

## Abstract

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**Title of dissertation:** *The experience of an empty nest in the narratives of women aged 45-64. A sociological analysis. A collection of published and thematically related scientific articles.*

### Based on:

1. (2022) Żadkowska Magdalena., Herzberg-Kurasz Magdalena., „Boomeranging covidowy” – o powrotach dorosłych dzieci do domów. Perspektywa rodziców; Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej, Tom XVIII Numer 1. Rodzina w czasach niepewności. (70 pkt. MEiN)
2. (2023) Gajewska Magdalena., Herzberg-Kurasz Madalena., Żadkowska Magdalena. Kostecka Marianna., Dowgiałło Bogna., *Room of her own. Remaking Empty Nest and Creating Herspaces in Practices of Polish Mothers whose Children Left Home*, European Journal of Women's Studies 30 (1):7-21. (100 pkt. MEiN)
3. (2023) Herzberg-Kurasz Magdalena, "Motherhood in the empty nest - the lack of social recognition?" Social Policy Issue, Special Issue 2023;62(3):1-23. (40 pkt. MEiN)
4. (2024) Herzberg-Kurasz Magdalena, Giraud Christophe, de Singly Francois, Gajewska Magdalena, Sophie David Goretta, *The reconfiguration of the mother's role after the departure of the children*, [w:] Żadkowska M., Skowrońska M., Giraud Ch., Schmidt F., *Reconfiguring Relations in the Empty Nest. Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Family and Intimate Life, ISBN 978-3-031-50402-0 ISBN 978-3-031-50403-7 (eBook) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50403-7>.
5. (2024) Dowgiałło Bogna, Giraud Christophe, Herzberg-Kurasz Magdalena, *Navigating Emotional Terrain: Women's Experiences of Loss and Gain*, [w:] Żadkowska M., Skowrońska M., Giraud Ch., Schmidt F., *Reconfiguring Relations in the Empty Nest. Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Family and Intimate Life, ISBN 978-3-031-50402-0 ISBN 978-3-031-50403-7 (eBook) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50403-7>

**Field:** Social Sciences

**Discipline:** Sociological Sciences

In my publication series entitled *Experiencing the empty nest in the narratives of women aged 45-64. A sociological analysis*, I analyze and describe the changes within the maternal practices and reconfigurations within the mother's role. I signalize a phase of motherhood that is not very present in the sociological discourse. It is characterized by the absence of adult children in the family nest. The main goal of my dissertation is to show the possible changes in women's lives related to the practices of daily life during the time when the role of mother is transformed as a result of entering the empty nest stage. The publication series I have prepared complements the research on the family life course, focusing on the reconfiguration of the maternal role and the experience of the motherhood phase at the mentioned stage. The analyses conducted thus complement existing research on family life.

I divided my publication series (three journal articles and two chapters in a monograph) thematically into the following dimensions of practicing the role of a mother: individual, spatial and relational. The proposed order represents a synthesis of mothers' experiences, presenting the diversity, complexity and individualized nature of their experiences. In **the individual dimension** (*Publication 3 and 5*), I look at how change within the maternal role is shaped in women's subjective experiences. I focus on what the emptying nest "says" about the (un)changing role of the mother, and in particular, I analyze the process of transforming the practices and role of a mother in a full nest into the practices and role of a mother in an empty nest. I am interested in how identification experiences (*how mothers define themselves, how they perceive themselves, how they talk about themselves, how they experience themselves*) related to the mother's role are presented in a situation triggered by an external factor such as an adult child moving out of the family home. In the next **dimension - spatial** (*Publication 2*), the space (home) provides a mirror for experiencing motherhood. I focus on describing how the space of the home participates in the experience of being a mother and in shaping the mother-child relationship. In this area, the process of leaving the role of mother and redefining it happens in relation to the empty room left by the child. Emotions embedded in the domestic space are also an additional aspect which I analyzed. In **the relational dimension** (*Publication 1 and 4*), I am interested in the changes occurring within the social relations of women (relations with adult children, relations with the partner), where the role of mother in the situation of leaving the nest by adult children is gradually changing.

The data used in the preparation of the publication series represent material collected within the framework of a longitudinal project (2019-2022) funded by the National Science

Center, directed by Magdalena Żadkowska SONATA BIS 8 titled *"Till death do us part... Everyday life practices of 50-64 years old couples with at least 20 years' of common life experience"* UMO-2018/30/E/HS6/00159. The data included in the analysis, which are the basis of the articles and chapters included in my dissertation, concern interviews with 73 Polish women (aged 44-68, living in both large cities and smaller towns (outside metropolitan areas)) whose children had left home: 58 of them were in relationships with at least 20 years of shared life experience with the fathers of their children; and 15 were in a new relationship or living on their own (divorced, widowed). In the study group, some of the mothers had already experienced the transition to the empty nest, while others were at the beginning or in the middle of the process.

The series of five scientific texts described shows that a **post-mother** in an empty nest is a mother for whom the process of distancing herself from the role of mother takes place during the transition from a full nest to an empty nest. A **post-mother** is a mother who has experienced the transition from full-time (daily) motherhood to part-time (sometimes dormant) motherhood, whose daily experience no longer includes tasks directly related to the role of a mother. In the **post-motherhood phase**, mothers begin to see themselves as more autonomous, socially active and as partners for their adult children. They perceive their role as mother (caregiver) among other self-identifications. In addition, the transformation of family roles takes place through modifications of home spaces - especially the room(s) that previously belonged to the child(ren), and sometimes other rooms as well. These spaces change physically, and receive a different purpose and meaning, related to the woman's new social role as a **post-mother ("mother of the adult child(ren)")**. The relational dimension of the mother's role evolves according to the different stages of the adult children's move out of the family home: when the children leave for college but are still economically dependent; when they start their first job, they gradually begin to be economically independent; when they move out and are completely economically independent. The **role of the post-mother** in the relational dimension does not disappear when the children leave home but is adapted to new circumstances and family conditions and requires inventing ways to practice it.

The analysis I have conducted, fills a gap in sociological research regarding the motherhood phase in the empty nest. It creates a space for looking for appropriate solutions in the field of services, care or, more broadly, social policies, and perhaps individual support. It also demonstrates the need for measures that would reduce the size of unpaid care work and counteract its reproduction.