic</i>	<i>tragic / comic</i>	<i>comic / tragic</i>
Moral Development	<i>survival / goodness</i>	<i>goodness / survival</i>	<i>goodness / care</i>
Ethical Level	<i>resent / indulgence</i>	<i>self control / art</i>	<i>artistry / love</i>
Self Integration	<i>divided</i>	<i>divided</i>	<i>integrated</i>



# Immature and Mature Parent-Child Relationships

RELATIONSHIP ELEMENTS	IMMATURE	MATURE
Primary Bond <i>Heidegger; Huertas-Jorda; Schutz</i>	Fractured	Continual and Stimulating
Time / Temporality <i>Heidegger; Schutz</i>	Unauthentic / Stressful	Authentic / Meaningful
Parent's Relationship to Child <i>Demaus</i>	Projective, Reversal, Double Image	Empathic
Mirroring <i>Miller</i>	Narcissistic Pride, Vicious Cycle of Contempt	Adequate
Attributions & Expectations of Significant Others <i>Mead</i>	Negative or Confused	Positive, Clear
Communicative Environment <i>Habermas</i>	Power-Saturated	Competent
Parent-Child Communication <i>Satir</i>	Blaming, Placating, Irrelevant, Objectivistic	Congruent



# Immature and Mature Parent-Child Relationships (continued)

RELATIONSHIP ELEMENTS	IMMATURE	MATURE
Model of Dramatic Action <i>Duncan</i>	Tragic, Scapegoating	Comic
Moral Self <i>Gilligan</i>	Survival, Goodness	Caring
Defense Mechanisms of Significant Others & Society <i>Vaillant</i>	Psychotic, Immature, Neurotic	Mature
Ethical Self <i>Weinstein</i>	Resentment and Self-Indulgence	Self-Control, Artistry and Love
Emotions and Self <i>Denzin</i>	Divided	Integrated

# Original Study / Christy Age 29: Ghosts of Physical and Sexual Abuse

Working on Master's degree, single mother, five year old daughter

Retired from military, employed as manager of store.

## GHOSTS

Sexual and verbal abuse from adoptive father

Physical abuse from mother who used metal tipped belt

Christy defended younger sister and brothers from mother

Boys (natural children from parents in military family) were favored.

Age 12 decided to fight back with mother, threw mother through a wall.

Age 16 left home to escape abuse.

In military training, inflicted self abuse by marching with broken foot to please sadistic sergeant.

## SPIRITS

In school, supporting self and five year old daughter, no signs of abusing daughter, sympathetic affect to other participants.



# Follow-up Study / Christy Age 59: Will Stomp on Mother's Grave, but Christy Mature and Nurturing

Had been in best relationship of life for ten years with a woman.

(She is a lesbian, but said her family was not aware for much of her life.)

Lives happily alone with three cats and dog.

## GHOSTS

Wealthy father refused to help her when she lost her job.

Father continues verbal abuse "I knew you wouldn't amount to anything."

Christy cried a lot recounting their continued indifference.

Father will not discuss sexual abuse.

She plans to stomp on her mother's grave when she dies.

## SPIRITS


Christy sees her kind deceased grandparents who visit her.

She says her granddaughter sees them also.

Volunteers for to help veterans, is helpful to neighbors.

Mature relationship with own daughter and granddaughter.

# Original Study / Rebecca Age 46: Ghosts of Sexual and Physical Abuse

A light gray silhouette of a woman in a business suit, standing with her hands on her hips. The silhouette is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the text.

Successful  
businesswoman

## GHOSTS

Severely physically abused by stepfather as child for ten years until left home at age 16, lived with pastor and wife.

Boarded by mother as young child so mother could obtain work, emotionally abandoned by mother.

Mother pushed through glass door by stepfather when she was child.

Reversal parenting, mother looked to her for advice.

Married church elder, 27 years her senior; took care of him.

Severe relationship with church, strict fundamentalists.

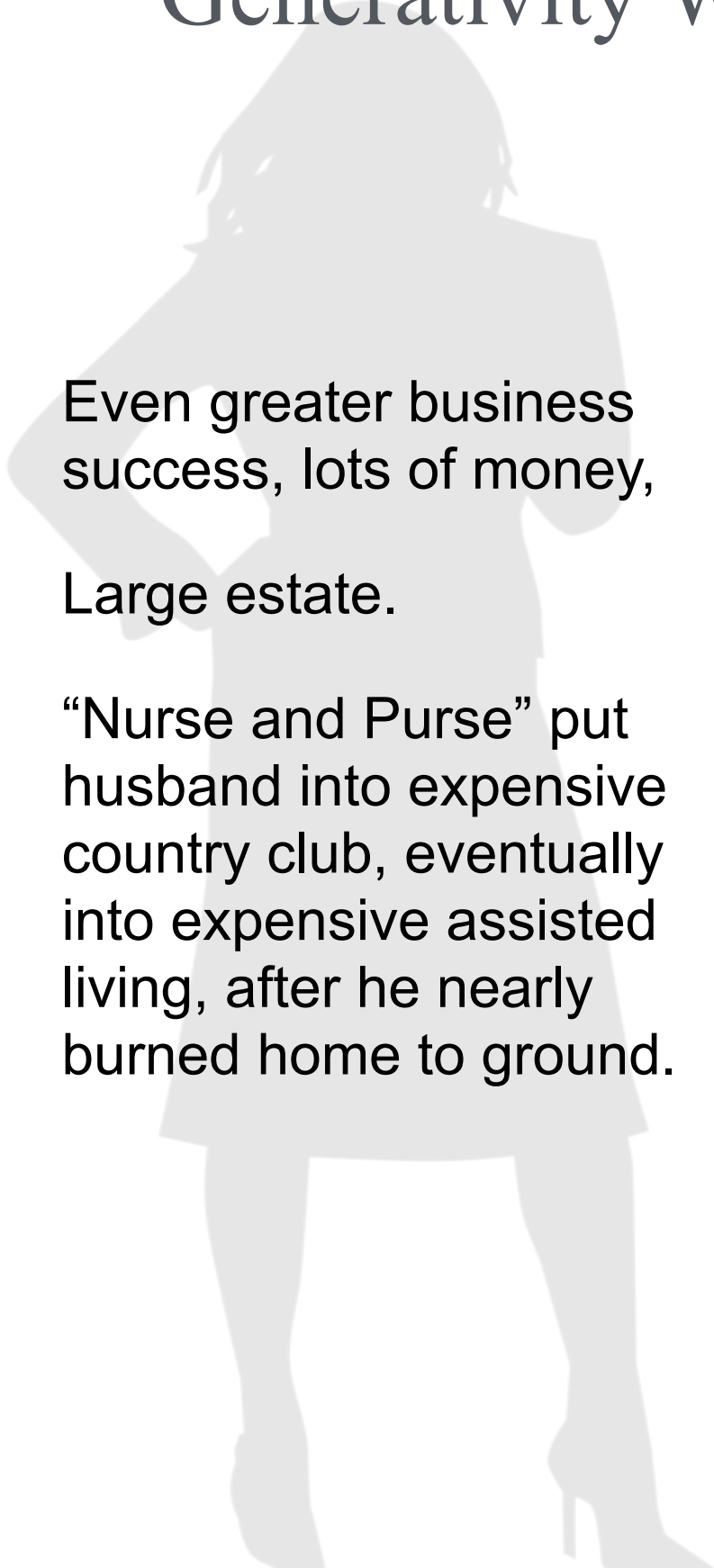
Developed “friendship” with work partner male, insists “nothing wrong—sexual” about it.

Tendency to brag about herself.

## SPIRITS

Hard work ethic led to outstanding success in business.

# Follow-up Study / Rebecca Age 76: Generativity While Ghosts Still Haunt



Even greater business success, lots of money, Large estate.

“Nurse and Purse” put husband into expensive country club, eventually into expensive assisted living, after he nearly burned home to ground.

## GHOSTS

Developed relationship with man as “friend” “nothing dirty” “not sexual”

Spirit of strength, independence

Survived breast cancer, refused prescribed medicines but had successful mastectomy and chemotherapy.

Some conflicting information—tendency to brag.

Angry about anyone getting anything for free.

Still angry about stepfather keeping her mother from having her on her lap.

Account of being displayed naked by mother to stepfather at age 13; still hurts.

## SPIRITS

Drive to work hard, succeed. Started new business using artistic photography to sell pictures to clients, internet marketing.

Attends local Baptist church but not as a member.

Contributes to alma mater.

Proud that she is not “frumpy” at her age.

# Original Study / Linda Age 22: Ghosts of Neglect and Rape by Stranger

Could only vaguely remember being in research group.

Felt alienated at university, but went because advised to go.

Became occupational therapist.

GHOSTS of “Neglect-Absent father, Perfectionist Mother”  
Father MD., absent as traveling Dr. in Northern Minnesota, remote, constantly criticized her. (“I was some color that didn’t show up on his radar.”)

Older siblings preferred.

Mother, homemaker, saw all in life as duty, no matter how joyless. But provided support when needed.

Raped by stranger as young teenager. Never reported or spoken of until post university experience. Felt her fault. PTSD.

## SPIRITS

Grandfather provided affection though lived in another town. Image of God the Father as kind grandfather.

8th grade teacher provided poetry for her to read, positive attributions and expectations

Nature and the forest provided inspiration.

She eventually finished her degree but suffered from an auto accident.

The insurance payment from the accident allowed her to purchase some land in a northern remote community.

## Follow-up Study / Linda Age 52:

Married, has become a minister and artist two sons,  
husband echoes absent father

Married man ten years older  
who was studying for  
priesthood.

He had been a part of an  
outdoor camping nature  
ministry experience that she  
loved to participate in.

They married and both  
became Protestant ministers  
in for a small town church in  
the Northern Midwest.

They had two sons, who she  
is proud of because of their  
values, intelligence.

### GHOSTS

Her husband does not pay close attention to her emotionally  
and is not interested in her art work.

She does all of the housework and childcare plus her work  
as a minister and artist. (Ghost of distant father.)

### SPIRITS

Love of nature and art and caring self. She and her spouse  
continue to minister to this remote community despite  
making low salaries and having to take on outside  
employment to make ends meet. Husband drives school  
bus, she believes in caring for the living as opposed to  
looking towards the afterlife.

# Original Study / Rhonda Age 36: Mature Parents; Love and Caring Despite Life's Challenges

Had mature, loving  
parents, happy childhood.

Two children, recently  
divorced.

Husband was immature, traveled a lot, had affairs.

Husband rarely home except on weekends when he dictated  
wants and needs.

He vacillated about divorce until she took strong stance for  
him to leave.

Driven away from desire to be engineer by male counselor.

## GHOSTS

No significant childhood “ghosts”.

## SPIRITS

Spirit of caring parents and good relationship with nuns  
growing up.

Catholic church sustained her.

Disappointing dating situation post divorce: Men expected  
sex upon first date; assumed divorced woman needed sex.



# Follow-up Study / Rhonda Age 66: Passing on Mature Caring

Caring relationship with students and colleagues at job she loved as school nurse.

Retired to become active grandmother.

Long-term deep friendship with man (non-sexual) who attended grandchildren's events with her.

Changed from Catholic to other Christian denomination where she could explore her own viewpoints more readily.

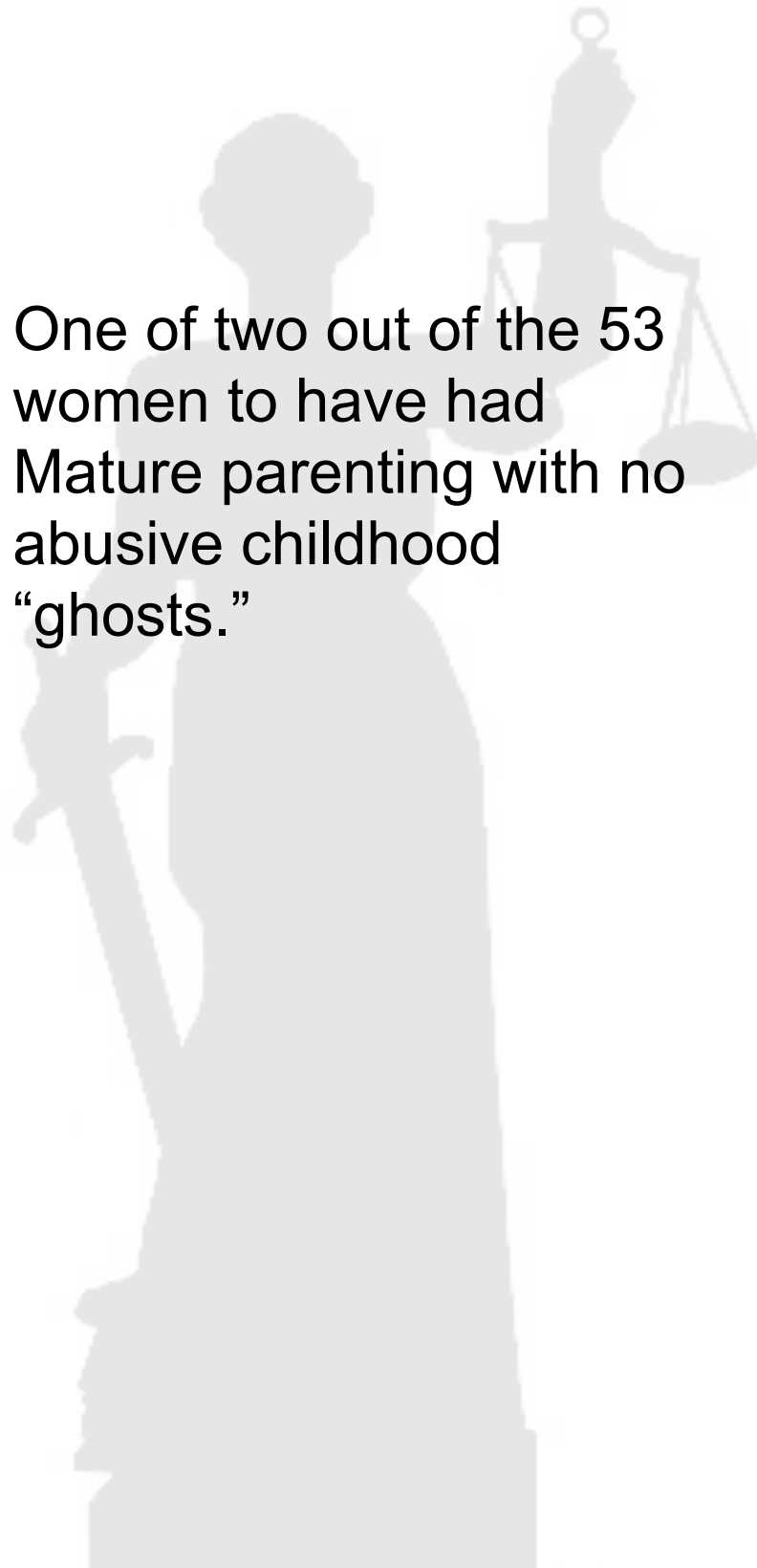
## GHOSTS

Possible ghost: She would like a warm relationship where she could cuddle with someone.

She wonders if she may not really be lesbian.



# Original Study / Pam Age 37: Challenges of Divorce; Early Forced Marriage



One of two out of the 53 women to have had Mature parenting with no abusive childhood “ghosts.”

As oldest of seven took sister role to mother, cared for siblings.

Got pregnant senior year in high school, pressured by husband to take care of him. Felt shame, left town with husband. Worked hard to raise three children to teen years.

At age 37 Husband brought home his pregnant girlfriend (their daughter’s age) to live with them.


A good therapist and supportive university environment and boss helped her turn the corner. She came to realize she had always succumbed to male privilege.

A hard worker she was an excellent student, becoming valedictorian of graduating class.

Despite extreme pain asked husband to leave, got car, job. Provided strong supportive home for her children.



# Follow-up Study / Pam Age 67: Thriving as Retired Legal Partner



She got a degree from a prestigious law school.

This led to her becoming the first woman partner in her law firm.

Contributed to society through work on environmentally friendly energy.

Developed relationship with a responsible, caring man who she later married.

She continued her “Spirit” of hard work.

Continued supportive relationship with children, setting firm boundaries.

Relationship with her mother deepened, purchased home for her in older years, moved nearby when she retired.

Lots of meaningful extended family gatherings.

Continued consulting service at firm.

Mature acceptance of unresolved “religious” difference with husband (she Catholic, he Protestant)

Mature sense of afterlife, no fear of death.



# Maturity of All, Despite Ghosts

All five of the women, exhibited aspects of maturity discussed in:



*George Vaillant, M.D.*

**George Vaillant**  
*Aging Well*

**Immature Defenses:**  
Projection, dissociation,  
fantasy, hypochondriasis,  
passive aggression, acting  
out.

**Mature Defenses:**

Altruism, suppression,  
sublimation, humor,  
anticipation.

**Michael Weinstein**  
*Finite Perfection:  
Reflections on Virtue*

Self-control, Artistry and  
Love.

**Bernard Boelen**  
*Personal Maturity*

Dialogue with the child  
within, not complete, fixed  
or determined, not  
perfectionistic.



# Replicative Study – In Process

## Participants

- Two separate groups of Fielding Graduate University Doctoral Students: 12 men; 12 women.
- Provided autobiographies for ages preschool, age 6-12, age 13-18, 19-15, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, and over.
- Kept daily journals for 3 months.
- Participated in recorded discussion with group of experiences from each age.

## Data Analysis Framework

- Compared men's and women's ghosts and spirits at each age of life.
- Compare these findings with findings about women 30 years ago.

## Preliminary Findings

- Men had severe ghosts from childhood as did women. However, men seem to be more stoical about them and less likely to share the burden.
- Both women and men had severe ghosts from childhood as well as welcome spirits.



# Call for Research Assistants

## **Qualifications of Research Assistants**

Fielding doctoral student or alum; background in developmental theory helpful.

## **Tasks**

Review and analyze autobiographies, journals, recordings and transcripts. Assist in making transcripts of recordings.

## **Benefits**

May be done for KA work or for a dissertation.

Contact [vbentz@fielding.edu](mailto:vbentz@fielding.edu)