

**Returning Home:
An Integral Research Study of Professional Women's
Transition to Retirement**

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Introduction

What is home? How do we describe home personally, culturally and socially? How does our sense of home affect our behavior, our relationships, our being in the world? Our experience of home reaches back to early childhood and forward into our future dreams, as well as being rooted in every moment. Home allows for many voices and perspectives—at home in my self, home as hearth and community, and home as expansive as our homeland, home world, or universe.

The research reported on here investigates this rich texture with the question: How does the transition to retirement influence the meaning of home? This is especially current for me because I have changed homes three times in the past six months, moving from full-time professional work to semi-retirement. A number of my women friends have also had changes in their home circumstances over a similar period and for similar reasons. I have noticed the influence of these changes on my own feelings about home. I have wondered if this is true for others in my circle as well.

This paper presents the results of a pilot research project on the topic of the changing meanings associated with the concept of home as a result of the transition from full-time professional work to retirement. I write the paper in the context of a postgraduate course in Integral Theory at John F. Kennedy University in California. The inquiry has taken place over the eleven weeks of a course in Integral Research and is written as a final course assignment. I have chosen this topic for the final project because I am interested in how people feel about themselves, their primary relationships, and the places they call home as they move from being in the work world to being retired. To explore this theme, I have designed a research project involving my own experience and that of a group of six women friends I have known for over three decades, all of whom are experiencing similar changes in making late career-stage transitions.

Although my interest is not limited to women's perspectives, the pilot project has been conducted with women because I feel we have a special connection with home, particularly in this generation of baby boom women who have pioneered the dual roles of homemaking and full-time paid work. As one of these women, I have a personal interest in this topic as well. I am in the process of moving from years of intense work and travel in the corporate world to a much-reduced emphasis on work and much more time spent at

home. This transition has something of a return in it. Like many of my contemporaries, I began adulthood with the expectation I would be primarily a homemaker. While that is been true, it is a partial picture. I have also been a teacher, worker, manager, consultant, coach, all roles outside the home in paid employment. Now, I find myself returning home to really see it, and myself in it, for the first time in decades.

The broader importance of this topic is that it will have an impact on the whole group of women in the North American baby boom generation as we begin to retire back into our homes over the next twenty years. My assumption in selecting this topic is that interest in home environments has received much less attention in professional circles than work environments. In fact, a university database search unearthed nothing written on the subject from this point of view (Joan Bewley, Personal Communication, November 2010). Professional women have joined the workforce and have put their energy into their work environments, into competing with their male counterparts and making their mark in the world beyond the home. Women's attention at home has primarily been focused on increasing the efficiency of housework and childcare in order to manage the complexity of their lives. Now, as this demographic leaves the workforce and returns home, the meaning of home reasserts itself. What role will home play in this next life chapter? How will the dynamics of home change with changing roles and interests? Who am I when I am not a professional woman? Where am I at home?

The Research Design

I have used mixed-methods research to explore the theme of the meaning of home in the transition to retirement. Since the concept of home is so thoroughly embedded in all three dimensions of reality—first, second and third person—it is important to include these perspectives in the research design. By using a variety of methods, I am able to reflect more of the richness of the concept of home in my findings (Creswell, & Clark, 2011). The particular form of mixed-methods research I am using is Integral Research, based on Integral Theory's Integral Methodological Pluralism (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2006). Calling upon the eight zones of Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP), each disclosing a unique view of the world, I have chosen six domains for examination, including all three dimensions of reality in the design.

Therefore, the purpose of this concurrent mixed-methods study is to better understand the research problem by converging both qualitative and quantitative data through the use of first-, second-, and third-person methods. In the study, two modes of first-, second-, and third-person inquiry are used to investigate how the transition to retirement influences the meaning of home. To begin with a first-person perspective, phenomenological analysis (IMP Zone 1) is used to explore the connection between the research topic and myself as the researcher. Here, I engage in reflection and journaling to investigate my own experience of the meaning of home. Then the Leadership Development Framework (Cook-Greuter, 2004) is used to expose the limits and strengths I bring as the researcher to the inquiry. This structural assessment (IMP Zone 2) focuses on interpreting my scores on the Sentence Completion Test (SCTi), noticing the patterns that may influence my perspectives on home.

At the same time, from a second-person perspective, the changing meaning of home is investigated through an interview with one of my women friends and her partner, employing hermeneutic techniques (IMP Zone 3). Group story telling is also used to engage these women friends in reflecting on their experiences of home as a changing concept. Together, we analyze our similar and different experiences, engaging in an ethnomethodological evaluation (IMP Zone 4) of our observations and insights and making sense of them collectively.

Finally, from a third person perspective, the research consists of conducting a brief 10-question empirical survey (IMP Zone 6) based on the results thus far, asking the women to further evaluate the insights from our collective inquiry to test and refine the themes we have created. To complete the data gathering, I use systems theory (IMP Zone 8) to analyze the impact of the socioeconomic system on the meaning of home, conducting a literature review of previous studies.

The paper then reflects on the results of the six methodologies to offer a meta-perspective on the question of how the transition to retirement influences the meaning of home. As a pilot project, these results are tentative, intended to inform subsequent research on the topic in light of new understanding. I will share these findings with the women involved in the study as a way of culminating this phase of the research and generating ideas for what is next.

First Person Section

*Within you there is a stillness and a sanctuary
to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself.*
Hermann Hesse (2002)

First-person methodologies focus on the individual interior aspects of the phenomenon of study, the person's thoughts, feelings, experiences and intentions. These methodologies are concerned with subjective perspectives. In this section, I explore the two zones of subjective experience, Phenomenology, and Structuralism. For the phenomenological analysis (Zone 1), I have used autobiographical description as a method of connecting me as the researcher to the research topic. I inquire into my own subjective experience of home. The question in this inquiry is, *How does the transition to retirement influence the meaning of home for me?* For the structural analysis (Zone 2), I have used a self-assessment description as a method of investigating the patterns in my own awareness that may affect my research. The question in this inquiry is, *How does the structure of my own awareness impact my research of the meaning of home at this time of life?*

For each of these two methods, I look first at the research design, then the themes from the data generated, and finally discuss implications and insights.

Phenomenology: Autobiographical Description

Research Design

As a means of understanding my subjective experience of the changing meaning of home for me, autobiographical description allows me to inquire into my own thoughts, feelings, memories, associations, biases and judgments. By describing my own experience, I can bring my internal subjective perspectives into awareness in order to assess them in relation to the research I am conducting. As Doris Riemen (1998) points out:

Phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to state his or her assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation and then bracket or suspend these preconceptions in order to fully understand the experience of the subject and not impose an a priori hypothesis (p. 277).

Autobiographical description is well suited to a phenomenological inquiry into the meaning of home because I have a lifetime of experience with homes from my earliest childhood memories to my recent changes in home location. I want to bring these experiences into the research as an aspect of what Hanson and Klimo (1998) call, “the indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual and his or her world” (p. 206), through which my own meanings of home emerge. And I also want to bracket them, in the sense of holding them aside, so that I can openly inquire into other perspectives without unknowingly imposing upon them.

The specific research design I have used is the creation of a stream of consciousness journal over an 8 week period while a student in a course in Integral Research. I began each session with a 10-minute silent meditation to get grounded. I then spent one hour in a journal writing session reflecting on the meaning of home in the past week, focusing particularly on the influence of my changing life circumstances in moving from full-time work to quasi-retirement as well as changing geographic locations. During this period, I have also left my home in Canada, stored my furniture and belongings, and traveled extensively. As a result, I completed these journal sessions in a variety of locations.

At the end of the eight weeks, I printed my 20-page journal to code it for themes by identifying recurring ideas, issues, or aspects. I chose a number of recurring categories which patterned the data. For example, divesting, detaching, separation, loss, transition, were categories repeating through the text, along with the excitement and anticipation. Conversations and connections with friends and family also re-occurred through the journal with stories of rituals, play, routines, gatherings and the nostalgia and sadness of leaving the familiar.

Data Analysis

As I mused over these categories and the overarching ideas they represented, I realized they all seemed to fit within three themes relating to opposites: arrival and departure; being and doing; isolation and connection. In my journal, I wrote, “I am more balanced between being and doing, between individual and collective, between inside and outside. I am both/and” (p. 19). Each of these seemingly contradictory themes highlights

an aspect of my mixed thinkings and feelings as I live through my current life and location changes.

During the eight weeks I kept my journal, I actually lived in seven different homes, my own and those of friends and family. No wonder I had sense of arrival and departure! I packed all my belongings into a 'pod', shipped them across the country, and I am in a Canadian context at least, homeless. I have given away a library of books and truckloads of furnishings to family and friends, and said goodbye. At the end of the first week, my journal captured these mixed feelings. I wrote, "Wistful, nostalgic, detaching, excited, sad, anticipatory, divesting, lightening, reminiscing, sense of place, temporariness, letting go, looking forward and back, misty, proud, sorry, happy" (p. 5).

Over the next few weeks, my journal is full of arriving and departing, to and from the homes of friends and family, with travel across the country and through many airports in between. For example, "I went to bed feeling very sad about leaving my son and grandson" (p. 12) and "Thursday we spent mostly on planes and in Denver airport" (p. 16). I spent part of the time with my husband and part on my own or bunking in with friends. I wrote, "It was fun to share a room with my close friend who had already moved in" (p. 14) and "We took the ferry over and established me in the studio, down the path from the main house" (p. 8).

On the theme of being and doing I wrote, "I am finding a greater need to go within, to be still, to just be, rather than to be tearing from one place to another, one adventure to another, with little time for sinking into the experience" (p. 19). I also wrote of my home outside Canada, "This is a place to BE, not DO. When I am here, I am almost forced to be, because there isn't much else to distract me" (p. 18). And of the next chapter of my life, "this is my spiritual journey, to explore my inner recesses, to bring them to light and ponder on them, to see where I might go or who I might be next, fearlessly and with conviction" (p. 20).

My journal reflections record numerous connections with friends, family and colleagues over the eight weeks but also a sense of isolation, of separation and loss. I wrote of one set of Canadian friends, "They have been such great friends through the summer, have been so helpful to us and we will miss them a lot" (p. 7). And another couple, "We went into town for dinner and to say goodbye. I am struck by how they have

welcomed us into their hearts and home. It is one of the many blessings of this place and I love it and will miss it and them” (p. 14). Describing our departure from our home in Canada, I wrote, “These are all little moments, little presences, that tell me I am home, that I feel love and connection and emotion about this place and myself in it. But as I stand on the threshold about to close the door for the last time, I am not really leaving home but rather it feels as though home has left the building” (p. 15).

Discussion

It is perhaps not surprising that in a time of transition, feelings are mixed and contradictions abound. However, I found the consistent paradoxical themes in the journal striking. “I am both/and.” In this pilot project, I have not been able to investigate in any depth whether the other women in my study have had these same feelings of being in contradiction, of feeling betwixt and between as they make the transition from full-time professional work outside the home to part-time or no outside work. This is an aspect of the findings I would want to add to any further inquiry into this topic.

I was also surprised by the extent of what I might call the “other-ness” in my journal, the intersubjective emphasis. That is, there was a significant focus on friends and family, on conversations and connections, on ritual occasions, on the importance of relationships. This can partly be attributed to the multiple homes I occupied during the period but also speaks to the importance of second-person relationships in feeling at home. It gave me a kind of continuity without place, a sense of belonging that was not contingent on having a place to call home, but rather having those around me make me feel at home wherever I was located. I felt this particularly keenly when I wrote, “home has left the building”, the feeling that home is something of an empty shell without the artifacts that connect it to treasured memories of people and events.

Of the insights I take away from the autobiographical description and analysis, the most transformative for me is the realization that for home to be meaningful it must have a past, present and future connection. Without all three being present, the idea of home loses its emotional pull. For example, the artifacts described in the previous paragraph provide a sense of the past, of cherished memories. The hopes and dreams of future occasions with loved ones provide a sense of continuity over time. And the “little moments, little presences” in the now provide the momentary joy of being home. I feel a

shift in understanding as a result of this insight and wonder if others might be influenced by it too. It is similar to seeing home in first, second and third person—a shift in frame that has changed the way I understand the idea of home. These unfolding phenomenological perspectives are interwoven in the research that follows, part of the intricate web of observer and observed.

Structuralism: Sentence Completion Test

Research Design

Structuralism allows me to analyze the structure of my own awareness in order to understand how my consciousness may shape the research project. How does my own awareness about home shape the meanings I attribute to it and those I most clearly identify with in others? What do I particularly notice and what is missing in my awareness? I hope through this inquiry to bring to light the strengths that may aid in my interpretations as well as blind spots that may bias my judgment. Structural analysis thus takes an outside view of my subjective experience, applying a structure of consciousness to locate my development within a conceptual framework.

I have chosen to investigate my own consciousness through the structure of developmental levels, using Susanne Cook-Greuter's (2002) Leadership Development Framework. Cook-Greuter's model of adult development through stages of meaning-making is the most comprehensive instrument to date for understanding the structure of consciousness. The results of the Sentence Completion Test (SCTi) reveal a slice in time of one's personality, both its developmental achievements and its challenges. I completed the SCTi and debriefed it with a psychologist trained to interpret the test and provide feedback.

Data Analysis

He described me as “a late-stage Pluralist with a strong Achiever base” (Personal communication, December 10, 2010). This puts me at the 4/5 level in Cook-Greuter's scheme, the Individualist action logic. Cook-Greuter explains this level as having a 4th person perspective, meaning that things are not necessarily what they seem but rather are dependent on how I as the observer construct meaning from them. Context is critical for meaning-making. Further, paradox is now something to enjoy rather than to explain

away, with 'and' often replacing 'but'. Pluralists are interested in self-exploration, in their unique identities beyond social norms or approvals. As Cook-Greuter (2004) writes,

Stage 4/5 individuals are often admired by others...for their unconcerned, energetic self-expression, their spontaneity, and their ability to live a life according to their own unique style free from restrictive conventions. (p. 23)

At this stage, there is an egalitarian emphasis as one seeks to understand others, to celebrate differences, to provide room for all voices to be heard. There is often an interest in diversity of opinion which, taken to an extreme, can slow action and frustrate others.

In my particular case, the strengths which will assist me in conducting integral research are the capacity to hold multiple perspectives, such as seeing home as a mirror of self, a container for relationships, and a place or location. I can see both its positive and negative aspects. I enjoy inquiry and I can be self-reflexive about my experience. In this project context, I enjoy discovering new insights on home; it is of personal and professional interest to me, and I can both bring my experience to bear on the inquiry and also step back from it to include other perspectives.

In terms of cautions I need to be aware of, I tend to emphasize the positive and diminish the negative viewpoints and this may bias my judgments toward too idealized an appreciation of home. I may avoid the emotional issues, preferring to remain in the cognitive line where I am more comfortable. In this project, the implication is that I must attend to the balance of perspectives I portray between the optimistic outlook and the more gloomy points of view.

As examples of the implications of my developmental level on this research project, I offer two cases in point. The first is with regard to my high Achiever base. Instead of simply proposing what research I would do, I felt dissatisfied with what seemed a limited effort. Instead, I have actually completed six mini-inquiry projects on the topic of the changing meaning of home, a significant undertaking in such a short space of time. To satisfy myself, I had to achieve more than is required. In so doing, I may have missed some opportunities for deeper inquiry so that I could spread my energy across a broader expanse of investigation.

The second example is that because I can hold multiple perspectives, and feel energized by the inquiry, I tend to want to include everything. I have difficulty sorting out what is critical to this pilot project. It is a joy to explore a rich topic and I find I have a lot to say, resulting in perhaps too broad a brush and too many points of view. I enjoy others' perspectives and want to include them as well, a typical characteristic of the Pluralist level. In my quest for equality, I may not be ruthless enough in questioning these other viewpoints and their contribution to the findings.

Discussion

Stepping back from the structural analysis, I can see that my passion for this project on home is a reflection of my developmental stage. I am, for one thing, intrigued by complex concepts. As Shelley Mallett (2004) concludes, "Home brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively (p. 70). All of these perspectives provide interesting avenues for inquiry into the meanings of home. Further, this is a personal as well as professional inquiry. I am living in my topic, transitioning from full-time work to a form of retirement, yet to be determined and without clear guideposts. I am implicated in what I discover—I am enlightened by it, frightened by it, and challenged to metabolize it. The paper has to do with my unique self, the expression of who I am. As Cook-Greuter (2004) points out, at this stage people "learn to consciously scrutinize their beliefs in order to test their assumptions" (p. 21).

It is my hope that through this inquiry, and from my particular stage of development, I can scrutinize some of my beliefs about the meaning of home during this transition, that I can test some of my assumptions in concert with others and through a variety of lenses, and see what emerges that speaks to this common aspect of professional women's life journey.

Second Person Section

*It was the function of the commons over the ages to
make a home for magnifying the spirit of the other,
of letting no deed or word be offered without witness.*

Hannah Arendt (1958)

Second-person methodologies focus on the collective interior aspects of the phenomenon of study—the intersubjective values, meanings, history and traditions, culture and shared resonance of a group. In this section, I explore the two primary zones of intersubjective experience, Hermeneutics and Ethnomethodology. For the hermeneutic analysis (Zone 3), I have used an interview with one of the women in my circle and her partner as a method of inquiring into their shared meaning of home as they begin to create a new life together in retirement. The question in this inquiry is, *How does the transition to retirement influence the meaning of home in a professional couple?* For the ethnomethodological analysis (Zone 4), I have used a story-telling focus group of six women friends as a method of investigating the meaning of home as they reflect on their retirement. The question in this inquiry is, *How does the transition to retirement influence the meaning of home in a group of professional women?*

For each of these two methods, I look first at the research design, then the themes from the data generated, and finally discuss implications and insights.

Hermeneutic Analysis: Interview

Research Design

Hermeneutics is an interpretative inquiry into some aspect of human activity, usually involving digging under the surface elements, say of a text, to find the symbols and meanings behind the words, and often considering the context within which the writing or other activity occurs. As a means of understanding the intersubjective experience of the changing meaning of home, interpretive research allows me to inquire into the perspectives, associations, and values of others. I can open the door to a wider set of possible interpretations as Packer and Addison (1989) point out,

So although hermeneutic inquiry proceeds from a starting place, a self-consciously interpretive approach to scientific investigation does not seek to come

to an end at some final resting place, but works instead to keep discussion open and alive, to keep inquiry under way (p. 35).

To explore the changing meaning of home from an interpretive viewpoint, I interviewed a couple, one of my women friends and her partner who have recently begun to live together in retirement. The conversation with them provides me with an intersubjective view of the changing meanings they associate with home as they share their transition. The interview process is well suited to a hermeneutic inquiry into the meaning of home because it provides an open forum for dialogue between the couple as well as calling upon their individual views. It also allows me as the researcher to follow up on language and symbolic cues, and to test my interpretations with them to deepen the dialogue. They, in turn, can challenge my assumptions and clarify my thinking. So although the findings are a beginning inquiry only, they enliven the discussion and provide potential avenues for further questioning.

The specific research design I have used is an hour-long interview based on the responses to ten open-ended questions I sent to each interviewee ahead of time. Each completed the questions individually on their own, then printed the responses and brought them to the interview. I asked the ten questions in sequence, encouraging them to take turns reading their written responses to begin the conversation, and then to elaborate on their own and each other's contributions. I asked questions for clarity about the meaning they attached to the home they were creating. Appendix 1 outlines the ten questions and the rationale for each. Once the interview had been transcribed, I sent it to them to give them an opportunity to discuss and change any aspect of the conversation.

Data Analysis

I created a document summary of meaningful headings, emotions, patterns, phrases and metaphors contained in the interview. From this summary of direct quotes, I chose four themes, each supported by a number of the meaningful quotations from their stories. Table 1 outlines the themes and meanings. It is important to say that these themes are the ones I interpret as important for my study of how the transition to retirement influences the meaning of home. As I reviewed the themes and quotes drawn from the text, I realized that I might if I began again choose different themes and

quotations to substantiate them. And another researcher, coming from their own background and viewpoint, might find others as well.

Theme	Meaningful Quotes
Moving from Outside to Inside	Coming home to myself A skin I wear Safe to be who I am Identity/self-expression Spirit/sacred space
Home as Seeking and Finding	Seeking home in all the wrong places Childhood home Emptiness/aloneness Beauty/safety/security “The rickety house” Moving in and moving out Nature – the life cycle
Pain as a Foreigner	Pain isn’t part of the family Embrace to release A process of acknowledgement Pain doesn’t live here anymore
Home as Relationships	Domesticity/home maker Home building What I’m responsible for Us as home Physicality/sexuality

Table 1 Interview Themes and Supporting Quotes

Discussion

Just as the interview ended, one of the interviewees commented that “home is a three-dimensional concept”. This idea seems to reverberate throughout the conversation. They spoke of themselves in their lives before they came together in contrast to how they feel now. They talked about themselves as a couple and the adjustments they were making to accommodate each other’s needs. And they talked about their home as the context, the container, for their life together, the “crucible” in which they were growing a shared life. This aspect of the discussion mirrored my own sense in the phenomenological findings of the importance of seeing home in 1st, 2nd and 3rd person perspectives.

They spoke at length about the pain in their past lives as they sought to find the partner who would allow them to be all they could be. They referenced the pain of their childhoods, how they had carried it with them and were now able to acknowledge it but not let it drive their lives, that it “wasn’t part of the family” now. Finding each other seems to have allowed them not only to literally move inside their joint home but to psychologically move inside themselves, honoring the pain but releasing it, feeling safe and secure enough to feel they were home in all three dimensions.

For example, my friend spoke of her workaholicism, how for years she had sought a sense of home—“safety, security, beauty”—by earning money and buying houses that never felt like home. She had been “looking for home in all the wrong places” and was now thoroughly enjoying domesticity, making a home both inside and out, and able to let go of the image of “the rickety house” that had haunted her since childhood.

They also spoke about the spirit of their home, that they saw it as “a sacred space” and their relationship as a “third celestial being”, something that transcended them both and yet included them, something to be nurtured and developed over time. Throughout the conversation, I was amazed at their maturity, their candidness, their caring, and their enthusiasm for building their home in all three dimensions—each as an individual, together in relationship, and within the context of their setting, as well as across past, present and future timelines. I was also instructed by the way they acknowledged their pain and yet transcended it and learned from it, particularly in relation to my own structural tendency to reinforce the positive. This aspect of the conversation brings the darker side of home to bear on the discussion.

Ethnomethodological Analysis: Focus Group

Research Design

Ethnomethodology is the second intersubjective domain of inquiry in my pilot study. This family of methodologies seeks to understand collective experiences as they are observed externally through various representations in behavior or narrative. I have used participant-observation in a focus group setting to share perspectives on how retirement influences the meaning of home with a group of professional women friends. This method adds another dimension to my inquiry, extending it to a group context and

allowing the members to tell their stories and to build on each other's perspectives as the conversation unfolds. It also allows me to observe the group as it discusses the topic and to reflect on the culture and intersubjective patterns among the members.

I facilitated a discussion of six women who have known each other almost thirty years. The six women range in age from 55 to 70, and are educated professional white women in an urban environment. We met at the home of one of the women and had a pot-luck dinner together around her dining room table. I asked the group to consider the influence of the transition to retirement on the meaning of home. Rather than a set series of questions, I simply raised the issue and let the conversation flow. We each took turns speaking for approximately five minutes, sometimes interrupting the flow with clarifying questions or comments. Each woman in the group had a chance to tell her current story of home and the changes occurring as a result of transitions in her life. After each person had spoken, including me, we had some general discussion of the themes and insights generated from our stories.

I am aware in terms of a research sample that this group is homogeneous and privileged, not representing a true sample of women but only a small slice of professional, socio-economically secure, North American women. In this sense, our perspectives reflect a narrow band of society in a more global context. Similar research in emerging economies or in underdeveloped countries might result in very different perceptions.

Data Analysis

My sense of the conversation among the six women around the dinner table is represented by what one of the women termed the "unrooted" nature of our lives in transitioning to retirement. "There is a feeling of being unrooted in our stories, that things are changing around us and provoking questions." Several of the women were concerned about sharing space at home with their husbands, feeling confined or too close for comfort. "We share an office in the house and it's very close quarters." A few were considering where to live now they are free to move if they wish; others felt home was a welcoming "cocoon" to return to. Children and grandchildren figured heavily in the conversation as an anchor in the uncertainty, wanting to be close to children to support them and grandchildren to participate in their young lives. The women felt much closer

to their own homes and neighborhoods than they did to the large city in which we all live. “This doesn’t feel like home anymore.” Some also expressed concern and disappointment in the way Canada was moving into its future. These are additional perspectives on the feeling of being in uncharted territory, of being uprooted.

In contrast, the feeling of being completely at home with each other pervades the group. The conversation begins as we step in the door and continues in a stream of individual and group dialogues until the last woman leaves. The relaxation is palpable, like a big collective sigh, as we sink into each other’s presence. I am often a listener and observer at these events. So while I am very much an insider, rarely missing an event, I am also an outsider, an observer of the scene. I often just bask in the wonder of being in this circle with these women. I feel so much at home, so much myself, unconditionally loved. I can say or do anything and be supported, challenged and cared for.

One of the characteristics of this and all our time together that demonstrates this closeness, this sense of a collective family, is the laughter. Somehow, no matter how serious it gets, we are able to find ways to lighten the mood and laugh at ourselves and our situations. I am always struck by the happy smiles on our faces around the table, the curiosity in our eyes as we listen to each other’s stories, the obvious teasing and jokes and fun that come with a family who know each other so well. We can hurt each other and have, but we have managed to work it out so that we sustain our deep friendships and trust that openly sharing ourselves will be worthwhile for us and for the group as a whole. In fact, some of our hardest moments have become iconic stories that define who we are.

Finally, I am aware that we are the unfolding narrative of a family, not by birth but by choice, evolving through our many connections as students, colleagues, co-workers, friends, sharing this stage of our lives as we have many others. The transition to retirement is simply another chapter in the continuing story of our lives. As one woman noted, “This is another transformational event. It has such a broad impact at this time in our lives and we each have a story, not necessarily traditional retirement but issues of what work, where, helping each other figure it all out.”

Discussion

What has struck me most profoundly through this focus group exercise is that this group of women meets every level of need for me in Maslow’s (1962) hierarchy. In

relation to the changing meaning of home, I believe during times of major life transition, including the transition to retirement, most of our needs are challenged. Where do I belong? Where will my self-esteem be acknowledged if I am not a professional woman? How will I continue to grow as a person outside the context of work? These are all the questions the women were asking around the table. And the group acted as a mirror where we were able to reassure each other of our worth, our belonging, our safety and security—that we were in this sense at home.

For example, the group provides for my physiological needs through the sharing of food, conversation and hugs. It provides for my safety and security through being a family of choice where I know I will be welcomed. It provides love and belonging through the deep friendships and connections over time. It provides self-esteem by allowing me to be a unique individual, knowing I will be cherished no matter what. And it provides self-actualization through intellectual and creative play, giving me a place to laugh, to cry, to stretch into not only who I am but who I can be. In transition, when we are neither here nor there, we are in a sense homeless. At this time, close connection with others who care for us can provide a powerful scaffolding for our journey. I wonder how professional women transitioning to retirement would feel without this kind of support, a topic for future research.

Third Person Section

Houses are amazingly complex repositories. What I found, to my great surprise, is that whatever happens in the world—whatever is discovered or created or bitterly fought over—eventually ends up, in one way or another, in your house.

Bill Bryson (2010)

Third-person methodologies focus on the individual and collective exterior aspects of the phenomenon of study, the actions and behaviors of individuals and the socio-technical systems that are at play in creating the meaning of home. These methodologies are concerned with objective and inter-objective perspectives from the outside, those that can be viewed and measured. In this section, I explore one objective and one inter-objective zone, Empiricism and Systems Analysis. For the Empiricist analysis (Zone 6), I have used a 10-question survey made up of themes emerging from the 1st- and 2nd-person findings. The survey measures the question, *How does a group of professional women transitioning to retirement rate statements about the meaning of home?* For the systems analysis (Zone 8), I have used a literature review to search for socioeconomic system impacts on my findings. The question in this inquiry is, *How does the socioeconomic system influence the meaning of home for professional women transitioning to retirement?*

For each of these two methods, I look first at the research design, then the themes from the data generated, and finally discuss implications and insights.

Empirical Analysis: Survey

Research Design

Empirical analysis provides measurable, observable data that allows me to test the themes emerging from the pilot study. I have used a survey to obtain quantitative information about the meaning of home to professional women during the transition to retirement, focusing particularly on statements that seem to reflect important patterns in the discussion so far. The survey method is well suited to this topic because it allows me to test my emerging perspectives and shed further light on their efficacy. I have included a section for comments after each question to encourage explanation or elaboration on the quantitative data. I added two additional participants and completed the survey myself

for a total of nine respondents, hoping that by broadening the response base somewhat, the perspectives do not become self-reinforcing. This method adds an important quantitative dimension to the pilot study although it is a less personal process and perhaps more subject to misinterpretation.

I began by reviewing each of the three zones of inquiry I had completed—phenomenology, hermeneutics and ethnomethodology. I noted what seemed to emerge as the most important statements of the themes to test in the survey. I then created a 10-question Likert survey based on level of agreement with the statements. I included first, second and third person questions to test the importance of the self, relationships and home base. I included two questions about change to assess the extent to which the participants agreed that the transition to retirement engendered change. I also included time-based and place-based questions. All of these were framed in statements drawn directly from the data. For example, “Home is more than my physical place; it is who I am.”

Data Analysis

All 9 respondents returned the survey. Levels of overall agreement (1 or 2 on the scale) ranged from 55.5% to 99.9% while overall levels of disagreement (4 or 5 on the scale) ranged from 0% to 33.3%. Table 2 below shows the three ranges for each question.

Questions 1 and 9 relating to home as subjective space scored similarly. On Question 1, six of seven comments reinforced “home is a reflection of who I am” or “home reflects who I am, my sense of self”. By contrast, one woman wrote, “Home is a physical place. Because I do so much traveling, I can really feel the difference of being ‘home’”. Although most of the women agreed to the statement, they qualified it by adding comments like “it is where I am in my life journey” or “home is also my primary intimate relationship”. Question 9 substantiated these themes, with one woman adding an important distinction. “It feels more like the reinvention of me is reflected in my home rather than home being a central part of that reinvention.”

Questions 3 and 10 relating to home as an intersubjective space produced many comments. Question 3 is particularly interesting because the idea of tension in their primary relationship at home was a recurring theme in the focus group yet in the survey it

has the highest level of disagreement. For a couple of the women, the comments reflected that the tension was a potential in the future; for others, it was a current reality. One woman wrote, “The stronger my embrace of my significant other, the more obvious our differences will show up and need to be accepted”. Question 10 added comments about age and stage with references to “elders” and “grandparents”. One woman reflected the tone of the comments with, “As we age, the narrative changes.”

Question	%Agree (1 or 2)	% Neutral (3)	% Disagree (4 or 5)
1. Home is more than my physical place; it is who I am.	77.7	11.1	11.1
2. The meanings I associate with home are changing for me.	66.6	11.1	22.2
3. There is some tension in adapting the roles and relationships with my significant other(s) at home.	55.5	11.1	33.3
4. My home, or how it is configured, has changed in the past few years.	99.9	0	0
5. For me, home has to have a connection to past, present and future.	88.8	0	11.1
6. Home is my house and it is also my community, city and country	88.8	11.1	0
7. I have several places I think of as homes away from home.	66.6	22.2	11.1
8. Home for me is not just interiors; the outdoor space is equally important.	99.9	0	0
9. Home is a central part of reinventing myself into a new chapter of my life.	77.7	0	22.2
10. Home is the unfolding narrative of a family.	77.7	11.1	11.1
Total Average Percentage	79.9	7.8	12.2

Table 2. Empirical Analysis Data

Questions 2 and 4 deal directly with change. Question 4 asking about changes in home received virtually 100% agreement—change is endemic. However, Question 2 asking about changing meaning had a much lower level of agreement, with two women saying the meaning of home was not changing. Others reflected on home as more of “a

place of rest and refuge” or “a marvelous place to recuperate”. One added, “now I can imagine home without connecting it to place at all”.

Questions 6 and 8 relating to home as an objective space produced high levels of agreement. In the focus group, the women had commented on their disappointment with their city and to some extent their country, although in the survey there was no disagreement. I was surprised by the 100% agreement with the importance of outdoor space. I had heard it spoken of in the interview and the focus group but without the level of emphasis reflected in these scores.

Finally, Questions 5 and 7 concerned home in relation to time and place. Question 5 relating to past, present and future has high levels of agreement with several references about treasured “memories held in photos, pictures” and a contrasting emphasis from a few on being in the present, “My past and future have some inevitable presence in my home; I work to keep these down and be more present”. Question 7 had a variety of scores and comments about homes away from home without any particular themes or consensus.

Discussion

The high levels of agreement on the survey responses confirm that the themes are relevant and important to the participants. The comments allowed the women to add nuance to the statements, and in some cases to disagree and explain their different points of view. The theme that change is ever-present was reinforced in both the responses and in many of the comments. The future for women at this life stage is uncertain, as they look ahead to issues of aging, ill-health and potential relocation. This is most acute for those who are furthest along in their retirement and on the horizon as a concern for those who are just beginning the journey. However, it was interesting to note that most of the women felt this was just another in a long line of transitions undertaken through life, rather than something new or particularly difficult. These comments further reinforce the sense from the focus group that as we retire from professional life, we are entering a new life chapter. However, we do so confident in our individual and collective capacities to make the transition successfully.

For a few, the meaning of home is not changing as much as they themselves are, and this reinvention is reflected in their home environments as it is in all aspects of their

lives. This reframing is an important point of causality—is it an internal yearning for something different that catalyzes a transition to retirement and subsequently a change in the meaning of home? Or does some external change in the environment catalyze the transition to retirement that in turn influences who we are and how we see our home? Both of these perspectives were reflected in the discussion and further research might shed additional light on the complexities involved.

For most of the women, home is very much anchored in relationships, whether partners, children and grandchildren, or friends and family. The nature of these relationships in the life structure is unique in each case but their role in providing meaning to the concept of home was common to all. Home would not be home without others. Similarly, extending from 2nd to 3rd person perspectives, connections to nature were also endemic to the women feeling at home. They are very connected to nature, to the outdoors and its centering affect on them.

Thus, again in this analysis, we find all three dimensions of reality in the perspectives. In terms of future research, I found it somewhat limiting to have only ten questions. I think in repeating the survey, I would add more questions to explore additional themes and to include more than one question to investigate the nuances of themes. The survey statements in the participants' own words worked well, as did the rating scale.

Systems Analysis: Literature Review

Research Design

Systems analysis allows the researcher to inquire into an interacting set of elements that have an impact on the topic. In this study, I have chosen to look at the socioeconomic system as it pertains to the group of women in my pilot study, to determine what influences this broader context may have on our perspectives on home as we make the transition to retirement. The participants are all well-educated, professionally-trained, Canadian Anglo-Saxon women who have held senior positions in business and education. We would all be considered middle to upper-middle class. We all own our homes, a few of us more than one. We have gardens and outdoor spaces. We

have friends and family and loved ones. We are a privileged group. What influence does this demographic have on the meaning we attach to home as we approach retirement?

I was surprised to find there is very little available in the area of my research topic. I found many articles dealing with developing countries and socioeconomic hardship. I found articles on the meaning of home for those in socioeconomic distress, particularly homeless women, the elderly, women with disabilities and those in institutional ‘homes’. I found one article in the area of my topic, entitled *Women and retirement: Reflections from the field* (Glazer-Raymo, 2004). This was a review of three books by a university professor dealing with professional women and retirement. I have used this article as representative of the women in my study, several who are and have been university professors and all who would be socioeconomically equivalent. The three books reviewed in the article are: *Women confronting retirement: A nontraditional guide* (2003), *A woman’s education: The road from Coovain leads to Smith College* (2001), and *When baby boom women retire* (2000).

Data Analysis

Four themes emerged from the data analysis concerning the impact of the socioeconomic system on professional women’s transition to retirement. The themes are: Economics of Retirement, Socio-cultural Barriers, Changing Meaning of Work and Home, and Self-Esteem.

The economics of retirement for professional women can be sobering. Because of gender inequities in salaries, women’s preparedness for retirement can lag behind their male colleagues. “Such inequities diminish women’s pensions and their chances of economically stable retirements” (Glazer-Raymo, 2004, p. 33). For those who have worked at several different organizations, worked on and off or part-time, this inequity is further augmented. The trend to earlier retirement is also a factor, with the estimated age at retirement for women in 2000 being 61.4 years of age (Department of Labor, 2001). This expands the proportion of life spent in retirement and spreads retirement resources over more years.

There are also socio-cultural barriers facing women in retirement. Baby boom women now beginning to retire from the workforce will do so in growing numbers over the next twenty years. Having spent rewarding and productive careers in the workplace,

what awaits these women in retirement? Social gerontologists assume aging signifies decline in one's physical and mental capacity (Glazer-Raymo, 2004, p. 34). Feminists such as Betty Friedan (1964) disagree, arguing that women can view retirement "as an opportunity to take charge of their lives, free from routine constraints that no longer challenge their emotional or intellectual capacities" (Glazer-Raymo, 2004, p. 35).

For women who see aging as a time for personal growth rather than decline, there are changes in the meaning of work in their lives, moving from the paid workforce to a more independent form of work and meaning. Many serve as consultants and mentors in social change projects, begin new businesses, or join with colleagues to offer services. Many women work from home in retirement, also changing the nature and meaning of the home environment from a place of retreat or refuge from work to a place that encompasses work. One woman describes this transition "into more transitory phases of life" (Glazer-Raymo, 2004, p. 32) where there is less structure and the need for more personal motivation to find meaning in life.

Finally, on the theme of women's self-esteem, many professional women as they move toward retirement worry about the loss of their professional identities and with it their sense of self. Glazer-Raymo describes this worry for women as including "the loss of professional identity and structure in their lives, the instability of their finances, and the replacement of professional priorities with personal demands on their time" (2004, p. 36). One woman is quoted as envisioning retirement as "the step before death: the loss of functioning in the world, the loss of service to the world, being out of it" (Glazer-Raymo, 2004, p. 34). Again, professional women's attitudes towards retirement, whether positive or negative anticipation, seem to be critical in framing the experience.

Discussion

Although the systems analysis did not turn up any direct studies on the topic of home in relation to the socioeconomic impact of professional women's retirement, still some connections can be made. For one thing, women making this transition will potentially spend more time at home, perhaps working from home and doing part-time work. For those without pensions or economic stability, selling the home may even be necessary. For many women, home ownership is a significant part of their retirement portfolio. For those lucky enough to remain in their homes if they wish to, what is the

new meaning of the space? Is it a refuge from the world of work, as one woman in Glazer-Raymo's article described, "an intense longing to live in another self" (2004, p. 36)? Or is it a lonely isolation from the former world or work?

What this inquiry emphasizes is that we lack existing data to inform the issues facing the first generation of professional women to have spent their careers at work and who now enter retirement. The baby boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, changes historical patterns with each life stage they embark on, and this one will be no different. Having in a sense left home to enter the paid workforce, professional women are now returning home to reinvent retirement without many landmarks to guide them. From this research, it seems that women's attitudes toward the retirement transition, whether seen as a time of personal and social growth or a time of isolation and decline, figures centrally in the meanings associated with home. For the women in this pilot study, both of these perspectives are represented to some extent in each woman's conception of the transition—it is both a time of growth and reinvention and signals potential changes in health, family structure and sense of self.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what emerges from this multi-method integral research project as learning for me and potentially for broader application? What meta-analysis can I provide based on what I have uncovered in this pilot study so far?

First, I am amazed by how complex and multi-layered the concept of home is. Throughout the data, perspectives on home as existing simultaneously in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person dimensions came forth. Similarly, the idea that home has elements of past, present and future recurred. There were many opposites, contradictions and paradoxes in the different viewpoints. Home is both internal and external, full of joy and pain, lifelong and present in every moment, eternal and in constant change. I began the inquiry with a bias toward home as a tangible place or space, an objective entity. Now, I see home more as a mirror of self, a reflection of the evolution of consciousness manifest, a dramatic shift in perspective, or perhaps better said, a dramatic inclusion of perspectives.

With regard to professional women's transition to retirement, my own feeling of homelessness was supported by the women's sense of being unrooted at this time in their lives. They felt they were entering a new chapter, reinventing themselves along with their relationships and their physical space. Feeling homeless during transitions is an aspect I would like to further explore, perhaps from the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. How can we support transitions by meeting requirements for physiological, emotional, cultural and social needs? The women in this pilot inquiry provide much of this support to each other, highlighting the importance of community in feeling at home. My interest in homelessness is certainly a reflection of my own life circumstances at the moment so I am cautious about extending it too far. However, I believe it is perhaps a suitable characterization for the feelings of loss associated with major life transitions.

On a more positive note, I am buoyed by the collective sense that we, as baby boom women, have been pioneers all our lives and that the transition to retirement and our returning home is just the next in a long line of transitions we have successfully negotiated. We are accustomed to laying new grooves, assuming new roles, and do so at this juncture with self-awareness and confidence in our capacities. Of course, the women in this pilot study are a privileged lot—there are many who will not have an easy

time, as the socioeconomic analysis outlined. We can at least draw on our experience and our success to support those in jeopardy. One way is to continue to inquire into how these transition processes are accomplished and to make the information available, a next step in my research agenda.

This brings me to the final meta-point from the pilot study. I am truly surprised at the lack of research data on this topic. This beginning inquiry feels like opening the door a crack into a darkened home—we need much more light on the subject. How professional women will make the transition to retirement in the next twenty years is a subject of immediate interest and concern. There is a need for much more thoughtful intelligence about this complex issue. Further, it is my contention that integral research is imperative for understanding the multiple dimensions and perspectives involved with their many nuanced distinctions. It is my hope that this introduction demonstrates some of the possibilities.

Appendix 1
Interview Questions and Rationale

Interview Question	Question Rationale
What would you like to get out of this interview?	To start the conversation and get expectations set about what we might focus on.
Can you give me a bit of background about your moving in together?	To provide some context for the questions to follow and understand what led up to their decision to live together.
How are you feeling about the situation so far?	To elicit their feelings, both positive and negative, about the new arrangements.
What does this new home mean to you?	To elicit statements about the meaning of home.
How have you created this meaning in your lives here?	To situate the meanings in their daily lives.
Has this changed from earlier in your lives when you were working?	To investigate whether this stage of life created different meanings from previous stages.
To what extent have new meanings been added to your sense of home since moving in together?	To elicit any new interpretations of home that may have been noticed.
How have you adapted the home so that you can share it?	To understand how each person feels about the move, one bringing a few belongings to another's home, and the other moving things aside to allow for another's belongings to be added
To what extent have any conflicts arisen in making these adaptations?	To elicit any negative or conflicting meanings in the transition to the new arrangements.
A year from now, what do you think this home will mean to you?	To project into the future.

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