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Parental Involvement in the Lives of College Students: Impact on Student Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIVES OF
COLLEGE STUDENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENT INDEPENDENCE, SELF-
DIRECTION, AND CRITICAL THINKING

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

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

PATRICK SPENCE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2012

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have noted the increasing communication between parents and students while students are in college (College Parent, 2007; Hofer & Moore, 2010). The most recent study noted that the interaction between parent and student during the last year of college averages over 13 times a week (Hofer & Moore, 2010). While many articles in the popular press have offered conjecture as to the developmental impact of this new data, very little has been done to understand the nature of the contact between parents and students as it relates to developmental outcomes (Carroll, 2005; Hoover, 2008). This study provides insight into the nature of communication between parents and students during the last two years of college, and attempts to understand the impact of this communication on the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. This study also attempts to understand the viewpoint of the parent specifically, and how the parent communicates with their son or daughter to achieve specific developmental outcomes.

In this study, I individually interviewed 12 parents of college students. Each college student was in their last two years of study at the time of the interview. The findings of this study indicate that parents have a good understanding of the need of their son or daughter to have intellectual space to “hear their own voice”, and parents avoid giving the “right answer” order to allow students to problem-solve. Parents more often ask students to come up with a solution and then help them vet the different alternatives.

This approach is rejected when a student encounters an interpersonal conflict however, and parents are more likely to give direct advice about how to proceed. Finally, this study indicated that parents who communicate multiple times a day with their student and describe their family as close are more likely to expect to have some impact on decisions post-college, especially in terms of career-related decisions. Implications for higher education and suggestions for further research are discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

With the start of the 2000-2001 academic year came the beginning of a cultural shift on colleges around the county: the newly-labeled “Millennial” generation (those born since 1982) arrived on campus. Almost immediately upon their arrival, student affairs administrators began to experience the paradoxical attributes of the millennial generation. These traits were first examined in-depth by authors Howe and Strauss in their landmark book published in 2000, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Since this book’s publication, many other researchers have used the traits identified by the authors as the starting point for an examination of the current generation attending college. These millennial traits, as described by Howe and Strauss, range from “team-oriented” and “optimistic” to “sheltered” and “entitled” (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The publication of *Millennials Rising* also began a debate about how specific traits impact this generation as these students leave college, with some authors, such as Robert Debard and Lynne Lancaster, mainly focusing on how the positive traits have led to an increased rate of civic engagement and high achievement post-graduation, while others, such as sociologist Jean Twenge and social scientist Sara Konrath, highlight how the negative traits have led to feelings of depression, a decrease in empathy, lack of direction, and increased stress in millennials (Debard, 2004; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; O’Brien, Hsing, & Konrath, 2010; Twenge, Zhang & Im, 2004).

One trait which has shown some consistency across the spectrum of these studies is the close relationship millennials have with their parents (Carney-Hall, 2008; Debard, 2004; Savage, 2008; Taub, 2008; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, & Ward-Roof, 2000). Millennial college students identify their parents as the most influential people in their lives (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Pew Research: A Portrait of Generation Next, [Pew Research] 2007). Millennials as a generation also appear to be much more willing to accept the values and societal norms of their parents than previous generations, and as a result are likely to turn to them for advice (Debard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000; National Survey of Student Engagement, [NSSE] 2007). In fact, more than three-quarters of students say they ask for and follow their parents' advice (NSSE, 2007; Savage, 2008). A study conducted in 2007 also suggests that students more readily accept their parents' advice on a subject because they believe that their parents have a good understanding of their needs and interests (Laughlin & Creamer, 2007). Over the last decade, institutions of higher education have learned to adapt to the changing role of parents in the college environment and have involved them more in college life (Mullendore, Banahan, & Ramsey, 2005; Savage, 2008). By incorporating parents into college life, schools have positively impacted parents' perception of the college experience (2nd Annual National Survey on College Parent Experiences [College Parent], 2007; Mullendore et al., 2005).

However, while parents are reporting higher levels of satisfaction with their students' collegiate educational experience, some related data suggest that this new educator/student/parent relationship may have a negative impact on students post-college

(Association of American Colleges and Universities: Employers' Views on Accountability Challenges, [AACU] 2008; Association of American Colleges and Universities: Employers' Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn, [AACU] 2009; Twenge & Campbell, 2001). A 2009 survey of those in the workforce 25 years of age or younger found that job satisfaction was at a record low for that age group (The Conference Board: I Can't Get No....Job Satisfaction that Is, [Conference Board] 2010). A large portion of this sample included college graduates. At the same time, the millennial workforce is also manifesting low levels of organizational loyalty when compared to other generations (Littau, 2009). The data in these studies suggest that it may be precisely some of these millennial traits, especially the high level of dependence on their parents while in college, that may be contributing to the findings in the study. In the process of creating a more "satisfying" college experience, signs exist that changes in the student/parent/educator relationship may have had some unintended consequences on some of the most important educational outcomes for college graduates.

While there is some variability about the most important educational outcomes of college, there does seem to be a consensus between parents, faculty members and future employers that educational outcomes such as independence, a sense of self-direction and the ability to think critically are crucial for any college graduate (AACU, 2008; Bissett et al., 1999; Higher Education Research Institute: The American College Teacher: National Norms for 2007-2008, 2009; Turrentine et al., 2000). Unfortunately, recent surveys of employers found that where college graduates were most lacking were in the areas that seem directly related to these educational outcomes. Employers gave recent college

graduates low marks in areas such as self-direction, the ability to think critically, the ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources, and the ability to be adaptable to multiple situations (AACU, 2008, 2009). Especially low were rankings in the areas of adaptability, self-direction and critical thinking skills, with only 24 % of employers ranking their new employees “well prepared” with the independence to be adaptable to new situations in the workplace (AACU, 2008). The areas of self-direction and critical thinking skills received even lower rankings, with employers ranking only 23% “well prepared” in the area of self direction and 22% “well prepared” in the area of critical thinking skills (AACU, 2008, 2009). With each passing year, employer dissatisfaction in these areas continues to grow, and employers continue to ask institutions of higher education to provide more of a curricular emphasis in these areas to boost the skill level of graduates (AACU, 2008, 2009; AACU: How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy? [AACU] 2006). Given the new dynamic of the close bond between parent and student during the college experience, and the new direct involvement parents have with students while in college, the role of the parent in these educational outcomes must be explored.

The goal of this study is to examine the nature of the contact between parent and student near the end of the student’s college experience in order to provide a much more granular understanding of how this relationship impacts the development of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills. Additionally, this study will provide a better understanding how parents envision their son or daughter will develop

independence, self-direction, and critical thinking skills, and what part they believe they will play in this transformation during their interactions.

This chapter introduces the study's rationale through an in-depth examination of the traits of the millennial generation as well as an overview of the nature of recent parental involvement in the lives of their college students. This chapter also introduces relevant cognitive developmental theory related to the educational outcomes of independence, self-direction and critical thinking, outlines the overarching research questions, defines terms, and explains the significance of this study.

Rationale for the Study

With each passing year the options for post-secondary education increase for college-aged students (National Center for Education Statistics: Digest of Education Statistics, 2009). For colleges, this means even stiffer competition for students especially as the pool of overall students of college age begins to decline (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Knocking at the College Door: Projections for High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity 1992-2022, 2008). This fact, combined with decreased federal support and a dip in institutional endowments nationally, has made student tuition dollars crucial for the survival of most educational institutions (National Center for Education Statistics: Paying for College: Changes Between 1990 and 2000 for Full-Time Dependent Undergraduates, 2004). In this effort to maximize tuition dollars, educational institutions have been increasingly focused on how to attract and retain students to their institutions, and a major part of this focus has been increasing the role of parental involvement in the college experience (Mullendore et al., 2005). This

new institutional approach to parental involvement was hastened by an increasing demand of parents wanting to be more involved in the experience as well (Hofer & Moore, 2010). The increased expectations of parents, combined with numerous studies conducted over the last two decades that provide ample data to suggest that parental involvement is a positive indicator of success, made an increase in parental involvement a natural step for educators (Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Pennington, 2005; Rice, Cole & Lapsley, 1990; Wintre & Sugar, 2000; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Predictably, student satisfaction with the college experience also increased when the parent became more involved, as did the satisfaction of the parent (Noel Levitz: How Students Rate the Quality Service Climate on Campus, 2009; Noel Levitz: National Parent Satisfaction and Priorities Report, 2010). This study does not seek to attach negative connotations to parental involvement in the lives of college students. Quite to the contrary, especially when examining first-generation college students or other groups such as African American or Latino students, parental involvement in college is an important predictor of success (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Solberg & Villarreal, 1997; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). However, given the frustration of employers in regards to the development of employees and the coinciding frustration by millennials about the expectations placed on them in the workplace, an examination of the perceived developmental gap is important if educators and parents wish to prepare their students differently. In order to understand how dynamics are shaped in regards to independence, self-direction, and critical thinking, this study will first examine the nature of the

millennial generation and the role parents play in the lives of millennial students while in college.

Scope of the Study

The options for formal postsecondary education have increased over the last two decades, and students now have a variety of options in pursuing their education. More students are attending a community college than ever before, and the arrival of non-traditional students on traditional college campuses has also increased. For-profit institutions have also gained traction in recent years with their enrollment now making up close to 10% of all students in college (NCES, 2008). Distance education has also flourished recently, with both for-profit and non-profit schools delivering postsecondary instruction via the internet. Nevertheless, of the over 12 million students enrolled in a four year postsecondary institution in the fall of 2008, almost 70% of those students attended a non-profit school as a full-time student (NCES, 2008). In addition, 37% of these students fell between the ages of 18 and 24 (NCES, 2007). While 37% of students who are of “traditional age” might seem low, the next largest cohort of students, full-time students who are between ages of 25-39, make up only 17% of the overall student body.

While the percentage of college students who are not having the “traditional” college experience (defined here as attending a non-profit college full-time immediately after high school) may be shrinking, this population still represents the largest population of those who attend college. Additionally, much of the study of the “college student experience” from Mullendore to Wintre and Yaffe to Laughlin and Creamer focuses on those students who are of “traditional age” (18-24) and attending a non-profit four-year

postsecondary institution. Also, while not specifically defining the population, popular press articles examining the changing relationship between parents and college student seem to infer that they are describing college students of traditional age. As a result, this study will focus on those college students who are of “traditional age” (between 18 and 24 years of age) and attend either a public or private non-profit institution. Specific factors relating to the choice of a participating institution in this study will be discussed in Chapter III.

Traits of the Millennial Generation

The millennial generation may already be the most studied generation in history (Connaway, Radford, Dickey, Williams, & Confer, 2008). Its characteristics have been studied since the first year of their arrival in 1982, and this trend has only increased since the label of “millennial” started appearing in 1998 (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Many of these studies continue to use the traits described by Howe and Strauss as their starting point, since these authors are the most cited when discussing millennial characteristics (Debard, 2004). Many of the traits that Howe and Strauss (2000) consider in their work are positive in nature, including the millennial orientation toward working in a team, achieving an overall advanced level of education, expressing a strong civic spirit, and having a general upbeat attitude. Other authors highlight millennial’s high level of optimism for the future, their self-confidence and self-assurance, and statistics that show that the millennial generation is just generally well-behaved (Debard, 2004). Although some critics of these commentaries believe that such descriptions are overly optimistic, recent studies of the generation show millennials still have positive feelings about their

future, even in the face of the recent economic recession (Pew Research: Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change, [Pew Research] 2010). Howe and Strauss and others have especially identified a sense of “specialness,” developed by millennials, as a defining trait as well. The authors note how the strong feeling that they are unique and should be recognized for their individuality has impacted their expectations of college life (Debard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Pew Research, 2010). As Robert Debard notes, these students have been made to feel special by their parents during their upbringing and by college admission staff during their recruitment, so it follows that they will expect to be treated as special by those who would educate them and meet their student service needs (Debard, 2004).

Other authors, such as Jean Twenge (2004), have been much more pessimistic on the outlook of the future of the millennial generation, as evidenced in the title of her first book about America’s youth, *Generation Me: Why Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. In her studies on the worldview of young adolescents, Twenge found that they were much more willing to believe that the forces which shape their lives are outside of their control than those in generations past. She found that such a worldview was more likely to increase feelings of cynicism and lead to a self-serving bias by which positive outcomes were attributed to personal effort while negative outcomes were attributed to outside forces. Twenge mentions that similar findings in other studies have been correlated with characteristics of helplessness and decreased self-control. Twenge further describes the concept of “specialness” described by Howe and Strauss, but with a much more pessimistic view of

its implications. Twenge highlights the increase in self-esteem scores from 1968-1994 as a sign of the creation of an inflated “culture of self worth” (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). She attributes the high level of self-importance and entitlement among students on college campuses to these cultural shifts.

Also important in understanding the millennial generation is listening to how students describe themselves. When describing the traits that most define their generation, millennials identify their familiarity with technology as a defining characteristic (Pew Research, 2010). Just over 75% of all millennials have a social networking profile, and when college attendance is factored in the calculation, the number jumps to 86% (Pew Research, 2010). Many more millennials have posted videos or pictures of themselves online than other generations (Pew Research, 2010). Over 55% visit their social networking site of choice at least once a day, if not several times a day (Pew Research, 2010). Their use of other technology is telling as well. Over 74% of millennials who attend college connect to the internet wirelessly when away from work or school, and almost all of them (94%) have cell phones (Pew Research, 2010). In fact, more than a third of millennials say that they no longer have a traditional phone line at all and depend solely on their cell phone (Pew Research, 2010). Usage trends are similar for texting and new social networking technology like Twitter in which millennials far outpace use by other generations (Pew Research, 2010). So what positive benefit does this use of technology have on their daily lives according to millennials? Millennials report that technology makes life easier, allows them to achieve tasks more efficiently, and most importantly, remain close with family and friends (Pew Research, 2010). In the

next section, how this new familiarity with technology has influenced the frequency of communication with parents is discussed.

Parental Involvement Trends

While parental involvement in the college experience has been on the rise since the 1980s, the technology trends discussed in the previous section, combined with the appearance of phone plans allowing for easy and inexpensive or unlimited text messaging, have dramatically increased the amount of contact that parents have with their students (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Several surveys conducted in 2007 show just how intertwined parents had become in the student experience. A survey conducted by College Parents of America reported that one out of every three parents had some level of contact with their students daily (College Parent, 2007). A Pew Research study in the same year put the proportion of students who are in daily contact with their parents at 50% (Pew Research, 2007). By 2010 the amount of contact had actually increased, with the *average* amount of contact between student and parent reaching to over 13 times a week (Hofer & Moore, 2010). These studies also highlighted that the initiation of contact rested primarily in the hands of the students, not the parents (College Parent, 2007; Hofer & Moore, 2010). This level of contact with parents also appeared to be sustained contact throughout college, with a 2010 study by Barbara Hofer showing only a slight drop in the amount of contact by the students' senior year (Hofer & Moore, 2010).

Similar to their millennial students, the traits of millennial student parents have been depicted in both positive and negative ways as a result of this increased contact. Articles in the popular press have depicted these millennial parents as hovering

“helicopter” parents, unwilling or unable to give their child room to grow (Carroll, 2005; Hoover, 2008). However, most studies of college students related to parental involvement still show such contact has a positive correlation to student satisfaction and a successful transition to college, and some articles in the popular press have recently come to recognize this fact (Aucion, 2009; Lee & Hughey, 2001; Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004). While some data do exist (Hofer & Moore, 2010; Taub 1997) which suggest that an over-involved parent can slow developmental growth in college-aged students, most of the research shows a positive correlation between parental involvement and positive feelings about transition to college, overall college success, academic success, and emotional and social adjustment (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). While these studies do highlight the importance of parental involvement in areas such as a low-stress transition to school, academic success (in terms of GPA) and an easier emotional adjustment to the college experience, they do not focus on how these factors interplay with important educational outcomes in college. The next sections provide a brief theoretical background into how independence, self-direction and critical thinking are developed in college. These theoretical concepts provide an important backdrop to understanding how parental involvement impacts these educational outcomes.

Related Student Development Theory

Student Development Theory and Independence

To gain an understanding of how college students develop a sense of independence, one must first understand how they come to view themselves and their place in the world, including their family and their society. One of the most dominant theories when considering the development of college students in terms of independence is Arthur Chickering's Seven Vectors of Identity Development (1969, 1993). These vectors focus on how self-concept is developed and how thinking evolves as a result of this growth. Two of Chickering's vectors are especially important in this study because they are self-concept issues that typically are approached during late adolescence and early 20s, the "traditional age" of a college student. These vectors are "Developing Competence" and "Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Within the vector of "Developing Competence," the idea of "Developing Interpersonal Competence" is crucial for college students entering the workforce because it deals directly with their ability to communicate effectively with a group. Students who have achieved this level of development will be comfortable with talking about themselves, giving and receiving feedback, facilitating conversation with the goal of reaching some level of insight, and feel some empathy as a result of being able to understand others on a deeper level (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In Chickering's Vector "Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence," students begin to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals and tend to be less bound by others' opinions, including their parents (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Students finally achieve interdependence, according to Chickering, when parental opinions are no longer central to decision-making but are only one voice among many when choosing a path (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to this theory, the student/parent relationship during college that fails to evolve may be short-circuiting some of the development of autonomy and independence that traditionally happened in the college years. It is important to note here that Chickering's theory of identity development has gone through changes itself that recognize the evolving nature of the parent/student relationship. Some of the vectors have changed since their original appearance in 1969, including the change in the vector "Developing Autonomy" to its current name "Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence" (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As Deborah Taub (1995, 1997) notes, this change to the theory recognized that autonomy development had shifted, but still required at least some level of repudiation of parental input in favor of friends and peers before parental opinions are re-integrated in achieving "interdependence." Taub and others have noted that this adjustment to the original theory does not recognize the continued dependence on parents that has been shown especially in female college students (Taub, 1995, 1997). Other studies have noted that the path of autonomy development provided by Chickering and Reisser (1993) also does not fit other cultural or ethnic patterns (Hofer, 2010; Torres, 2010). To account for this perceived gap in acknowledging developmental patterns in women as well as other groups who depend on the family unit through and even after college, this study will primarily refer to the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Ruthellen

Josselson (1988) and also reference other studies that examine the varied autonomy development within other cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Student Development Theory and Self-Direction

In a discussion about developmental issues and self-direction, the concepts of independence and self-concept are important factors. Some sense of self that differentiates oneself from peers is necessary before development of self-direction can occur. Once an independent (or as Chickering describes, interdependent) view of the self has been achieved, one can begin to consider how he/she will interact with society. The first theorist to closely examine the development of self-direction in adolescents was Erik Erickson when he considered the process of developing self-direction for those approaching college-age. Erikson, in his theory of psychosocial development, identifies the primary goal for those adolescents from ages 13-19 years of age, as defining their role in society as they enter adulthood (Erikson, 1959). In Erikson's theory, adolescents attempt to balance what they desire as their role with what they feel society expects of them. If adolescents properly move through this stage, they will experience a period where they experiment with different societal roles. According to Erikson, adolescents will eventually "find themselves" through this process, landing on a balance that allows them to establish a social identity that is self-defined rather than externally defined. Erikson points out here that expectations by society or familial pressures that are too strict can short-circuit the process, effectively ending the process of experimentation and therefore identity formation. Such adolescents, according to Erikson, will continue to

define themselves via external sources and will have a difficult time providing self-direction.

Author Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) continued to build on the ideas of Erikson (1959) as well as the work of Arthur Chickering (1969) by examining how adolescents make meaning out of the external world and create a sense of self. His work focused on how adolescents and college-aged students develop a sense of direction for themselves, a process he called “self-authorship” (cited in Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 6). Marcia Baxter Magolda continued the exploration of Kegan’s concept of self-authorship by specifically examining college students and the development of self-direction. In order to be able to make such independent decisions, Baxter Magolda (1999) argues, students must first clarify an internally generated belief system that recognizes the importance of the input of parents and others, but ultimately is self-authored. In this developmental transformation, being influenced but not consumed by others, or being interdependent, requires the possession of an internally-generated belief system that regulates one’s interpretation of experience. This internally-generated belief system “allows for a ‘construction’ of the self as author, maker, critiquer, and remaker of its experience” (p. 9). Baxter Magolda suggests that Kegan (1994) encapsulated the importance of such interdependence, suggesting that a student who has achieved this level of self organization “can decide ‘for’ oneself without deciding ‘by’ oneself” (p. 222).

The concept of self-authorship is essential in understanding how millennials are prepared as they leave college and enter the workforce. As Kegan (1994) notes, employees in contemporary society are expected to be “self-initiating, self-correcting,

self-evaluating and guided by their own visions” (p. 153). In essence, employers are looking for employees who will “invent their own work” (p. 153). Besides just being accomplished masters of their particular work roles, jobs, or careers, employees in contemporary society are expected to take responsibility for these self-guided decisions and be held accountable for their choices.

Student Development Theory and Critical Thinking

In considering how college students think about knowledge itself there are many theories to consider. However, most theorists on some level acknowledge Jean Piaget’s (1932) theory of cognitive development as the starting point when one begins to think about how knowledge is constructed, especially in children and young adults. The Piaget model focused mostly on how young children create knowledge and assimilate new experiences into their existing knowledge base. In the later stages of knowledge development beginning around the age of first-year traditional college students, Piaget believed cognitive development required the abandonment of a cognitive lens that only viewed problems in a concrete way in favor of a view that allowed the consideration of complex problems abstractly. It was this abstract reasoning ability, according to Piaget, that was a prerequisite for critical thinking skills (Piaget, 1932).

Building on the Piaget model was William Perry (1970), who concentrated his study specifically on the intellectual development of college students. Out of his studies of hundreds of college students in the late 1960s came Perry’s model of Intellectual and Ethical Development, in which he described nine positions involved in intellectual and ethical development. Perry grouped these positions into larger categories, and students

moved through these categories sequentially, one building on the next. Perry's ideas about how students think about knowledge itself and how knowledge is acquired (epistemology) are key to his theory, as well as to understanding how students develop critical thinking skills in particular. Perry's theory describes students who move through an understanding of knowledge that is dualistic, to a position about the nature of knowledge that is more relativistic, and one that appreciates the contextual nature of knowledge and how knowledge is created. As with Piaget, the development of the relativistic lens through which students can assess knowledge based on context, source, fit with other data and a number of other sources is key to development of critical thinking. Possession of such a point of view will then allow students to assess data from a variety of areas and reconcile facts into a plan of action (Perry, 1970).

Finally, building on the work of Piaget (1932), Perry (1970), as well as John Dewey (1938), Patricia King and Karen Kitchener, developed the Reflective Judgment Model (1981) which dealt heavily with the development of critical thinking skills. In the King and Kitchener Model, college students begin their thinking about knowledge as existing absolutely and concretely in a stage called "Pre-Reflective Thinking" (King & Kitchener, 1994). In this stage most information comes from authority figures or experts and is accepted as true unequivocally. Students then progress into the "Quasi Reflective Stage" in which they still accept that absolute truth exists for all matters, and they believe uncontrollable variables such as research design flaws are responsible for incorrect or contradictory data (King & Kitchener, 1994). Finally students move into the "Reflective Thinking" stage in which knowledge is seen as contextual and a relativistic perspective is

accepted as the conceptual lens. With the Reflective Judgment Model, as with the two models discussed previously, these theories provide a context in which to understand how parental involvement in college student decision-making impacts their conceptual lens about the way knowledge is constructed and used.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The first section of this chapter introduced the changing nature of the millennial college student, discussed the pattern of increased involvement by parents in the collegiate student experience, and summarized key student development theories as they relate to independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills. With this context in mind, my study will attempt to better define the nature of parent expectations in the areas of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills, to better understand the nature of the contact between parents and students in relation to these educational outcomes, and to identify ways that educators can partner with parents to achieve these important developmental goals. In order to understand these areas more fully, the following questions will guide this study:

Research Questions

1. How do parents describe their expectations for their student's development in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience? What level of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking do they expect their student to achieve by the end of his or her college career?

2. What role do parents believe they serve in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience?
3. What role do parents believe the college experience plays in fostering a sense of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience?

Definitions

Independence. The definition of independence for the purposes of this study does not rely on one existing model that neatly defines the process of gaining emotional and intellectual independence from parents in a few stages or steps. A definition from just one theory does not cast a wide enough net to possibly relate to every student's experience with gaining independence from parents or extended family. This is especially true given the disparate theoretical views pertaining to the idea of how much separation needs to exist between parent and student to gain independence, or if separation needs to exist at all. Instead this study will depend on a few different approaches to achieving independence. This study will look to definitions provided by Josselson (1988), Grotevant and Cooper (1985) and others which recognize that college students must go through some process that allows them to shed parental dependencies, but at the same time not sever close familial ties. Ruthellen Josselson (1988) calls achieving this balance where a student has acquired a separate sense of self along with a continued "connectedness" with the family "relational autonomy." Other researchers, including Grotevant and Cooper (1985), as well as Lapsley and Edgerton (2002), have defined this process of achieving independence within the context of the family unit as

“separation-individuation.” However, these definitions do not allow for the students who still fit the Chickering and Reisser (1993) model that suggests achievement of a certain level of autonomy is still necessary before interdependence can be achieved. In lieu of one theory, this study will depend both on the definitions of “separation-individuation” or “relational autonomy” as well as the Chickering and Reisser (1993) model that proposes a level of autonomy is necessary before interdependence can be achieved. Although these two approaches differ slightly in the process and the amount of separation needed from parents, both agree that “separateness and connectedness are important for adaptive functioning” (Rice, Cole & Lapsley, 1990, p. 196).

Self-Direction. For the purposes of this study, the definition of self-direction will be linked to the concept of “self-authorship” as described by Marcia Baxter Magolda (1999) in her work *Creating Contexts for Learning and Self-authorship*. Designed specifically around the dilemmas that a traditional college-aged student experiences, the theory of self-authorship recognizes that to achieve successful self-direction, a student must achieve some level of independence, and that both parents and students have some responsibility in fostering this process of independence (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

In developing this autonomy, self-authorship requires students to achieve three developmental goals. First, students must construct an internal identity and belief system that considers outside opinions (such as instructors and family members) but is at the same time separate from external influences (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Secondly, self-authorship also asks students to begin to organize and construct knowledge in a way that has personal meaning to them within this internal belief system. Finally, the theory

discusses the need for students to continue to engage in external relationships without losing their internal identity. It is through this maturation process, Baxter Magolda believes, that students can learn to act independently, chart their own course, and still remain part of the family network that is so important to student adjustment, and ultimately, to student success. By allowing room for the goals of parents and students alike, self-authorship provides a framework which recognizes that students can simultaneously be lifelong self-directed learners, while also remaining close with their parents and preparing for a job market which demands that they adapt quickly and provide self-direction.

Critical Thinking. The definition of critical thinking for the purpose of this study is based on King and Kitchener's (1994) "reflective thinking" described in their Seven Stages of Reflective Judgment. As King and Kitchener point out, the terms "reflective thinking" and "critical thinking" are often used interchangeably in regards to the study of critical thinking skills (p. 8). The reflective thinking definition in the King and Kitchener model relies on a specific view of what type of question requires reflective thinking, how knowledge is created and how knowledge is justified. In the King and Kitchener model, the problem must first be "ill structured" meaning that a clear answer cannot be obtained and a level of evaluation is required (p.13). Upon encountering such a problem, a reflective thinker constructs a solution after a process of reasonable inquiry is completed. The adequacy of those solutions is evaluated in terms of what is most reasonable or probable according to the current evidence, and is reevaluated when relevant new evidence, perspectives, or tools of inquiry become available. Knowledge is justified on

the basis of a variety of “interpretive considerations,” such as the weight of the evidence available, how well the conclusion fits the facts, the risk of incorrect conclusions, consequences of alternative judgments, and how all of these factors relate together (p. 15). Conclusions are defended as representing the most complete, plausible, or compelling understanding of an issue on the basis of the available evidence. The King and Kitchener model is most appropriate for this study because instead of focusing on just problem-solving skills as with some models, the King and Kitchener model, as with the Piagetian and Perry models, focuses on the way knowledge is constructed, or the epistemological basis of knowledge. For millennial students who have been described as extremely deferential to authority figures such as parents or teachers for answers (a stage King and Kitchener call “pre-reflective thinking”), an examination of how continued parental involvement in college impacts epistemological development is a key focus of the study (King & Kitchener, 1994, p.14).

While this study acknowledges some overlap exists in the growth of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills, this study has constructed these definitions separately in order to recognize that employers are identifying independence (ability to adapt to different situations independently), self-direction (ability to take initiative and think creatively), and critical thinking skills (ability to assess, evaluate and summarize multiple sources of information) as three key developmental gaps of college graduates (AACU, 2008, 2009). Since this study hopes to ultimately make recommendations to augment learning outcomes for graduates in these key areas,

structuring these definitions separately will hopefully yield results that more directly relate to the perceived deficiencies.

Significance of the Study

In 2009, a survey of job satisfaction conducted annually by the well-respected business research organization The Conference Board yielded an alarming result. Those new to the workforce (including most college graduates) who were 25 years of age or younger were reporting record low numbers in job satisfaction, with only 36% reporting they were happy with their jobs (Conference Board, 2010). This was the lowest for the age group in the nearly two decades of the survey, and followed a continuing decline over the last several years (The Conference Board, 2003, 2010). Although the job satisfaction for all Americans was in decline according to the survey, a significant difference in decreased satisfaction existed between those in the under 25 group and the rest of the groups (Conference Board, 2010).

After hearing from many of these frustrated new employees as well as several human resources managers who struggled to retain their new hires, consultant Lisa Orrell (2008), decided to write her book, *Millennials Incorporated*. After conducting interviews with new graduates who were potential employees, Orrell offered several tips to employers on how to retain this new generation of employees. Her advice to employers provides enlightening insight into the possible source of frustration for the incoming employees. Orrell encourages employers to provide “constant contact” from direct supervisors. She cites a recent study of graduates that suggests a majority of them expect to hear from their managers at least once a day. Orrell points out that this level of contact

and constant “checking in” has been instilled in them from their parents, their high school teachers, as well as many that work in the college environment. According to Orrell, this phenomenon leaves recent college graduates expecting to be given a clear path and a plan for accomplishing a task. Orrell also reminds managers to be open-minded to the ideas and suggestions of new employees, even if these suggestions come fairly quickly after their arrival. Again, Orrell points out that this new generation is used to an environment at home and in the classroom that values and reacts to their feedback, and they expect the same in the work environment. Orrell also recommends starting a formal or informal mentoring program for new workers as a successful retention tool, and suggests that such a program will help ease new employees who are used to having constant guidance from parents, teachers and others. Finally, Orrell suggests developing a three, six and 12 month career plan with new arrivals, and referring back to this plan during weekly meetings in order to encourage a sense of direction. Although Orrell’s data are anecdotal, they do provide a glimpse into what exactly millennials are expecting based on their college experience and why millennial students might be just as frustrated as employers about how ill-prepared they find themselves as they leave college and enter the workforce. These suggestions provided by Orrell, combined with the employer data detailed previously, point to a significant preparation gap that students, parents and educators must address. While attempts have been made to address the issues via curriculum, little has been done to address parents as a key constituency in this change.

In the last few years, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has developed a group called LEAP, or Liberal Education and America’s Promise, to address

some of the concerns from employers about the preparation of college students for the workforce. Its most recent planning document, entitled “College Learning for The New Global Century,” mainly focuses on curricular and extra-curricular implementation strategies to directly address some of the complaints by employers (Association of American Colleges & Universities, College Learning for the New Global Century [LEAP], 2007). However, families of students were only mentioned in passing in the executive summary, and a role for parents was not clearly identified in this new educational roadmap. Undoubtedly parents and families support an increased focus on educational outcomes such as “foundations for lifelong (self-directed) learning” and “critical and creative thinking skills ” as explained in the document, but a plan that fails to address the familial role in the educational process does not acknowledge a key constituency in achieving these goals (LEAP, 2007). This study will provide a new level of understanding of exactly how parents may contribute to these important initiatives. By gaining this new understanding, educators will be better prepared to partner with students and parents in addressing these shared educational outcomes. This study will also provide a better understanding of what parents envision when they describe a sense of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking, and how the parent/student/educator relationship should evolve to achieve these goals.

The next chapter provides a critical review of relevant literature about the historical and cultural contexts from which the current student/parent/educator relationship emerged, and explores past research involving parental involvement in the lives of college students and its impact on the college experience itself. Finally, the next

chapter offers an in-depth review of relevant student development theory as well as an overview of past and current research on the topic of student development in the areas of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking skills.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to understand the state of the current relationship between parents, students and educators on contemporary college campuses, an examination of the historical and cultural roots of this relationship is necessary. Dynamics that exist on college campuses are informed by traditions, both formal and informal, that have developed over the generations. If one or both parents attended college, their experience also provides the lens by which they approach the experience of their sons or daughters. The first section of the review attempts to contextualize the current relationship between parents, students and educators by providing a brief overview of how the relationship has evolved. The second section of the review explores the current research that considers the process of transition to college as it relates to the relationship between parent and college student. Finally, the review provides an in-depth analysis of how theorists currently believe the skills of independence, self-direction and critical thinking are developed in college students, and also provides an overview of the relevant research.

History of Student, Parent, and Educator Relationship

In the 370 year history of higher education in the United States, the role of the parent, student and educator in the college experience has evolved dramatically, especially in terms of responsibility for student maturation. For the first two centuries of

higher education in the United States, the responsibility for this development rested squarely on the educator. Early colonial colleges were mostly modeled after the English “residential college” system of education (Rudolph, 1990, p.87). In adapting this model, the colonial colleges would typically enroll students at the age of 15 or 16 and attempt to sequester them from society (Allmendinger, 1975; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). In this monastic residential college model, the students would live, eat and learn with their teachers and have little exposure to the outside world (Allmendinger, 1975; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Geiger, 1999; Moore, 1976; Rudolph 1990). As students arrived to these colonial residential colleges, parents understood in a real sense that they were ceding some of their parental rights by sending their son to college (Allmendinger, 1971). Parents accepted that as a student matriculated to college, the relationship of father/son was traded for father-figure/son as a headmaster or tutor took a student under his care. This tradition of overseeing young students in a paternal role, a concept called in loco parentis (in place of parents), was articulated formally by Sir William Blackstone in his four volume work, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765). Blackstone (1979) described how a father may “delegate part of his parental authority, during his life” in order that a son is educated (p. 473). The father would delegate authority to the tutor or headmaster who would then have the power to offer “restraint and correction, as may be necessary to answer the purposes for which he is employed” (p. 453). As a result of this practice, parents did not play a significant role in the on-campus lives of colonial college students, preferring to defer developmental responsibilities to educators.

By the early-to-mid 19th century, students found this paternalistic pressure applied by educators to, as historian Helen Horowitz (1987) puts it, “pay, pray, study, and accept,” too restrictive (p. 26). Over the course of the 19th century, riots, a common occurrence, were initiated by students who were incensed by a combination of oppressive control and a lack of recourse for complaints about perceived mistreatment (Geiger, 2000; Horowitz, 1987). Nonetheless, educators of the 19th century continued to view these student restrictions as benevolent “parental superintendence” (Report on the Course of Instruction in Yale College [Yale Report] 1828, p. 9). The Yale Report of 1828, a strong endorsement of the residential college model and the paternalistic oversight it required, echoed the sentiments of educators across the country and suggested that educators were serving appropriately as “faithful and affectionate guardians [who would] take [students] by the hand and guide their steps” (p. 9).

By the 20th century, the United States was moving into a new era in higher education. The continued rise in the diversity and volume of college students in the United States who enrolled after the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, combined with the more hands-off approach of education popularized by the German “university” model of education, helped spell the beginning of the end for the paternalistic model of the residential college. In lieu of *in loco parentis* and stifling student oversight was a more *laissez faire* attitude towards student behavior that was friendlier to students and more respectful of student freedoms (Rudolph, 1990). Although many sectors of society were still prevented access to higher education in the early 20th century, it was during this period that historian Martin Trow (1988) described American higher education as moving

from educating the elite to educating the masses. What would be attempted during this period, according to historian Frederick Rudolph (1990), was “reconciliation between the aristocratic and the democratic, between the English and the Germanic, between humanistic and scientific” (p. 453). In other words, educational institutions attempted to find a compromise between the paternalistic control of the English residential college model and the laissez faire approach of the German university model.

Educators of the 1920s determined the way to achieve this balance was to release some control over student behavior while at the same time addressing a student’s personal development (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). According to educational historians John Brubacher and Willis Rudy, educators of the time believed that “extensive personnel services should be developed which would give attention to the student’s problems of self-support, job placement, counsel him on health and personal problems, give him educational guidance, and help him ‘adjust’ to college and life” (p. 330). This new outlook on the support of students and student life laid the foundation for what is considered the modern student personnel movement. It was this new class of student personnel staff with whom students, along with their parents beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, would develop a relationship.

Cultural Shifts to the Student, Parent, and Educator Relationship

Early in the second half of the 20th century, college campuses began to evolve at a rapidly increasing rate, particularly in re-defining the relationship between the student and the college educator. The social unrest present in the larger American culture of the 1960s often found its way onto college campuses or, in some instances, arrived on

college campuses before spreading to the rest of the nation. Such was the case in 1961, when six African American students were immediately expelled from their college after they briefly demonstrated at an off-campus lunch grill where they were refused service. They sued their institution as a result of their dismissal, and *Dixon v. Alabama Board of Education* (1961) served to fundamentally re-define the relationship between student and educator. The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decided to intervene on behalf of Dixon, stating that students are owed at least a basic level of due process, commensurate to their First Amendment rights. The *Dixon* decision marked the first time that the federal courts took the initiative to intervene in the relationship between educator and a student or parent (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Kaplin & Lee, 2006). Before this intervention, the legal nature of the student relationship had always been between the parent, who ceded some parental rights, and the educator, who accepted those rights in order to provide education. The *Dixon* case abandoned this notion of the student as a university ward, and established students as Constitutional “adults” with rights and due process expectations (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Grossi & Edwards, 1997; Kaplin & Lee, 2006). By ending in loco parentis in the public sector, the *Dixon* case shifted the formal relationship from parent and educator to student and educator (Bickel & Lake, 1999; Grossi & Edwards, 1997; Kaplin & Lee, 2006).

Social unrest continued to grow on campus, with students continuing to demand that colleges recognize their constitutional rights. Protests at the University of California at Berkley in 1964 brought the campus to a standstill as students demanded recognition of their free speech rights and the ability to participate in campus governance (Astin, Astin,

Bayer, & Bisconti, 1975). Sit-ins at Cornell University in 1969 demanded that African American students be appropriately accommodated in order to have a chance to succeed at Cornell (Astin et al., 1975). Students at Kent State in 1970 demanded the ability to protest U.S. foreign policy, and four students were killed after the National Guard was called to end the protests. These events help define the prevailing campus climate in the late 1960s and early 1970s and serve as case studies that reveal a cultural shift on college campuses.

Slowly, laws impacting traditional college-aged students began to catch up to the cultural shifts. The first major change occurred in 1971 with a new constitutional amendment that would forever change how the courts legally viewed students (Coomes, 1994; Olivias, 1999). The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1971 and lowered the voting age in the United States from 21 to 18 years of age. This major change in how traditional-aged students were viewed in public life served as the backdrop for the important legislative changes that followed. Included in these legislative changes is the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the passage of the Buckley Amendment in 1974, better known as the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA). This set of legislative changes followed the tone of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prevented discrimination based on race for those institutions receiving federal funding. Title IX prohibited institutions that receive federal funds from denying educational benefits on the basis of gender. Section 504 prohibited institutions that receive federal funds from discriminating against students with a disability who

would otherwise be qualified to participate in a program or activity. Finally, FERPA prohibited all educational institutions that receive federal funding from releasing student records to others and allowed students in the college setting the right to review their record and the opportunity to amend it. The passage of this new legislation continued to further define students as legal adults, and moved the parents even further out of the student/ parent/educator relationship. The FERPA legislation makes especially clear the prevailing view that a student is an adult as he/she moves to college; that is, the rights pertaining to FERPA pass from parents to students once the student turns 18 years of age or enrolls in a postsecondary institution.

Changing Student and Parent Expectations

During the mid-to-late 1980s, the student activism era had reached an end as student attitudes on campus shifted once again. The most noticeable change on campus was the relative abandonment among students of concern for social issues in favor of a career-oriented focus and more concern with material success (Altbach, 1997; Levine & Riedel, 1987). With a sense of disconnection about their ability to impact world events, students turned inward, and could be described as increasingly self-concerned (Altbach, 1997). According to authors Arthur Levine and Eric Riedel (1987), “They were far more optimistic about their personal futures than about our collective future together” (p. 269). In stark contrast to the students attending college in the 1960s and mid 1970s, these students were concerned with “the politics of me” (p. 269). At the same time, the demand for more involvement in institutional governance that defined student presence on campus in the 1960s virtually evaporated by the 1980s. However, the lack of student

activism did not mean that students lost all power to impact what happened on college campuses. As a result of the leveling off and eventual downturn in the pool of traditional-aged college students by the late 1980s, finding a college to attend had changed from a “seller’s market” to a “buyers market” and incoming students took full advantage (Altbach, 1993; Levine & Riedel, 1987). Incoming students took a consumer’s approach to picking a college and wanted to make sure that they were getting their money’s worth. As a result of the continually evolving student body and their changing consumer demands, almost all institutions expanded their student services by adding career advisors, counselors, deans, residence hall staff, and other support personnel (Boyer, 1993).

During this same time period, parents were also changing their expectations of colleges on campus. In the mid 1980s, parents finally began to take notice of the legal and cultural shifts that had occurred regarding student oversight at educational institutions (Boyer, 1993). Prior to this time, the assumption persisted that when an undergraduate went off to college, he or she would, in some general manner, be cared for by the institution. Parents began to feel betrayed by institutions that took a laissez faire approach to student oversight, especially when that approach led to their son or daughter being physically or emotionally harmed. By the second half of the 1980s, legislators and the courts began to respond to parental concern with unprecedented intervention in response to perceived lawlessness on campus. A new wave of legislation began with the passage of laws such as the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (DFSCA) requiring more drug and alcohol education on campus (Boyer, 1993; Gehring, 1994). In 1991,

Congress also introduced the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (later re-named the Clery Act). This new legislation required campuses to collect data on campus crime, disseminate the information to students as well as the public, and provide education on how to be safe. In 1994 Congress also passed a Campus Sexual Assault Bill of Rights which required institutions to report on their sexual assault and sexual offense awareness programs, possible sanctions for sexual offenses, and procedures for students to follow once an offense has occurred. Finally in 1998 Congress amended FERPA to allow institutions to notify parents of students under the age of 21 when the institution determines that students violated campus policies or laws governing the use of alcohol or other drugs, regardless of whether the student is considered a dependent or not (Lowery, Palmer & Gehring, 2005; Weeks, 2008).

As the millennium arrived, students and their parents brought with them to campus new expectations about the purpose of a college education. Attitudes about the expected outcomes of attending college had shifted for students and parents, and many of the changes reflected a view of college as a place for career preparation (Bissett et al., 1999). For students, changing attitudes about the reasons for attending college have continued to reflect movement toward the view of education as a means to a financial end rather than an experience meant for learning, maturation and self-improvement (Higher Education Research Institute: The American freshman: Forty-year trends from 1966-2006 [CIRP]). The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which began conducting research on freshman students beginning in 1966, reports that students from the 60s and millennial students both believed that the most important two reasons to

attend college included: “To learn about things that interest me” and “To get a better job” (CIRP, 2008, p. 4). However, by 2006, earning more money was a close third, with 69% of students reporting that “To be able to make more money” was a very important reason for going to college, compared with 50% of incoming students in 1966 (p. 4). Also by 2006, 67% of students indicated that “the chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one’s earning power” (p. 4).

Although changing attitudes of students regarding the reasons for attending college may be a cause of concern, the 2000 study by Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth and Ward-Roof about parental attitudes has both encouraging information as well as discouraging signs for educators. The most important goals for their students, as described by parents, included receiving a quality education, preparing for the job market, developing a level of maturity, having some fun, graduating, making friends, and achieving academic success. While one professed goal listed by parents that of preparing for the job market, could be construed as consumer-driven, on the whole, these goals seem to reflect that attending college is about achieving other types of learning besides that which is specifically oriented toward a career. Nevertheless, new public perceptions of students as consumers continue to place new expectations on educational institutions. The most recent requirements of the Higher Education Opportunities Act (2008) require many “consumer” facts be provided to the “customer,” such as career placement data, recent tuition increase amounts, average student debt, and overall costs as compared to other schools (Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008 [HEOA]). Understanding this current mindset, as well as the journey of students, parents and educators through the

generations of higher education in the United States, provides a useful backdrop to this study in understanding how parents believe they should participate in the educational process.

Given this review has thus far provided an overview of the history of the relationship between student, parents and educator, an examination of how the relationship changes have impacted the process of college transition is needed. This new involvement by parents fundamentally changed the prevailing wisdom about the process of developing into an independent adult during this period. Implications of this shift are examined in the following section.

Parental Involvement and Transition to College

As was apparent beginning in the mid 1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s, an increased level of parental involvement was becoming the norm on college campuses. This trend only increased with the arrival of the millennial student. As the relationship between parent and student continued to be redefined through this process, a new paradigm emerged in terms of emotional connections with parents as students left for college. Instead of emotionally and psychologically cutting parents off in an effort to mature, students were now attempting to find independence and autonomy by renegotiating norms within the existing family relationship (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Josselson, 1988; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). This concept, described by Josselson (1988) as “relational autonomy,” defines the narrow path college students must walk between a sense of separation and a sense of connectedness in establishing this new identity. Other researchers described this

process as “separation-individuation,” a developmental task describing “a renegotiation of family relationships in such a way that independence and autonomy are attained within the context of ongoing relationships” (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002, p. 484). Ironically, many studies found that how students *felt* about making this transition in the separation-individuation process was more important to a student’s successful college transition than the actual *process* of developing this autonomy (Lee & Hughey, 2001; Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004; Rice, Cole & Lapsley, 1990; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). Further studies on the transition of traditional-age college students found that those who successfully negotiated the separation-individuation process were able to make the transition without creating negative *feelings* about the process of separation (Lee & Hughey, 2001; Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004). A relatively conflict-free transition in the separation-individuation process, the research concluded, positively impacted everything from the transition to college, to effective career planning, to academic achievement (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Lee & Hughey, 2001; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990). Students who experienced a conflictual transition often reported negative feelings, including reactions of anxiety, guilt or a sense of rejection from their parents (Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004). In achieving positive feelings about college transition, several studies point to two important factors that are well established before a student ever arrives to a college campus: parenting style, a concept first outlined by Baumrind (1968), and attachment style, as described by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991).

Baumarind's (1968) description of various parenting approaches has been used in several studies as a framework in which to understand the influence of parental involvement during the transition to college. In the Baumarind model, parenting approaches could be described as permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. In the permissive approach, the parents place few, if any, rules on the child and generally take a relaxed approach to parenting. Children are given great latitude to make their own decisions with little input from parents. In the authoritarian parenting approach the opposite is true. This parenting style favors harsh discipline and rigid boundaries for the child. In this style, communication flows one way and the child is expected to accept the directives of the parent without question. The third parenting technique highlights a balance between the two techniques, called the authoritative style. In this style, discipline is still present but perceived as fair and part of a communication process. These parents have high expectations but value open communication with the child to build these expectations (Hickman et al., 2000). A number of studies have shown the positive impact of the authoritative parenting style on a wide variety of college adjustment issues, such as academic adjustment, goal setting, and career preparation (Gonzalez & Greenwood & WenHsu, 2001; Hickman et al., 2000; Lee & Hughey, 2001). In terms of the authoritative style, communication played an extremely important role in success, especially if the student felt like the communication was open, and the respect for each point of view was mutual (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). A study by Wintre and Yaffe found that those students who perceived greater degrees of mutual respect in their relationships with their parents were not only less likely to have a difficult transition to college, but

also less likely to be identified as depressed. A study by Gonzalez, Greenwood, and WenHsu (2001) also found that students who described high levels of open communication with their parents had a strong sense of motivation while in college. It should be noted here, however, that some studies suggest that such findings may be only generalizable to Caucasian families who have not experienced a divorce (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Taub, 1997).

Another important factor in the success of students is the way in which they build new relationships as they move to a new environment. This process, according to Bartholomew and Howowitz (1991), is most heavily informed by the relationship originally established with their parents as young children. This original relationship, or “attachment,” is then used as a template to establish other new relationships.

Bartholomew and Horowitz identify four attachment styles: dismissing, preoccupied, fearful, and secure. In the dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful attachment styles, students have a less than positive view about either themselves or other people, and as a result have trouble establishing intimate mature relationships. A secure attachment style, on the other hand, describes a person with a positive sense of self and also a general positive outlook about others. An individual with secure attachment style is comfortable with both a sense of independence as well as intimate relationships with family and others, a necessary component to achieve the relational autonomy that is key to a smooth transition to college (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998). Having a secure attachment style in place for college students has also had implications on a wide variety of factors, such as academic success, coping strategies, self-confidence, and

comfort with experimentation and/or exploration both academically and socially (Cutrona et al., 1994). This dependence on a secure attachment with parents was even more predictive of college success in the female college students than in their male counterparts. In another difference from males, women who displayed “attitudinal dependence” (similar beliefs, attitudes as their parents) succeeded at a higher rate than those who did not (Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994, p. 253). Several studies also examined the interplay between education levels of parents along with attachment style, with interesting results. These studies, when the factor of attachment is removed from the equation, actually found little predictive value in parental education level, which again highlights the importance of this factor (Gonzalez, et al., 2002; McCartin & Meyer, 1988; Steinberg et al., 1992).

Parental/Family Attachment and Ethnicity

With a few exceptions as noted above, the transferability of the parental attachment theory across cultures has not been questioned (Melendez & Melendez, 2010). Attachment theory presumed that the process in college of achieving a balance between separation and relatedness was a phenomenon that existed universally. However, a few studies have taken a more multicultural perspective. In 2000, Rothbaum et al. conducted a study juxtaposing the current understanding of attachment theory on Japanese culture. This study concluded that attachment theory relied heavily on Western definitions of ideas like “secure attachment.” While the Rothbaum (2000) study did find that the idea of parental attachment seems to exist across cultures, the way that attachment is used in development varies depending on the culture. For example, in the

United States this attachment may be used to achieve individuation and autonomy; in Japan the attachment may be used to fit in culturally and to establish bonds of cultural loyalty and interdependence. Since the Rothbaum et al. study, proponents have defended the malleability of attachment theory to adjust to different cultural differences (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 2001). These proponents point out that multiple studies have been conducted, from Uganda to China, validating the universality of attachment theory.

While the universality of parental attachment may indeed be valid across cultures, recent studies like that of Melendez and Melendez (2010) show that seeking a culturally specific understanding of how, for instance, Latino or African American students integrate parents into their sense of self is essential to providing them support. In the Melendez and Melendez study, parental support and attachment were highly predictive on college success for the African American and Latino students, even above the Caucasian students who participated. To ignore these cultural reference points, the Melendez study shows, is to fail to acknowledge the differing journey these students take on their transition to college.

With a greater understanding of the emotional factors involved between parent and student in the transition to college and ultimately college achievement, this review now turns to how theorists believe development occurs in the areas of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills. With each aspect of development, the theoretical roots of each developmental model are explored, a more robust examination of current theory is presented, and relevant research concerning the developmental theory is discussed.

Student Development Theory and Research

Independence

Ideas about the process of gaining independence in late adolescence and through the traditional college years have gone through significant adjustment over the last four decades. Many original theories addressing this process highlighted the need for a period of conflict with parents. This need for conflict is certainly present in Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages (1959), which are widely accepted as the foundational theory behind ego and identity development. When examining the process of gaining autonomy during late adolescence, Erikson highlighted the need for a rejection of parental constraints in order to emerge with a new, more autonomous, identity. This phase, according to Erikson, would allow the student who successfully navigates this process to emerge with a new ability to self-define in a way that does not make parental expectations as central as they had been prior to adolescence. Similar to Erikson, Peter Blos (1967, 1979) emphasized the centrality of separation as a precursor to identity formation. Identity development required the sharpening of boundaries in self definition that were distinct from others. According to Blos, "[i]ndividuation implies that the growing person takes increasing responsibility for what he does and what he is rather than depositing this responsibility on the shoulders of those under whose influence and tutelage he has grown up" (p. 168).

As mentioned previously, Arthur Chickering, in his first edition of *Education and Identity* (1969), also identified "Developing Autonomy" as one of the Seven Vectors of Student Development, highlighting the need to psychologically break from parental

influence in order to form a self-governed sense of self. However, by the mid 1980s, an increasing body of research began to reverse this thinking, recognizing that these models of identity development mainly incorporated the process of White males, and failed to account for differences in others, especially women (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1988; Straub 1987; Straub & Rogers 1986).

Especially important in the re-imagining of the process of gaining independence was the work of Carol Gilligan in her book *A Different Voice* where she posited that women conceptualize and experience the world in a way that is defined as an interconnected web of relationships while men experience the world in terms of hierarchy and competition (Gilligan, 1982). Ruthellen Josselson, in her 1988 work detailing her longitudinal study of identity development in women, also adopted this view, recognizing that development of a sense of independence, or “individuation,” was not as clear a path as defined by either Erikson, Blos, or Chickering:

Separation, then, does not employ individuation. Nor is physical separation necessary for individuation. Many young people become their own person without ever leaving home. What is critical here is that aspects of the self become re-worked during adolescence so that the young person has some choice in the creation of a self, a self that will function autonomously but in relation to the parents. (Josselson, 1988, p. 20)

In re-imagining the process of growing into an independent adult, Josselson (1988) identified the central aspect of identity development as the commitment to a “self-in-relation” rather than to a “self that stands alone facing an abstract world” (p. 23). According to Josselson, rather than a repudiation of parental authority identified by Blos and others as a prerequisite for independence, it is the search for “self -in-relation” that is the main task for women in the developmental process of gaining a separate sense of self.

Josselson described this process as a search for “relational autonomy,” in which college students must walk between a sense of separation and a sense of connectedness in establishing this new identity.

Another key theoretical concept in developing a sense of independence is Chickering’s concept of “Developing Competence,” first appearing as one of his seven developmental vectors in his 1969 work *Education and Identity* as well as the vector “Moving From Autonomy Towards Interdependence” that appears in Chickering and Reisser’s updated version of *Education and Identity*, published in 1993. Under the vector “Developing Competence” is the task Chickering labels “Developing Interpersonal Competence” that most relates directly to the process of developing intellectual independence from parents. Developing interpersonal competence, “accompanies increasing readiness to take responsibility, increas[ed] openness, and increas[ed] willingness to take risks with one’s self-esteem” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 82). Chickering and Reisser further define achieving interpersonal competence as creating a communication style that involves asking questions, self-disclosing, giving feedback, and participating in dialogues that bring insight and enjoyment. It involves a “broader ability to work smoothly with a group, to facilitate others’ communication, to add to the overall conversation, and to be sensitive and empathic with others” (p. 72). This growth towards independence requires college students to expose themselves intellectually and emotionally in a way that can result in negative feelings but that can be rewarded by gained skills in working with others and expanded self-knowledge. Such an expansion in the concept of self, according to Chickering and Reisser, is what facilitates growth

toward independence and a strengthened self-concept. Achieving this competence and a feeling that one has achieved adequately both socially and academically relative to other students improves self-concept and a feeling of competence. This feeling, combined with what Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) describe as positive self-esteem (an internal comparison of where one “is” against where one “should be”), is a large step toward achieving emotional independence in the Chickering and Reisser model.

In the 1993 version of *Education and Identity*, Chickering and Reisser also discuss the importance of a newly revised vector, “Moving From Autonomy Towards Interdependence.” In this revised vector, Chickering and Reisser acknowledge a variety of studies, including work by Josselson (1988), Gilligan (1982), and others, that have helped them re-calibrate their theoretical framework concerning the development of autonomy. They seem to echo Josselson in their re-introduction to the topic, stating that “some students go away to college but continue to live at home psychologically. Other students live with parents but use the college environment to define personal goals and values that are truly their own” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 115). The authors now recognize that the path to what they call “interdependence,” which acknowledges the need for a level of autonomy but also the need for a web of connectedness in its development, takes many different forms. In Chickering and Reisser’s new process, interdependence is considered the “capstone” of autonomy (p. 140). During this process, a certain level of autonomy must be established before moving towards interdependence. Autonomy is established, according to the theory, by gaining both emotional and instrumental independence. Emotional independence is attained when a student has a

sense of freedom from a continual and pressing need for reassurance, affection, or approval from others. Instrumental independence is established when a student has the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed manner. “When students can rely on their own ability to get the information they need, move toward goals of their own choosing, and navigate from one place to another, physically and psychologically”, they have then established the requisite level of autonomy to move on to interdependence (p.117). As students who have achieved this level of autonomy, they are now prepared to re-integrate their parental influence into their decision-making with a new lens that is more able to objectively assess parental input. Chickering and Reisser describe students who have successfully re-integrated parental input and achieved interdependence in this way:

Students who have [achieved interdependence] display coping behaviors well coordinated to personal and social ends. They see parents for what they are, middle-aged persons neither omniscient nor omnipotent. Nettlesome feelings about parents are resolved sufficiently for a more adult-to adult relationship to emerge. Reliance on peers, nonparental adults, and occupational and institutional reference groups fosters awareness of interconnectedness with others. (p. 140)

Independence: Implications in Research

In terms of the study of these theoretical models of independence, the Chickering (1969) and the Chickering and Reisser (1993) models have received the most research. Beginning in 1979 Winston, Miller and Prince introduced the Student Development Task Inventory (SDTI), followed soon after by a revised version, the SDTI-2 and then in 1990 the Student Development Lifestyle and Task Inventory (SDLTI) (Winston, 1990; Winston, Miller, & Prince, 1979; Winston & Polkosnik, 1986). These measurement tools

closely followed the developmental tasks identified by Chickering, and returned strong validity scores when the construct was initially examined (Winston, 1990; Winston & Polkosnik, 1986). This inventory identified “Developing Autonomy” as one of the three major lifestyle tasks during college, and measured the task among three different subscales: Emotional Autonomy (feeling free from the need for continuous reassurance and establishing an adult relationship with parents); Instrumental Autonomy (the ability to carry on daily activities without depending on others); and Interdependence (recognizing the reciprocal nature of social relationships recognizing the importance of contributing to community) (Winston & Polkosnik, 1986). Criticism of the instrument mirrored emerging criticism of Chickering’s theory itself, with studies revealing that reliability and validity scores were weak in some examinations of the instrument, especially in examining women’s scores compared to men’s scores (Stonewater, 1987; Stonewater, Daniels, & Heischmidt, 1986). Other studies began to emerge using different instruments that actually demonstrated the difference in development of autonomy between men and women, especially as it relates to maintaining relationships (Straub 1987; Straub & Rogers, 1986; Taub, 1995; Taub & McEwen, 1992). Taub and McEwen (1992) also examined African American and Caucasian women and found their autonomy development not only differed from the Chickering model but differed from each other as well.

In 1999, Winston, Miller, and Cooper again modified the inventory to reflect the 1993 changes in the Seven Vector Model of Chickering and Reisser, releasing the Student Development and Lifestyle Task Assessment (STDLA). This new form

continued to have “Developing Autonomy” as one of its three main tasks. The subtasks in the 1999 version had remained largely unchanged, save the addition of a fourth subtask, “Academic Autonomy” that examined the student’s ability to deal with ambiguity in his or her life (Wachs & Cooper, 2002). Despite these seemingly small adjustments in response to criticisms of the instrument, validity studies conducted after its release produced statistically significant outcomes (Wachs & Cooper, 2002).

Research into Josselson’s theory of autonomy development is much less robust, and, it should be noted, carried out primarily by Josselson herself (Evans et al., 2010). Josselson’s theory primarily stems from a continuing longitudinal study of 60 senior female college students that included interviews from 1971-1973 and then additional interviews in 1985 and also in 1993 (Josselson, 1988; Josselson, 1996). It is also important to note some important characteristics of these interviewees. Most importantly, as the title of her books suggests, (*Finding Herself* (1998), *Revisiting Herself* (1996)), these studies focus solely on autonomy development in women. It is also important to note that Josselson’s theory of independence development does not purport to be generalizable to other populations, or even other female populations. As Josselson (1996) notes, “I did not select [the participants] to ‘fit’ anything—they are a random group” (p. 12). The random group she selected were all of traditional college age, all attending college in the Midwest, and all but one were White (Josselson, 1988). Because of this sampling, further doubt may be cast about the possible generalizability of the theory to other populations. The lack of independent research confirmation aside, the Josselson theory allows this study another theoretical framework to consider besides the

Chickering and Reisser theory of “Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence” which, as previously noted, does not account for interdependence without first achieving autonomy. While the data uncovered during the investigation of the separation-individuation process (described earlier in Chapter II) will be helpful in examining the results in this study, using two theories that cover the spectrum of possibilities between “relatedness” and “autonomy” within the development of independence should also help provide context to the study’s outcomes.

Self-Direction

As with independence, much of the theoretical framework about the creation of self-direction begins with Erik Erikson (1959) and his work defining the creation of identity in the adolescent years. This identity formation, according to Erikson, is the primary goal of late adolescence and leads to a more mature sense of self as well as a place in society. Attempts to balance internal desires with societal expectations, according to Erikson, will ultimately lead to a development of a sense of goals and overall purpose. If development proceeds as planned, adolescents feel a sense of assurance as they develop an identity through their societal roles as well as a set of ideals or belief system. Failure to form an identity that balances internal needs with the outside world will result in the teenager or young college-age student experiencing “role confusion” in which no balance is achieved. Students experiencing role confusion will often retreat into a “moratorium” and a new, more mature identity is eschewed in favor of existing roles identified in early adolescence (Erikson, 1959).

Chickering (1969) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) expanded on the idea of identity formation in establishing “Identity Development” as one of the key components in the Seven Vectors of Student Development. They expanded the balance between self-expectation and societal expectation in the process of establishing identity. Chickering and Reisser (1993) highlighted important areas in which identity development occurs, such as comfort with one’s body and physical appearance, establishing one’s place in both a social and cultural context, growing comfortable with one’s sexuality and sexual orientation, developing an overall sense of self and self-esteem, and developing the ability to integrate external feedback, among others. Chickering and Reisser also noted that in this stage of development a student becomes aware of a separate “self” that is integrating all of these disparate understandings into an overall sense of self. Having this underlying sense of self-awareness that is more than just the sum of the various self-definitions is an important step in the ability to create self-direction.

Kegan (1982, 1994) made a significant contribution to understanding the development of self-direction in his examination of how meaning is made during different stages of identity formation. Kegan proposed that the process of creating meaning was actually central to the process of creating identity. As Kegan (1982) states:

The activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning making context in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we *are* the meaning-making context. (p. ii)

Kegan’s (1994) theory on the development of meaning-making focuses on the process of how one becomes increasingly more self-aware through youth, adolescence, and young adulthood, and how the process alters the meaning of events, both internal and

external. Kegan describes the developmental task of breaking through various levels of “embeddedness” or the ability to step outside oneself and consider factors that had been previously indistinguishable from the self. In this way, the less embedded in one’s own world one becomes, the more self-aware one becomes. Kegan identifies four orders of self-development, each building on the prior for a more self-aware and less egocentric sense of self. For the purposes of discussing college students, Kegan’s third and fourth order are most relevant. In the third order, usually experienced in late high school or early college for those of traditional age, students typically begin to be able to define themselves through interactions with others, usually with close friends or peers. Feelings about the construction of knowledge, values, and how to act in relationships are often heavily influenced by peer groups. Prior to this, younger students would typically define themselves solely via labels based on societal roles placed on them by parents. Yet, as Kegan points out, the limit of this order of development is that the student is unable to step outside the external definitions and shared realities and evaluate them from afar. In this way students are still embedded in a shared reality and have difficulty considering things outside it. A student or adult who achieves the fourth order, according to Kegan (1994), is able to simultaneously be aware of this reality and also step outside it to consider options, or achieve true “self-authorship.”

In 1999, Baxter Magolda took the concepts of “self-authorship” and “meaning-making” as described by Robert Kegan (1994) and specifically examined the process of creating self-direction that occurred while students were in college. The challenge of creating a sense of self-direction or self-authorship is a complicated one for college

students, according to Baxter Magolda (1999). Self-authorship requires students to simultaneously achieve “an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one’s internal identity” (p.10). As a result, Baxter Magolda divides the process of gaining self-authorship into three categories. Self-authorship simultaneously requires cognitive development (how one makes meaning of knowledge), interpersonal development (how one views oneself in a relationship with others) as well as intrapersonal development (how one perceives one’s sense of identity (p. 10). To be able to achieve self-authorship on the cognitive level, Baxter Magolda believes that students must go through a transformation about the nature of knowledge, generally moving a view that knowledge is certain and is possessed by authorities to a view that knowledge is constructed in a context. This transformation will be discussed further in the next section involving the development of critical thinking skills. This shift of knowledge from certain to uncertain is accompanied by a shift from viewing oneself as a receiver to a constructor of knowledge, a shift central to the development of self-authorship. The intrapersonal growth necessary for self-authorship involves distinguishing one’s impulses from oneself and identifying enduring qualities of the self that will eventually serve as a guiding force in authoring one’s inner psychological life. The interpersonal development necessary for self-authorship hinges on assumptions about the relation of the self to others. Growth in this area moves from lack of coordination of one’s point of view with that over others, through subsuming one’s own view to that of significant others, to developing a system that regulates interpersonal

relationships. This concept is similar to what is described by Chickering and Reisser in their vector “Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence” (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 39).

In the Baxter Magolda (1999) model, the cognitive aspect of self-authorship hopes to:

empower students with a self-sustaining capacity to think and learn. Students should leave college with the ability to pose questions, collect information, and identify and use an appropriate framework to analyze information and come to some conclusion (p. 10).

However, achieving interpersonal and intrapersonal development is just as important, because, as Baxter Magolda points out, students can learn cognitive inquiry skills, yet not be able to use them to decide what to believe because they have no internal sense of identity or belief system.

Self-Direction: Implications in Research

Marcia Baxter Magolda (1999) herself has conducted several studies of self-authorship since the creation of her theory. Her original study, which followed 39 adults from age 18 to 30, stands as the basis for her theory as well as her subsequent studies on self-authorship. Others, including Baxter Magolda, have continued to study how the concept of self-authorship impacts the lives of college students and others in the field have continued to work to try to identify the intricacies of self-authorship as well as its boundaries. A 2005 study by Creamer and Laughlin explored how women in college implement self-authorship when making career decisions. The study found that the participants often struggled in making career-related decisions often preferring to defer to parents or career advisors rather than struggle with the possible dissonance of diverse

possibilities. Laughlin and Creamer (2007) also found, through the examination of data from several studies, that the over-dependence on parents and college advisors may be stunting the growth of self-authorship in students in general who find it easier to defer to external definitions in lieu of making personal meaning. This finding is in line with Baxter Magolda's study (2000) which posited that the students participating in her original longitudinal studies developed self-direction after college because external meanings were so readily available to college students that no internal meaning creation was necessary. In 2004, Pizzolato examined self-authorship in high-risk students entering college. In her study, Pizzolato found that many of these high-risk students entered college with a sense of self-authorship and a well-defined internal sense of self. For many of these high risk students, it was this internal sense of purpose that caused them to enroll in college in the first place. However, Pizzolato found that these students encountered extreme dissonance when they struggled academically in college and, unlike the proposed Baxter Magolda model, were unable to rely on their internal definitions of self to guide them through these tough times. The students Pizzolato (2004) studied often retreated from self-authorship, finding it easier to try and adhere to external definitions of what faculty or peers expected. Although these students did regain their sense of self-authorship through external support, this study suggests that for students who have their internal identity heavily challenged, a regression (similar to Erikson's moratorium) is possible.

More recent studies have also focused on the transferability of the concept of self-authorship to other cultures. Weinstock (2010) suggests that the self-authorship concept

may not transfer to collectivist cultures where more weight is given to external expectations than internal expectations. In his study of Bedouins and Jews in Israel, Weinstock found that cultural preference for external meaning-making cues limited the applicability of Baxter Magolda's definition of self-authorship. Similarly, Barbara Hofer (2010) found differences with epistemic views on knowledge when studying U.S. and Japanese students, as well as differences on external societal pressures that impacted the transferability of self-authorship to other cultures.

Recent studies have also examined how those from different ethnic backgrounds encounter the process of self-authorship in several longitudinal studies. In general, these studies found that college students from various ethnic backgrounds often were negotiating their definitions with self-authorship at the same time they were negotiating their ethnic/racial identity. For example, in Vasti Torres's (2010) study, she found that Latino students often had to reconcile their ethnic identity, both internally and how their ethnic identity was perceived by the outside world, before they could understand how they would like to "author" their lives. Torres also found that because of this additional challenge, the Latino/a's participating in the study often had less of a linear progression than the students previously studied by Baxter Magolda. The students in the Torres study often would be derailed or regress in their self-authorship, depending on how their journey through the development of racial identity was progressing (Torres, 2010). Similar results were found in previous studies into the development of self-authorship in Latinos as well (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). As a result this most recent research, an understanding of the cultural background of the

participants will be especially important when considering the expectations of self-authorship.

Critical Thinking Skills

Aspects of the concepts of both self-direction and a sense of independence are also highly dependent on the concept of cognitive development. Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1932) is widely considered the foundational theory on which other ideas about cognition are constructed. Piaget focused most of his research on how infants and young people understand the world around them, develop cognitive structures, and then assimilate new experiences into these cognitive structures. Piaget did focus some of his theory on those who are of traditional college-age and described their transition of cognition in his fourth stage of cognitive development called the Formal Operational Stage. In Piaget's Formal Operational Stage, one begins to think about knowledge in "shades of gray" and possessing more or less certainty based on a number of factors that one evaluates on one's own. This transformation in thinking about the nature of knowledge and moving from knowledge as absolute to a more relativistic model is a crucial part of creating critical thinking skills, according to Piaget. Continuing the work of Piaget was William Perry, who in 1970 introduced his model of Intellectual and Ethical Development. In this new model, Perry expanded on Piaget's ideas concerning the creation of knowledge and the process by which students move from a dualistic way of understanding the world to what Piaget described as "shades of gray." In the Perry model, development begins from a place of dualism, or a sense that all problems are solvable and that right and wrong answers are objective and known for every situation.

For dualistic thinkers, gaining knowledge is about obtaining the right answer from authorities. As students gain a sense of perspective, they tend to move away from dualistic thinking into a cognitive structure called multiplicity. An emerging multiplistic thinker begins to understand that not all problems have known solutions, but, in a kind of dualism, still divides problems into either ones with solutions or ones without. In this early stage, according to Perry, students then move away from the authority figure as the source of all knowledge and instead try to find ways to find out answers independently. Through this attempt to personally expand knowledge, students begin to expand their cognitive lens and now understand that many problems do not have concrete solutions. A multiplistic answer to this dilemma, according to Perry, is to treat all alternatives as equally valid. Students examining knowledge in this cognitive structure will fail to examine each alternative critically, believing that each person is entitled to a solution that appears valid. Finally, as students continue to evolve into a cognitive structure that Perry describes as “relativism,” multiple solutions are now seen as alternatives that can be evaluated and supported based on their merit. In this evaluation, an integration of both objective analysis and personal experience is necessary to reach a conclusion. According to Perry, when one can integrate all of these varied types of information and make a commitment to a solution that is based on critical evaluation, relativistic thinking has been achieved.

Again building on the work of Perry (1970) and others was the work of Patricia King and Karen Kitchener (1994). Their Reflective Judgment Model, similar to Perry’s model of intellectual development, required an expansion of the view of knowledge in

order to be able to consider issues critically. The Reflective Judgment Model also borrowed heavily from John Dewey (1938) who highlighted that not only did the thinker have to grow into a relativistic worldview in order to use truly reflective thinking, but also needed to be faced with some problem that required some measure of critical analysis and could not be easily solved by some existing metric.

Following closely the process outlined by Perry, children and young adults process through three stages, called “Pre-Reflective Thinking,” then pass on to “Quasi-Reflective Thinking” and finally move to “Reflective” thinking (King & Kitchener, 1994). For each stage, King and Kitchener identify not only a view of the nature of knowledge (epistemology), but also a concept of how knowledge is justified internally. For developing thinkers, King and Kitchener’s “Pre-Reflective” thinking mirrors Perry’s dualism. Knowledge is believed to be set and concrete. For thinkers who view knowledge this way, direct observation is the best way to collect knowledge about this “concrete” world where everything is as it appears. In lieu of direct observation, dependence on an authority figure is sufficient. In this stage, no justification of knowledge is necessary because no possible space is perceived between “what is believed to be true and what is true” (p.14). As one moves to the “Pre-Reflective Stage” knowledge has expanded to have multiple interpretations. The thinker has also come to terms with the fact that much of the information that would be useful to form an opinion or solve a problem may never be available. Similar to Perry’s multiplistic thinker, the Pre-Reflective thinker has come to view knowledge and beliefs to be very subjective and context specific, therefore making difficult any critical evaluation of the information. For

a person in this stage, knowledge may not be evaluated outside the specific individualized and content specific realm in which it was created. In short, similar to Perry, each person may have his or her own theory which interacts with knowledge differently, and therefore differing conclusions can be just as “true” as any other for that particular person. As one moves to the stage of “Reflective Thinking” information is still gathered from a variety of sources, but the thinker now feels empowered to evaluate the information based on a variety of criteria and across contexts (King & Kitchener, 1994). Solutions to problems are now evaluated “by criteria such as weight of the evidence, the utility of the solution, or the pragmatic need for action” (p. 15). In this new understanding of knowledge, as with Perry’s relativism, solutions can now also be revised or re-evaluated as new evidence becomes available to the thinker. As mentioned previously, this study will refer heavily to the King and Kitchener model of reflective thinking not only because of its graduated system of understanding cognitive structures (which is in fact similar to Perry’s intellectual development theory) but because it also focuses on how students justify beliefs, especially when faced with what King and Kitchener describe as those “ill-structured” problems that defy any logical structure in which to plug in information and receive a solution. This theory is also important in an examination of millennials in particular because it is not the problems that fit neatly into a decision matrix that seem to be the challenges in the workplace. It is exactly these ill-structured problems that King and Kitchener describe that are leaving millennials frustrated in the workplace as a result of their inability to come to a well-reasoned solution without further external guidance.

Critical Thinking Skills: Implications in Research

Shortly after developing the Reflective Judgment Model (RJM) in 1981, King and Kitchener developed the Reflective Judgment Interview (RJI) in an attempt both to validate their theory and also better understand how young adults move through this cognitive growth. The RJI is an hour-long semi-structured interview that presents its interviewees four different “ill-structured” problems (Kitchener, 1986). The interviewer presents these problems and then asks the interviewee to form an opinion on the issue and also defend his or her rationale for those conclusions. If necessary, further questions are posed by the interviewer to highlight the epistemological assumptions underlying the interviewee’s thinking (Kitchener, 1986). Based on responses, the interviewee receives two ratings. The first score represents his or her dominant stage used in thinking and a second represents the subdominant stage that plays in to his or her epistemology. Tests measuring reliability scores of the raters, test retest repeatability, as well as tests assessing the construct being measured has been consistently strong (Kitchener, 1986, 2002; Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davidson, 1989; King, Kitchener & Wood, 1994). The study of the Reflective Judgment Model using college students has been well documented, with dozens of cross-sectional studies performed over the last three decades (King, Kitchener & Wood, 1994). In the studies of reflective judgment with high school and college students over a time period ranging from three months to ten years, the data suggest that subjects may remain stable in their epistemic approach over short periods of time, but show positive growth in the direction suggested by the Reflective Judgment Model over longer periods (Kitchener, 1986; King & Kitchener, 1984; King, Kitchener &

Wood, 1994). Specifically for college students, growth of a “half a stage” is typical for a college student, usually occurring between stages three and four which track the movement from pre-reflective thinking to quasi-reflective thinking (Kitchener, 1986, p. 84).

In studies examining possible gender or cultural differences in the application of the Reflective Judgment Model, little conclusive evidence has been found to suggest a significant difference across groups (King & Kitchener, 2002; King, Kitchener & Wood, 1994). Studies of the RJM based on gender did show some variance of scores based on one or two particular ill-structured problems presented, but overall scores on the RJI scale did not produce a statistically significant difference (Kitchener, 1986). Similar outcomes were found when additional longitudinal studies were conducted on the RJM that expanded King and Kitchener’s (1981) original study sample, who were predominantly White and Midwestern to a more diverse sample in terms of geography and ethnicity (King, Kitchener & Wood, 1994). A 1992 study focused specifically on African American college students followed the RJI scoring patterns that had previously been discussed with other college participants (King & Taylor, 1992). Likewise, a 1999 study of Latino college students found that their RJI scores did not differ significantly from the 1994 Kitchener, King, and Wood sample, which was not ethnically focused (Samson, 1999). Little difference was also found when the RJI was administered to college students in Germany. While some scores trended slightly higher for German students than students in the United States, the RJI scores remained consistent when the age of the (slightly) older German sample was considered (Kitchener & Wood, 1987).

The major determining factor when examining differences in the RJM seem to be the age of the participant. Several studies suggest a strong linear relationship between age and development in the RJM (King, Kitchener & Wood, 1994). However, King, Kitchener and Wood (1994) warn that the role of age alone should not be taken as the singular reason of development. As the researchers point out, there are many intervening factors and events in a subject's life (education, employment, etc.) that certainly also play a factor. However, how these factors in association with age impact growth in the RJM is yet to be determined (King, Kitchener, & Wood, 1994).

Epistemology and Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking Skills

Underlying Chickering and Reisser's theories on independence and Baxter Magolda's theory of Self Authorship is the idea of epistemological development. At its core, the King and Kitchener Reflective Judgment Model is a developmental model about epistemological growth and how that development is applied to ill-structured problems. Epistemology, or the way one views the construction of knowledge, is at the heart of how a student moves from one stage to another in each of these theories. For instance, the integrating of parental influence into a holistic understanding of the self is a key part of achieving Chickering and Reisser's Interdependence. In this stage, such integration requires a re-imagining of knowledge imparted by the parents from a view of the information as ultimate authority to a voice that is important but cannot override the guiding voice of the self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As Baxter Magolda (2010) highlights, growth in self-authorship often requires the person to answer the epistemological question: "How do I know?" Once a person begins to understand

knowledge and their personal worldview as more than just a collection of the views of others, self-authorship can begin to emerge. In the King and Kitchener Reflective Judgment Model (1994), the growth that occurs in a student's ability to critically analyze various sources of information is a direct result of epistemological development.

Author Barbara Hofer (2000) highlights several new theories of epistemological development have emerged in the last two decades, including Baxter Magolda's Epistemological Reflection Model (1992) as well as the previously reviewed King and Kitchener's Reflective Judgment Model (1994) among others. Each of these theories, according to Hofer, describes the growth that occurs in understanding the nature of knowledge as stage-based. Each model in essence follow the original Perry (1970) model, and begins with the most dualistic, authority-based understanding of knowledge and moves toward a more multiplistic, personally and socially constructed nature of knowledge. Therefore, to gain a better grasp of a student's views on independence and self-direction, an understanding of the epistemological assumptions of the student is vital. Understanding how students believe they gain knowledge, their theory about how knowledge is made or acquired, and how these two premises impact their cognitive processes will be an important part in understanding development of each area. It is the hope of this study that by asking parents questions about their son or daughter's critical thinking skills, which in many ways serves as a proxy for epistemological development, will help demonstrate their student's epistemological viewpoint.

Conclusion

Within each developmental theory, whether the theory provides an examination of development of independence, self-direction, or critical thinking skills, a clear developmental point exists where students must take a level of ownership for themselves and their own lives emotionally and intellectually, and also integrate the surrounding world into that context as well. This involves some level of an examination of how one relates to the world and how to process the various types of information one receives in a given day. It is clear given the recent history of parental involvement in the college process and the positive data available about involved parenting styles that parents will be and should be involved in the daily lives of college students. However, it is unclear how this active parental involvement intersects with these crucial developmental challenges in college. To form a sense of independence, Chickering and Reisser (1993) believe that students must free themselves from a continual and pressing need for reassurance, affection, or approval from others, including parents. Baxter Magolda (2010) believes that a sense of self-direction requires a well-developed identity that, while still incorporating family, can still stand outside of the family as well. Finally, King and Kitchener (1994) suggest that critical thinking requires students to break away from a dependence on authority figures such as parents and establish an independent and thoughtful method to evaluate difficult problems. In each case, resolving the relationship with parents is central to the growth for a college student. It is the hope of this study that an exploration of the role parents play in these specific areas of development will provide helpful information to students, parents, and educators.

In the next chapter, this study will focus on a research methodology that attempts both to isolate parent/student contact in relation to independence, self-direction and critical thinking as well as understand the communication within its larger context. Through a series of interviews, this study will explore the nature of the parent/student relationship around these developmental areas through the eyes of the parent.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

While recently reading the book *The Plan of Chicago* by Carl Smith (2006), I became distinctly aware of the challenges of any research study. In his book, Smith seeks to examine forces behind the development of a grand plan to turn Chicago into the “city of the future” (p. xvii). This plan, under the direction of renowned architect Daniel Burnham, is still revered for its thoughtfulness, consideration, and relevance to the modern-day Chicago, even now a century later. However, as Smith points out, *The Plan of Chicago* highlights not only Burnham’s insights but his blind spots, not only his personal presumptions, but his views on modern culture. As Smith writes, “*The Plan of Chicago* is a reflection of its times and its origins, which no individuals, no matter how forward-looking, can transcend” (p. xvii). This study, just like Burnham’s undertaking, occurs in a specific place in time with specific cultural meanings. I accept that I am unable to see my cultural “blind spots” that may be glaringly obvious to someone who may read this study a few years from now. However, notwithstanding my acceptance that I can never discover all of these omissions, I have identified my assumptions to the reader to the extent possible. I have also been as specific as possible about the process of collecting data and analyzing it, and have highlighted inherent limitations with the study as I understand them.

This chapter describes the research methodology for this study including the rationale for use of qualitative methodology, the design of the study, the process of site selection, the method and process of contacting participants, a description of interview protocols, the process of data analysis, and limitations of the qualitative approach and sampling methods.

Qualitative Methodology

As is well documented in the first two chapters, parental contact with students during their time in college is at an all-time high and shows no signs of slowing. An August 2010 article by the *New York Times* highlights this trend as another school year starts, trading the popular term “helicopter parents” for the term “Velcro parents” to describe the seemingly ever-increasing involvement of parents in the lives of college students (Gabriel, 2010). This *New York Times* article is just the latest example of the trend, both in research literature and in the popular press, to highlight the increase in volume of parental contact with college students. This study does not seek to add to this research on the volume of contact, but instead seeks to understand the nature of the contact itself. By focusing on the content of the contact with parents instead of the frequency, this study seeks to understand the impact in the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. In their work, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that a popular reason to select a qualitative research design is to “gain novel or fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known” or to “give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods” (p. 19). In the case of this study both scenarios describe the

current state of knowledge about the substance of parent/student contact while in college. While a significant level of data has emerged about the frequency of contact, little data are available about the nature of this contact. This qualitative study will help provide a basic level of understanding of the prevalent themes present in parent/student contact.

Conceptual Foundation for the Study's Design: Social Constructivism

The current trends in the level of attachment between parents and their students did not evolve over the course of a few years. As discussed in Chapter II, the history of the relationship between parent, student, and institution of higher learning has been shaped by social and historical factors for decades or even centuries. Parents and student arrive at the transition to college not only with the history of their personal relationship as an important factor, but also the shared understanding of the social norms that exist in this transition process. To understand this phenomenon, this study takes a social constructivist view of knowledge. According to Creswell (2009), social constructivism assumes that:

individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow meanings in a few categories or ideas. (p. 8)

Creswell (2009) goes on to write, “Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. They are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (p. 8). It is exactly this social construction--how parents make meaning of words like, “independent” or “self-directed”

as related to their son or daughter that this study explores. This study assumes that parents come to these definitions by combining their individual subjective experiences with an understanding of socio-historical expectations and depend on this information to develop their relationship with their college student.

Researcher Positionality

In accepting knowledge as socially constructed, this study must also acknowledge that the interpretations of the study are therefore, by definition, seen through the socially constructed lens of the researcher. As Creswell (2009) states, “[r]esearchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 8). In an effort to understand my own socially constructed lens, I will provide a short description of my background as it relates to college students, parents, and institutions of higher learning. I am currently employed as an Assistant Dean at a small four-year post-secondary institution in the Midwest. I have worked in the student affairs field since 1997, when I began my Master’s degree program. In my current role and in all my prior roles in student affairs, I have a significant level of contact with parents, and therefore have witnessed how parents and students interact, especially as it relates to a perceived problem with the institution. I have witnessed what I believe to be an increase in parental involvement in my time in the profession, and also believe I have witnessed a change in how students think about themselves and their responsibility in decision-making for their own lives. Over the course of my time in the profession I have seen what I believe is a gradual abdication of self-reliance in favor of

shared decision-making with parents. This worldview has also been shaped by my interaction with others in the field and the literature produced in the field that supports this view. I also bring to this study, of course, my own experience as a former traditional-aged college student, and my interaction with my parents at the time. I attended my undergraduate institution from 1992-1996. My parents and I recently discussed our interaction in preparation for this study, and they remember that we communicated via phone approximately once every three weeks to a month, and our topics of conversation were mostly about how classes were going and future plans (holidays, trips home, etc). I also bring to this study my own viewpoint as a parent. Although my child will not face choices about college for quite a few years, I am heavily involved in her schooling now, receiving e-mails from the school approximately once a week. I have also been invited to several events for parents in an effort to help me feel involved in the school community. Finally, I bring to this study my own understanding of the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking that is informed by my race, gender, and culture. I am a White male who brings his own bias of what it means to be independent or self-directed. For instance, I identify more with the Chickering &Reisser (1993) model of developing independence than the Josselson (1988) model. I remember going through a process of fundamentally rejecting my parents' influence before trying to re-integrate their influence. Therefore I believe I have a harder time understanding how growth in independence, self-direction and critical thinking happen within the context of close parental contact. This level of contact does not describe my personal path, so I have made an effort during this study to understand this

different path. Methods implemented to curb the effects of these biases will be discussed later in this chapter.

Grounded Theory

This study seeks two general outcomes. The first is to gain a greater understanding of the substance of parent/student interactions around the areas of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking and the underlying assumptions by parents that inform this interaction. The second is to provide the information to student affairs professionals in a way that will be useful in helping them support students and parents. In order to provide this level of assistance, this study seeks to generate a theory of parental involvement that is grounded in the general themes that emerge from the interaction with parents. This process of inductively deriving a theory after studying a phenomenon is called grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Using grounded theory in qualitative research is different than the use of theory in quantitative research, where a researcher begins with a theory and seeks to prove or disprove it. In developing grounded theory, the researcher “begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (p. 23). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), an effective grounded theory should be (1) understood by the persons who were studied as well as those practicing in that area; (2) conceptually broad and abstract enough to allow sufficient variation to a variety of contexts related to that phenomenon, and (3) specific enough to guide those wishing to use the theory in terms of what conditions must exist for the theory to apply.

Design of the Study

Site Selection

In order to generate an appropriate sample of interviewees for this study, selected institutional factors needed to be considered in order to identify a site that allowed a rich examination of the parent/student relationship. A majority of traditional-aged undergraduate college students, whether they are attending a community college, trade school, for-profit institution, online school or a four-year college or university, have a living parent and are in contact with a parent on some level. Students attending these institutions certainly have unique higher education experiences and may be factoring their parents into this experience. However, as mentioned in the introduction, this study seeks to examine the parent/student relationship at a traditional college campus, where there are selective admission requirements, a prominent residential component, a robust campus life, and a diversity of student population in ethnicity and gender as well as other factors such as students from out-of-state and parental academic background. A school with such a diverse background of students should yield a parent participant pool that includes a cross-section of variables that have been previously studied in terms how they impact college success. As discussed in Chapter II, previous studies have examined how the parent/student relationship is impacted based on parental academic background, ethnicity of the student, and gender of the student, among others (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Denis et al., 2005; Hurtado et al., 1996; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Based on the descriptors above, I targeted mid-size four-year institutions in the Midwest for participation in my study. I targeted institutions in the Midwest specifically in order to have more flexibility with the scheduled interviews and hopefully additional reflection time between interviews. Since I am also currently located in the Midwest, selection of a site that required a long trip for individual interviews would have necessitated the scheduling of several interviews in a short time span. Such a schedule would have allowed little flexibility for me or the participants, and also would have prohibited much reflection between the interviews.

After considering several institutions, I contacted a large (20,000-plus) private institution in the Midwest to participate in my study. To inquire about participation in my study, I made contact with a high ranking staff member within the Student Affairs division of the institution who had authority to grant permission for the study to take place. At this meeting I provided her a letter (see Appendix A) as well as a synopsis of research (see Appendix B) and formally requested that she consider my study for implementation at her institution. The institutional representative accepted my request, and the study was then reviewed by the institution's review board. This review board provided an exemption for institutional review board approval since the study was based solely on parent interviews. Once this exemption was obtained, the institutional representative provided me with a formal approval via letter, similar to the one that appears in Appendix B. After this approval was secured, the institutional representative connected me to the appropriate parent liaison to assist with contacting possible participant candidates.

Participant Selection

This study sought to understand the nature of parental contact with students and how it specifically impacts independence, self-direction, and critical thinking, especially in terms of how students are prepared for leaving college and entering the workforce. In light of this goal, the parents of students who are nearing the end of their time in college were the best candidates for participation in this study. Parents of entering first-year students who were going through the traditional transition to a more independent lifestyle away from home were not likely candidates for this study for two reasons: (a) A baseline level of communication will likely not have been established immediately as both the student and parent adjust to the new setting; and (b) The way that a parent and student relate to each other in the first year of school may or may not reflect how they are interacting with each other as the student begins to think about transitioning out of the college environment. Therefore, this study identified participants who were parents of students who were in their junior or senior year of school. Since the interviews for this study took place during the late summer and early fall of 2011, the parents selected for the study were parents of students entering either their junior or senior year. By examining the nature of the contact between parent and student at these later stages of college, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how the parents and students were thinking about the developmental goals of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as they prepared for a transition post-college.

In order to contact participants who met the criterion described (parents of students in the last two years of college), this study used a theoretical sampling model to

contact participants. A theoretical sampling model involves selecting the participants based on specific criteria in order to help the researcher form the best theory—the ultimate goal of a grounded theory study (Creswell, 1998). After identifying parents who met the “parent of a student who is in the last two years of college” criterion, the study depended on purposeful sampling to achieve a level of variance in participants in the following sub-categories: gender of the student, parental educational background, socioeconomic status, in-state versus out-of-state residence, and marital status. To assist in facilitating interviews, I asked the institution to select one quarter of the parents to be out-of-state, but still within a four hour drive of the Chicagoland area. For the rest of the specified demographics, including parental educational background, and socioeconomic status, I hoped that the purposeful sampling would still result in some variance in the other desired areas.

Research concerning some of these sub-categories and their impact on parental involvement were discussed in Chapter II, including gender and parent educational background. Some of these proposed factors, such as attending in-state versus out-of-state, marital status of parents, and socioeconomic status have not been considered in terms of how they impact the nature of parent/student contact in college. However, in the hopes of developing a useful theory, these other categories have been selected based on their importance in other research concerning student success in college (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005; Walpole, 2003). In working with the selected institution, I set the goal of conducting 12-15 interviews with parents of college

students. In the case where parents asked to participate in the interview together, I considered both parents as one “interview” or data set.

In one interview, a parent asked if it was acceptable to have the student in the room while the interview was taking place. In this specific instance, the interview took place in the condominium of the student, and the mother was visiting her son. An area of the apartment that would have been out of earshot of the participant’s son would not have been feasible. During the interview, the mother also asked the son a few times to reflect on how her communication had been received by him. The son offered honest reflection and added to the depth of the findings of this interview. Although a possibility exists that having the student present in the interview and hearing some of the answers may have skewed the results, I do not believe that the mother gave any different answers than she would have had the interview been held in complete privacy. During the beginning of the interview, she described her family as “open and honest” with each other, and this underlying philosophy came through in the interview. The implications of this unique interview are discussed further in Chapter V.

Data Collection

Contacting Participants

Once the institutional representative gave written approval to proceed with the study, I was connected to a staff member that often works as an institutional liaison for parents. This person served as the primary gatekeeper between me and the participant pool during the study. In June 2011, I met face-to-face with this institutional representative and provided a short synopsis of the study to her prior to our meeting (see

Appendices C & D). During our meeting we discussed the details of the study as well as the criteria for potential interviewees. After the staff member agreed to participate as the institutional liaison, she identified potential participants for this study and agreed to make initial contact with potential participants on my behalf. Data concerning some other criteria of interest in this study, including parental ethnicity, parental educational background, parent socioeconomic status, and parental marital status were not readily available at the institution. This fact was not unexpected, so I hoped that some variance would occur in these areas as a result of the other sampling choices. I discussed with the institutional liaison that I hoped to keep the out-of-state parents within a four hour drive from the Chicagoland area in order to more readily facilitate the in-person interviews. To facilitate this restriction, I provided the institutional liaison with zip codes that were within this driving distance but also out-of -state. The liaison then used these zip codes to create the participant pool.

Once the participant pool was created, the institutional liaison contacted 50 parents with my letter of invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix E). This letter included an introduction that provided a synopsis of the study and a response deadline, as well as an attached letter (see Appendix F) with a brief personal introduction, more detailed information about the study, and participant requirements. All information was sent as an attachment via e-mail and all responses were sent back to me directly. Any questions about the study or participation in the study were directed via e-mail to me. I was not copied in any way on the initial e-mail to the participant pool, nor did I see the list of potential participants in advance. In order to thank the participants who

participated in the study, the invitation offered them a \$20 gift certificate to the institution's bookstore at the completion of the interview. In accordance with the established protocol, the institutional liaison also sent a reminder e-mail to the participants about three weeks later (see Appendix G). This first participant pool produced three parents willing to participate in the study. Per the same procedure, the institutional liaison made contact with another 50 parents, and again three parents responded and agreed to participate. In the first pool of 100 possible participants, six parents responded, giving the study a 6% response rate. After conducting six interviews, I asked the participating institution as well as the Loyola Institutional Review Board for permission to contact an additional 200 parents, in groups of 100, until I reached the threshold or 12 interviews or I felt that I had reached a saturation point with the data. The additional contacts were approved and, through the institutional liaison, I contacted the first group of 100 parents. Again I received a 6% response rate and was able to conduct six additional interviews. The additional 100 parents were not contacted about the study.

Once a participant agreed to meet, I provided him/her with an information sheet (see Appendix I) that furnished the study some basic demographic and background information about those participating. This participant data included questions about personal income categories, educational level, and marital status as well as questions about the gender of their student and the distance the parent lived from the college campus. This form was e-mailed to participants, and I asked that they bring the form with them to the individual interview. I hoped that by collecting this data, any variations

based on these demographic characteristics emerged when I began analyzing the interviews.

The first request for parent interview was sent out via the institutional liaison in early July 2011 and the first interview was conducted in late July 2011. Interviews continued on at a pace of about one every one or two weeks, with about a month break as I requested additional participants through the Loyola Institutional Review Board. Most interviews were completed in just over 60 minutes. Interview locations were chosen by the parents in an effort to put them in a location that was most convenient and comfortable to them.

Interviews

In order to understand the substance of student/parent contact and the goals of parents within this contact, this study used individual interviews as the method of data collection. Seidman (2006) highlights the use of individual interviews when the investigator's interest lies "in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). To understand this lived experience, this study asked parents to discuss how their ultimate goals for their students in terms of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking skills with fit within the substance of their communication with their son or daughter. As a result, parents were required in this interview to verbalize how the goals for their son/daughter and the communication impacting these goals came together. Individual interviews were an optimal tool for gathering data precisely because interviews required the interviewee to offer verbal reflections, organize thoughts, and ultimately make meaning of their experiences. Kvale

and Brinkman (2009) highlight the strength of individual interviews to create meaning, or construct knowledge, as a part of the process of the interview, not only for the interviewer but for the interviewee. As Seidman (2006) puts it, it is the “selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (p. 9).

I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix J) that follows the format suggested by both Creswell (2009) and Johnson (2002). Part 1 of the interview established the scope of the study, the purpose of the research and discussed the consent process for the parent. After I introduced myself, described the study, provided a basic list of questions, and secured written consent from the parent (see Appendix K), I asked the participant to provide background/demographic data. These questions provided information about the participant’s son or daughter’s class year, the educational history of the participant, socio-economic status, location of the family in terms of distance from school, and marital status of the participant. In Part 2 of the interview, I focused on the goals of the parent for his or her student in relationship to achieving independence, self-direction, and critical thinking at the point of graduation. The interview attempted to establish what the parent expected in terms of behavior and student self-image in terms of these three areas. Finally, in Part 3 of the interview I focused on parent/student contact, which took up the majority of time for the interview. The interview first focused on the frequency of the contact between parent and student, and other specifics in regards to the method, initiation, and timing of communication. Once this pattern was established, the remainder of the interview focused on the substance of the contacts, including

conversation topics, the direction of the conversation, the “leader” of the conversation, and the perceived outcome of the conversation. At the point at which I came upon a story where considerations of independence, self-direction or critical thinking were the sub-text, I made an effort to delve more deeply into the goals of the parent within that particular discussion, and how that corresponded with his or her established goals in Part 2 of the interview. As both Creswell (2009), Johnson (2002) and Kvale and Brinkman (2009) note, some of the richest and most valuable information that is imparted in an individual interview does not follow the exact protocol as laid out, and I often decided to, as Johnson (2002) describes, “go with the flow” (p. 111). Having conducted numerous interviews in my role as Assistant Dean in both conduct cases, staff and student staff interviews, as well as in meeting with students and trying to address their concerns, I felt comfortable exploring wherever the interview took me.

Ethical Considerations

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) state,

An interview inquiry is a moral enterprise. Moral issues concern the means as well as the ends of an interview inquiry. The human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees, and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition (p. 62).

As Kvale and Brinkman highlight, the interview process must be handled with the utmost respect, not only to avoid harm to the interviewee, but also to make sure that the investigator is employing acceptable methods to make sure that the results are providing an accurate picture of the “human condition” explored. It is with this goal in mind that I

used the following safeguards to protect the participants as well as the results of the study.

Informed consent and setting. While sitting with a relative stranger and having one's answers recorded are never a natural feeling, I attempted to find the most naturalistic setting in which the participants felt the most comfortable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In choosing the place and time of the interviews, I suggested the interviews take place in a location in a place convenient to the schedule of the participant. My only stipulation was that it be a place conducive for an audio recording. Locations chosen by participants included their homes and workplaces as well as local libraries, coffee shops, and restaurants. Prior to the interview beginning, I asked all participants to review the informed consent form (see Appendix K) and allowed them time to read the form fully and ask any questions. I then asked participants if they consented to having an audio recording made of the interview. I discussed the purpose of the audio recording, the handling of the audio recording, and the use of a transcription service. I also reviewed the statement of confidentiality that the transcriber signed (see Appendix L). Finally, before I began the taping of interviews, I let participants know that at any time they may choose to end the interview and choose no longer to participate in the study. I let the participant know that I expected the interview to proceed for about 60 minutes. Although Seidman (2006) suggests that a 60 minute format will result in participants "watching the clock" and suggests a 90 minute format, I believed that the areas that needed to be covered could be addressed adequately in 60 minutes (p. 20). If, at the end of 60 minutes the interview had not concluded, I asked the participant for permission to continue.

In an effort to maximize the usefulness of the participant's time, I conducted a pilot study with a colleague who had a child that was a senior in college to assess if the interview was designed to be the appropriate length and elicited the desired information. In addition, I consulted with Barbara Hofer, Professor of Psychology at Middlebury College and author of several studies involving parent surveys, including the recently published *The iConnected Parent*. Dr. Hofer has also written extensively on the subject of epistemology in college students, and how the change in epistemology impacts areas such as critical thinking and self-direction. Dr. Hofer's insight and experience allowed me to shape the interview protocol and interview questions in a way that yielded rich data and also paid respect to the time and effort of the participant.

Confidentiality. It is also important to be explicit at the outset of this study how I planned to handle all aspects of the data collected as part of this study in terms of protecting the participants. As stated before, I reviewed with my institutional liaison the invitation to participate in the study and a research synopsis, but I did not know the names of participants. As I received information from those who did wish to participate, the institutional liaison did not know the identity of the participants. As the interviews were conducted, participants had a chance to review again how the data would be used. At this time they also had the opportunity to refuse to participate. An audio recording was made of the interview, and this audio recording was transferred onto my home computer, and then on to a flash drive. After the transfer, the audio recording was deleted from both the audio recording device and the computer. The flash drive was kept in a locked drawer in my home. At the time of transcription, the audio file was delivered

to the transcriber via a secure password-protected website. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement prior to receiving the data and agreed to destroy the audio file once the transcription was complete. Once the transcription was completed and the transcription file received via the password-protected website, the audio recording along with the transcription of the audio recording were kept in the same folder on the flash drive. This information is being kept in a locked drawer in my home no longer than two years after completion of the study, at which time the data will be erased. Field notes, participant information supplied via paper during the interview, e-mails and other personally identifiable information are also being kept in a locked drawer in my home for two years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. In the compilation of the final report, as well as in field notes, report drafts, or transcriptions, pseudonyms are being used to protect the confidentiality of the participants and participating institution. In addition, non-identifiable personal descriptors have been deleted or changed in the report as an additional safeguard.

Trustworthiness

In addition to protecting participants from harm and respecting their confidentiality, the researcher has a responsibility to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. In a quantitative study, some generally accepted methods exist which provide data on the veracity of the outcomes, including measurements of internal validity, external validity, and reliability, among others. In qualitative research, methods of testing outcomes also exist, but these methods consider 'truth' using assumptions from a different paradigm. Instead of presenting internal or external consistency in terms of

numbers, 'truth' is presented in terms of the "trustworthiness" of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Undergirding this understanding of truth is a belief in qualitative research that all understanding is contextual and not to be separated from the setting from which the data were gathered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). In order to confirm the trustworthiness of the study's results, I will address four areas identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the main components to achieving trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In order to address credibility and dependability, this study will employ two methods recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Confirmation of credibility (the ability to accurately reflect the data gathered) and dependability (the "reliability" or "consistency" of the data gathered) will depend on a two processes: peer review and member checks. Member checks are defined by Lincoln and Guba as "the process of continuous, informal testing of information by soliciting reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told" (p. 19). In order to assure that each participant's raw data are being represented in a way that is accurate and representative of his or her true opinion, each participant received a written transcript of the interview via mail. Each participant had a period of two weeks to review this transcript and make any changes or revisions to answers, as well as expound on subjects that may require additional clarification. In addition, I also provided the themes of the study to each participant after the data has been collected and analyzed. This additional step provided another layer of credibility to the results by allowing the participants to react to the results.

After the member check was completed, I also instituted a peer review process to analyze the data. Peer review is described by Lincoln and Guba (1986) as consulting a professional peer to “keep the inquirer honest” by challenging or questioning emerging themes as well as assisting in developing a working hypothesis (p. 19). I identified two professional peers who reviewed the results and assisted in developing themes. This peer review enhanced the credibility of my themes as well as the dependability of the data. The reviewers have a level of knowledge about working with parents and also conducting research. Both peer reviewers also hold a Ph.D. and have conducted independent research. Finally, the reviewers selected have expertise in assessment, as well as working closely with the parents of college students.

In order to address the issues of transferability (presenting findings in useful way to be applied elsewhere) and confirmability (objectivity of the research), this study employed what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call “thick description” (p. 125). This thick description, according to Lincoln and Guba, “must specify everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings” (p. 125). By using this “thick description” which relied on frequent participant quotations, an effective window was provided into both the study’s ultimate findings as well as the possible unstated biases of the researcher. Additionally, I took field notes after each interview to accurately record any non-verbal information that I noticed during the interview. These field notes also helped me record my initial reactions from the interview. Field notes or notes of the researcher about the process of collecting data (in this case the process of interviewing) are commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). As I began to weave these

different stories together in creating the results of this study, these additional field notes added to the trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

Constant Comparative Analysis

In gathering data for a grounded theory approach, Creswell (1998) describes the process of moving from the interviews to data analysis to theory generation. Creswell highlights that the process is an iterative one, moving back and forth from “the field” in order to collect enough interview data (p. 56). As data are gathered, according to Creswell, the researcher should consider what emerging categories or themes the data might suggest. This process is called “open coding.” According to Creswell, these categories, defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), are “a unit of information composed of events, happenings, and instances” that should be re-evaluated after each interview session (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). After every interview, the “events, happening and instances” recorded should either add to the existing categories or help alter the existing groupings. Creswell suggests the researcher should be constantly gathering data, then re-examining assumptions or categorical structures based on the new information. Creswell describes this “constant comparative” style of data analysis as a “zigzag process—out to the field to gather information, analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, analyze the data, and so forth” (p. 57). Creswell suggests that the interview process continue until the researcher has reached “saturation” or a point at which the information that is being gathered no longer adds to the overall understanding of the subject.

Open Coding

In accordance with the open coding process, immediately after each interview I created categories based on the audio recordings of the participants, dividing their “events, happenings, and instances” into emerging themes (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). These emerging categories were later checked against the transcription of the interviews and reviewed again carefully. In a few cases when the re-evaluation of the categories was not possible after each interview (there were two instances of multiple interviews in one day), I re-examined the categories prior to the next set of interviews in order to ask follow up questions that helped clarify the emerging categories. I continued to conduct interviews until the categories became well-defined, continuing to explore properties or subcategories that allowed the data to “dimensionalize” or show the extreme possibilities on each end of the created category (Creswell, 1998).

Axial Coding

After interviews were concluded, I re-examined the data to identify, as Creswell (1998) states, the “central phenomenon” that had emerged from the data collection and resultant open coding. These phenomena were categories identified during open coding that emerged as central to understanding the nature of communication between parents and college students. After I identified the central categories, I attempted to examine and understand the context in which other categories impacted the central categories. Finally, in axial coding I examined other data as they related to the central phenomenon, such as the action or interactions (also referred to as “strategies”) that resulted, and the intervening conditions that impacted these strategies (Creswell, 1998).

Selective Coding

After the information had been categorized through open coding and re-imagined in relation to each other through axial coding, the data was examined for an emergent theory that allowed a better understanding of the nature of the student/parent relationship and the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. In the selective coding process as described by Creswell (1998), the related axial codes come together into a “story line” that helps bring understanding to the nature of parent/student contact in a way that transcends simply offering broad categories. After proceeding with the selective coding, a “story line” as described above failed to emerge. However, this study did yield important themes in the parent/student relationship as well as suggested areas for further research to better understand the student/parent connection.

Limitations

Selection Bias

As with many qualitative studies, this study depended on participant self-selection. In assisting with the selection of parents to participate in this study, the institutional liaison may have turned to parents who are most actively involved with or are in regular contact with the college. These participants may be individuals who work closely with the college parent association or other parent organizations. This study assumed that parents who select to participate in formal programs or organizations within the selected institution are more likely to be involved in their student’s lives than parents who do not take part in these organizations. As a result, the participants may skew towards the “more involved” end of the spectrum in terms of parental involvement in the

lives of their students, and not be representative of the overall parent population. This possible skewing of the sample, called “selection bias,” would mean that the group that self-selected to participate in this study are not representative of the larger parent population (Boehmke, 2004). This is only partially problematic, as qualitative studies do not attempt to generalize to the larger population. Nevertheless, I will try to take steps to include those in my study that are not regularly in contact with the institution. To try and account for this bias, I asked the institutional liaison to consider within the pool not only those who regularly interact with the school but also parents who were more episodically involved. While this certainly did not eliminate the bias (the chosen pool itself likely skews towards “more involved”) hopefully some intentionality in the selection of the pool counteracted some of these limitations.

Social Desirability Bias

As a parent myself, I understand how questions about parental involvement may be perceived. In a face-to-face interview, parents participating in this study may have searched for the “right answer” in terms of their involvement in order to elicit positive feedback from the researcher or to adhere to societal expectations. Skewed responses to a study that attempt to make the participant “look good” in the eyes of the researcher is called a “social desirability bias” (Paulhus, 1991). Since this study is, at its very core, a study concerned with the substance of parent/student contact, parents could have easily skewed their answers for the perceived benefit of “looking good” in the eyes of the researcher. This is especially true as I asked parents to reflect on the overall goals for their student during specific contacts, or contact over a period of time. Within the

context of a study about parental involvement, parents could have been tempted to misrepresent past conversations with their student, or misrepresent the goals of those conversations in an attempt to align more closely with perceived societal norms. Given the increasing focus on the involvement of parents in the lives of college students, parents may have been concerned about being perceived as “helicopter” parents who do not give their student enough room to grow. I mitigated the possible impact of social desirability bias by addressing the subject directly with participants, and discussing the negative effects of such a bias on the ultimate outcome of the study. In addition, I reassured him/her of the confidentiality of the interview in order to create a level of trust with the participant. Some studies have found that taking such measures at the beginning of data collection can reduce the effect of social desirability bias (Paulhus, 1991). To provide accurate portrayals of their internal thought process, parents needed level of trust in the research process, the researcher, and a clear understanding of the purpose of the study. Parents needed to feel good about how the study will be conducted and have a level of trust in the researcher as well as a grasp of how the information will be used. Most importantly, parents needed to understand that the study’s purpose is to help parents, students, and institutions achieve shared goals of independence as well as growth in self-direction and critical thinking for students.

Conclusion

This study sought to build on the already substantial literature concerning the contact that parents have with their students during their college years by adding an examination into the substance of these contacts and the underlying purpose of this

communication from the viewpoint of the parent. In creating the research design, I focused on the “best practices” when planning and creating a qualitative study consisting of individual interviews. Potential limitations of the study have been considered, and care has been given within the research design to address these limitations directly. Implications for the participants have also been considered in the research design. From the introduction e-mail to the informed consent form and the interview protocol, the design of the study served to keep participants well-informed as to the purpose of the investigation and their role within it. Substantial efforts were made to safeguard participants from any negative or unplanned outcomes from the study. With a design that sought to select a representative participant group, an interview protocol that elicited rich data, and a data analysis plan that allowed for themes to emerge, it was the goal of this study to produce useful data for students, parents, and student affairs professionals in higher education that allows for a deeper understanding of the parental role in the development of student independence, self-direction and critical thinking.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Students who want the job must survive a rigorous selection process that includes two interviews and a written application. About one in three makes the cut. Those who are accepted learn about university policies, as well as the intricacies of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the federal law that protects the privacy of student records. They also participate in role-playing exercises that hone the art of attentive listening and empathy, two skills that help relax stressed [visitors]. (Wills, 2005, p. A1)

Student affairs professionals in higher education reading the description above may assume that it is an excerpt from a Resident Advisor or possibly an Orientation Leader position description. In fact, the description is of a position established at the University of Vermont in 2005, affectionately called the “parent bouncer.” This position, described as the “last line of defense” during student orientation, was created to keep over-eager parents out of their student’s orientation sessions (Wills, 2005). Each year administrators acknowledge with some reservations that parental involvement (or over-involvement) is here to stay. Indeed, this new close connection has become a prevalent model for parents and students attending college, with many parents and students communicating multiple times a day throughout their college career (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Though some educators and sociologists have suggested that parent involvement may be having an impact on students developmentally, very few studies have actually examined the nature of the communication between parents and students, the view of parents about this communication, or how parents view their role in their students’

development while in college (Hofer & Moore, 2010; NSSE, 2007; O'Brien, Hsing, & Konrath, 2010; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, & Ward-Roof, 2000; Twenge, Zhang & Im, 2004).

This study focused on providing a better understanding of parent/student communication from the parents' perspective, especially as it relates to their students' development in the areas of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. In reviewing the findings of this study, an examination of the results begins with an overview of participant demographics for this study and introduces the participants of the study to the reader. Findings and themes are then explored in the context of the research questions, juxtaposing the context created through the review of the literature with the findings in the study. Following this review, six major themes are discussed: (1) behavioral observations of students by parents regarding development in independence; (2) behavioral observations of students by parents regarding development in self-direction; (3) behavioral observations of students by parents regarding development in critical thinking; (4) the role of the parent in development of independence, self-direction and critical thinking; (5) the role of college experiences in the growth of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking, and (6) emerging patterns in communication between parent and student. Within each theme, several sub-themes are examined. The chapter ends with a summary and discussion of the member checking and peer review process utilized to enhance trustworthiness of the findings.

Participant Demographics

As noted in the previous chapter, a request for an interview was ultimately sent to 200 parents. In this participant pool, 100% of the potential interviewees were parents of juniors or seniors, and approximately one quarter were from a state other than the one where the institution resides. I had 14 parents agree to be interviewed for this study. In two cases, both parents of the student agreed to participate in the study, creating twelve interview transcripts. Of the 14 participants, three were male and 11 were female.

In terms of diversity, the pool of participants was more homogeneous than I had hoped in some areas, and fairly diverse in others. Some diversity existed among the participants in parental educational level, ranging from parents who earned their high school diploma, to parents who had earned their M.B.A. and J.D., respectively. Some variance was found as well in parental income, with one family currently earning under \$50,000 and another earning more than \$200,000 annually. I was also quite pleased with the variance in both student academic classification and gender, with the breakdown being roughly equally split. Less variance appeared in the “marital status” and “distance from school” categories. Of the parents interviewed, 10 of the 12 lived within an hour’s drive of the campus. Only two parents lived more than 200 miles away. In addition, 100% of the parents were married and had raised their son or daughter from infancy. While no data on divorce rate were readily available for the institution, national studies regarding the percentage of students from divorced families suggest the participant pool is not a representative sample of the overall student population at the institution (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001). The participant demographics are summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1. Self-Reported Demographic Information (N=14)

Gender of Student	7—Female 5—Male
Classification of Student	6—Junior 6—Senior
Income of Family	1--Under \$50,000 4--\$50,000-\$100,000 3--\$100,000-\$150,000 2--\$150,000-\$200,000 1—Above \$200,000 1—Abstain
Distance from Campus	5---0-20 miles 4—21-50 miles 1—50-200 miles 2—200+ miles
Parent Educational Level	0—Some High School 1—High School Diploma 7—Bachelor’s Degree 2--Master’s Degree 4—Professional Degree, (M.B.A., J.D., etc.)
Marital Status	0—Single 14—Married 0—Divorced 0—Widowed

In all interviews I conducted, parents were genuinely interested in the study topic and very forthcoming and candid in their answers. I appreciated parents taking the time to share with me what were in some cases very difficult family decisions, concerns they have about their student’s future, or their worries that their own personal lives are impacting their children’s development. In thanking one parent for her participation, she

reflected, “giving a parent a chance to talk about their children? How could that have not been worth it?” As a fellow parent I can appreciate this sentiment, but I also know that talking about the celebrations and victories is the easy part. Talking about the worries, the insecurities, and the failures to someone they do not know takes a level of trust, and for that I am extremely grateful. The next section provides an introduction to each participant in the study. The names of participants as well as their sons or daughters have been changed in order to provide confidentiality.

Participant Biographies

Jennifer is a mother of two children, is married, and is currently employed as an interior designer. Her eldest daughter is a senior in college and she is very proud of her accomplishments. Jennifer’s daughter Sharon is the first in her family to go to college as neither Jennifer nor Sharon’s father ever attempted higher education. Family is very important to Jennifer and being part of her daughter’s daily life is something she is interested in doing even after Sharon graduates. Jennifer’s daughter plans to remain relatively close to home after graduation and pursue a teaching position in secondary education. Jennifer speaks to her daughter via phone twice a day and texts her a few times a day in between phone calls.

Robyn is the mother of two children, is married, and works locally as a social worker in the education system. Robyn’s daughter Carrie is currently studying abroad in Italy and is having an amazing experience according to her mother. Similar to her mother, Carrie is pursuing a career in social work because she feels called to the field. Robyn describes her daughter as extremely independent and motivated. Prior to her

study abroad trip, Carrie went to school full-time, was involved in extra-curricular athletic activities and also had a part-time job. Robyn speaks to Carrie approximately every three weeks to a month via phone. Aside from the phone communication they may text each other but also may go weeks without communicating.

Ed and Joanne are the parents of three children. Two of their children have already graduated college and their third child, Jan, is a junior in college. In the opinion of Ed and Joanne, Jan has benefitted quite a bit from having older siblings go through college prior to her, and in many areas she consults with her two brothers on decisions. Ed and Joanne describe Jan as very independent and focused, with the ability to navigate new situations well. Jan is working full-time at an internship this year and this has caused her to have to drop some classes. However, Jan believes with summer classes she will be able to still graduate on time. Ed and Joanne speak to Jan around once every week or two via phone. They often will e-mail Jan but very rarely text her.

Lauren is the mother of three children, and is married. Lauren currently works in the journalism field. Lauren's other two children have attended college and graduated, and her youngest son, Brendan, is a senior in college. Lauren describes Brendan as passionate about his field of game design. She says that throughout school Brendan has had some social adjustment issues, but she has been impressed how he has battled through these and become more independent in college. Lauren believes that Brendan may have a little more difficulty adjusting than her other two children post-college, and hopes he remains close to home for at least a year or two. Lauren speaks to Brendan

approximately every week to 10 days on the phone. She reports that they only send texts if there is an issue to be resolved.

Karen is a mother of two children and married. Karen is currently employed but times have been tight due to the current economic situation. She and her husband lost their business a few years ago and they have had a very difficult time financially. Her son Blake is a junior in college, and he is currently studying abroad in France. Blake is pursuing a computer science degree and does not yet have a defined career path. While in France, Karen has spoken to Blake quite a bit as he updates her on his travels. During his sophomore year Karen and Blake had only spoken about once a month. Karen believes that Blake has become quite independent during his time in college and thinks he will do quite well after he leaves school.

Samantha is the mother of two children, is married, and works as a school teacher. Her youngest daughter, Carli, is a junior in college. Samantha describes her daughter as a very driven student, and one who has definite ideas of a career path. Carli is majoring in business but plans to pursue a career in fashion design. Carli has a lot of experience in the area, but decided a business degree would serve her well and was more transferable than a degree in fashion design. Samantha reports that she and Carli have contact probably five times a week, and the majority of that contact is text. Over the course of her education, she has noticed that Carli has become a lot more focused at school. Previously, Carli's world seemed to revolve around the social aspects of college, now she seems much more focused on the academic expectations.

Corrie and Rich are the parents of two children. Their daughter Melissa is a junior in college and just about to leave for a study abroad trip in Budapest. She has a younger brother who is just beginning his freshman year. Corrie and Rich live about 200 miles away from campus in another state, but still come to visit Melissa about once a term, usually because their work takes them close by her campus. During college they describe Melissa as becoming more socially outgoing and more confident in social situations. In terms of independence, they describe Melissa as highly independent even through high school. In terms of communication, Rich and Corrie speak to Melissa via phone about once a month but might text once a week or so.

Kristina is the mother of two children and is married. Kristina is employed in the engineering field. Kristina's son, John, is a senior and has been studying for a career in game design. John has a sister who is older and has already graduated college a couple of years ago. Kristina describes John as a very responsible young man that takes his schooling very seriously. Kristina reports that John seems to be paying more attention to life after college more recently, and has been looking at different companies and areas of the country where the industry of game design is centered. Between texting and phone calls, Kristina estimates that she and John interact around three times a day.

Jamie is married and the mother of two children. Her oldest child Julie is about to enter her senior year and has pursued information systems as her major. Jamie describes Julie as very socially independent and someone who always had good social skills. However Jamie describes Julie as really flourishing socially during her sophomore year, and as a result becoming much more self-confident. Julie has participated in internships

and a study abroad trip in her time in college, and this has also helped her maturation.

Jamie describes Julie as anxious about graduating and searching for a job. Jamie and Julie talk on the phone at least once a day and communicate via text a few other times on a typical day.

Tony is married and the father of three children. Tony's middle child, Sarah, is beginning her senior year. Tony's oldest child has just graduated from college recently and his youngest has just started college recently. Tony runs a local restaurant and Sarah works at his restaurant as a part-time job while in college. Tony does not expect her to take over the business, but he does say she has learned valuable lessons since working there. Sarah shares a building with her parents and lives on the first floor as her own apartment. Sarah is pursuing a career in education and plans to be a school teacher locally after she graduates. Tony believes she will continue to live in the apartment after she finishes school. Sarah's younger brother has been diagnosed with characteristics of Autism, and Tony describes Sarah as being very close to her brother. Tony communicates with Sarah via text about five or six times a week and sees her in person about two or three times a week.

Mary is married and is the mother of four children. Her son Jeremy is beginning his junior year in college. Jeremy's brother has also recently graduated and lives with him in an apartment near campus. Mary and her husband live with their two other children about 200 miles away from campus. Mary and her husband are entrepreneurs and together they run a consulting firm. Mary describes Jeremy as very motivated and self-reliant. Jeremy is also interested in entrepreneurship and has been designing his

college experience around that plan. In describing her relationship with Jeremy, Mary notes that their conversations are now more often about sharing inspirational stories or providing thoughts on possible business plans than the specifics of his college experience. Mary clearly has a lot of confidence in Jeremy and is proud of his accomplishments during his time in college. Mary and Jeremy communicate about once every other week, and it is usually either via e-mail or phone.

Emily is married and is the mother of twin boys. One of her sons, Frank, is beginning his senior year. Emily works as a nurse, and lives about 17 miles away from campus. Emily is very proud of Frank and what he has been able to accomplish in college, although she relates that he is fairly stubborn and has to learn things for himself, despite any advice she might give him. Frank is interested in the field of game design and has really flourished during his time at the school. Emily credits Frank's time studying abroad during his junior year as one of the most transformative experiences he had in college in terms of creating a sense of independence. Emily communicates with Frank about once a week, and they usually communicate via phone on Sunday of each week.

Without exception, each parent who participated in the study was very proud of his or her student and optimistic for the future. Variation occurred in the amount of contact that each had with his or her student, and also with approaches to the contact that did occur. Some parents and students had begun a significant conversation about life after graduation and some had not. Some parents had very frank discussions with their student about their inner decision-making process. For others, they only received peeks

into the way decisions were made. For some of these parents, their sons or daughters who were juniors or seniors in college represented their first child going through the process. For other parents, their junior or senior students represented their last child finishing school. In all cases, the parents were very helpful in providing their insight, and I believe provided a rich amount of data for the study. In the next section, I review the process of recording these data and converting the individual interviews into categories and finally into emerging themes and sub-themes.

Data Analyses

At the completion of each interview, data were analyzed through several methods. First, immediately at the completion of each interview, I created extemporaneous field notes about the interview itself in order to provide a continued contextual understanding as more interviews proceeded. These field notes included such information as the time and place of the interview, information about the surroundings during the interview, and any information about non-verbal interaction that I noted that would not necessarily be captured by an audio recording. As noted in the previous chapter, a digital copy of the audio recording was also transferred through a secure website to a confidential transcription service. Typically I received the finished transcription within five days. Once the transcription was received, it was checked again against the audio recording for accuracy. I then removed any personally identifiable information from the transcript and e-mailed the document to the participant to also check for accuracy.

After the participants had completed this optional member check, the transcript was then closely examined in an effort to establish categories of data through the process

of open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the importance of this first step in data analysis to “open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein. Without this first analytic step, the rest of the analysis and the communication that follows could not occur” (p. 102). In open coding, “the data is (sic) broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (p. 102). As a method to organize these “discrete parts” of data described by Strauss and Corbin, I listed each overarching research question, and then as a category emerged from the data, I listed this new category under the appropriate research question. Finally, once all interviews were completed, I went back through each interview to confirm that the categories created through the open coding process accurately captured the responses. Table 2 below lists the categories that the initial open coding process established, as well as how this category related to each particular research question. At the end of Table 2 are responses involving communication patterns between parent and student, which do not address a specific research question, but underlie all research questions as they help define the characteristics of the communication between parent and student.

Table 2. Open Coding Organized by Research Question

Question	Category	Number of Occurrences
How do parents describe their expectations of development in terms of self-direction, independence, and critical thinking?	Doesn't expect to be involved in academic matters (class choice, etc.)	10
	Expects student to take ownership of college experience	7
	Expects student to ask for advice with interpersonal relationships	6

Question	Category	Number of Occurrences
	Expects student to provide “high level” updates on academic progress	5
	Expects consultation on practical matters (bills, heat, cable, etc.)	5
	Expects good grades and offers financial incentive	2
	Expects student to ask for advice often	1
What level of self-direction, independence, and critical thinking do parents expect their student to achieve by end of college?	Ability to plan ahead for career/internships	10
	Have a post-graduation plan	6
	Communication patterns depend on specific needs of son/daughter	6
	Will NOT “test” plan, implicitly looking for approval	6
	Have an idea of passion “follow their path”	6
	Family will play large role in post-college decisions	5
	Except them to have difficulty adjusting financially	4
	Role of siblings will grow/continue strong in decision-making	4
	Will continue to “test” plan, implicitly looking for approval	3
	Role of friends will grow in decision-making	3
	Parental advice unlikely to sway decision-making process	3
	Will follow advice about a specific college/major	1
	Avoid “drama” of the social scene	1
What role do parents serve in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking?	Parental role is vetting alternatives	10
	Student vents to me, but does not expect me to do something	8

Question	Category	Number of Occurrences
	Parent purposely avoids "giving the answer"	7
	Parents should avoid "rescuing" students from logical negative consequences for poor decisions	6
	Tests alternatives with parents	6
	Vetting occurs on aspects of career choice and preparation (internships, graduate school, etc.)	5
	Vetting occurs on monetary aspects, realism of achieving goal	5
	Parent has communication plan directed towards more independence	4
	Have been working to prepare student for independence since childhood	3
	Areas where you disagree with post-graduation plan?	1
What role does college experience play in the development of self-direction, independence, and critical thinking?	Credit early extracurricular experience (choir, swimming, piano)	8
	Study abroad had big influence in self confidence	4
	Difficult roommate experience spurred growth	4
	Has increased in "professionalism"	4
	Grown in time management	3
	Academics have increased in importance	3
	General increase in confidence	1
Communication patterns	Text messages usually have to do with logistical concerns	9
	Parent and student communicate multiple times a week	6
	Parent and student communicate once a week or less	6
	Student usually initiates contact	5
	Initiation of communication is a 50/50 split	4
	Parent usually initiates contact	3
	Phone calls usually more substantial	2

As highlighted in Table 2, the interviews with parents were based on three overarching research questions that guided this study: (1a) How do parents describe their

expectations for their student's development in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience? (1b) What level of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking do they expect their student to achieve by the end of his or her college career? (2) What role do parents believe they serve in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience? and (3) What role do parents believe the college experience plays in fostering a sense of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience? Finally, the coding also highlighted the communication patterns between parent and student that underlie the developmental process.

Through open coding, my analysis showed that the two parts of research question #1, "How do parents describe their expectations for their student's development in terms of self-direction, independence, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience?" and "What level of independence, self-direction and critical thinking do they expect their student to achieve by the end of his or her college career?" were indistinguishable as I conducted parent interviews. Since participants in the study were parents of students who were either in their junior or senior years in college, describing their current expectations of their college student in developmental terms and then trying to establish developmental markers they may achieve by the time of graduation failed to recognize the journey that these parents and students have shared over the last two decades. The parents that I spoke to have watched the trajectory of development of their son or daughter from the very beginning of his/her life, and

exploring a developmental arc that ranged between 9 months and two years until graduation seemed like an arbitrary timeframe during the interviews. Through the interview process, I came to understand that parents previously had identified the apparent developmental struggles for their sons or daughters, as well as strengths, and were more apt to speak of behaviors to be achieved or specific behavioral observations than vague developmental goals. These responses are in line with the study conducted by Turrentine, Ostroth, Schnure, and Ward-Roof (2000) when they conducted surveys to ascertain parental goals. In the study, some parents did identify some abstract developmental goals, but most goals were concrete such as “graduate on time,” or “be prepared to get a job,” or “maintain a 3.5 GPA” (p. 34). In addition, the Turrentine, Ostroth, Schnure, and Ward-Roof (2000) study interviewed parents of first-year students and this study asked the same essential question to parents of juniors and seniors. As a result, I believe responses were in this case even more specific, such as “complete student teaching requirements” or “complete current internship.” In essence, I found that examining current developmental “expectations” or future “levels” to be achieved did not match how parents were thinking about their student’s growth. Although the questions posed did ask parents to comment on developmental goals now and for the future, the most common responses instead reflected observations about concrete behavioral or task-oriented milestones. As a result of the parental responses to the different parts of this research question, I combined the responses of the two questions and sifted through the categories to establish themes that emerged. For the purpose of analyzing data, the questions were combined into the following question: What behaviors have parents

observed from their son or daughter in terms of self-direction, independence and critical thinking as they approach graduation? Responses by parents to the questions posed in the interview will now be examined in this context.

Key Findings Addressing Study Research Questions

After coding each individual interview upon receiving the transcript as well as examining the data after all interviews were completed, it became apparent that while the initial prospect of understanding the overarching developmental goals of parents needed modification, a rich amount of data had been collected from the interviews in terms of specific parental observations regarding the development of their student in terms of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. Parents also provided rich data about their perceived role in fostering development in these three areas, as well as the role of the college experience. Through the coding process, specific themes emerged that related to parental observations in terms of development in independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. In an effort to capture the nuance of parental responses in these interviews, each developmental area (i.e., independence, self-direction, critical thinking) is presented as its own theme. In addition, the developmental role of the parent as well as the role of the college experience as they relate to the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking will each be examined as a theme, as will the communication patterns that emerged from the interviews. The themes as well as sub-themes are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3. Emerging Themes from Open Coding

Emerging Themes	Sub-Theme
Behavioral observations by parents regarding development in <i>independence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has taken ownership of college experience • Pre-college experiences provide a head-start • Student has shown more assertiveness in planning ahead for career • Has grown in practical life skills, financial literacy
Behavioral observations by parents regarding development in <i>self-direction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students ask for advice about interpersonal conflicts • Need for approval of “plan” connected to amount of parental contact • Asking for direct advice not a common occurrence regardless of amount of contact
Behavioral observations by parents regarding development in <i>critical thinking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental expectations regarding family input in big decisions relate to amount of parental contact • For “low contact” parents and students, parental opinion not central • Student should be guided by passion, sense of calling
<i>Role parents play in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental role is just to allow venting and to listen • Parental role is perceived as vetting alternatives properly, not providing “the answer” • Allowing students to experience negative consequences is necessary • Parental involvement in making academic decisions is extremely rare • More direct parental role in vetting aspects of career choice
<i>Role of college experience in growth of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive role of study abroad programs in development • Impact of roommate issues in developmental growth • Increased “professionalism” and ability to interact in a professional manner • Unique academic experience and/or internship assisted in growth • Nature of college necessitated a growth in self-management
Communication patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents grouped as either high or low contact • Parental communication pattern varies between siblings • Parents in high-level contact use text

Research Question: What behaviors have parents observed in their son or daughter in terms of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as they approach graduation?

Parental Observations Regarding Independence

Student has taken ownership of college experience. One of the most important behaviors that parents could point to when discussing the development of independence of their son or daughter was the moment or period of time when their student seemed to realize that he or she was an autonomous individual who was ultimately responsible for his or her own education. While seven of 12 parents interviewed described a time when their son or daughter began taking the college experience more seriously, two accounts really stood out for the parents as a defining moment in their students' college experience. Jennifer, and her first-generation college student Sharon, had a wake-up call early in her freshman year that helped her understand her level of autonomy and personal accountability for her own college experience:

One of the teachers and I cannot remember his name, he was an eye opener for her. She was failing math and I think he had said to her--he pulled her aside and said "and you know what? You may not be ready for college, why don't you take a break?" She said her eyes opened and she thought she was going to cry that moment and she realized, realistically, the path she was taking, wasn't going to get her where she wanted to go and it seemed from that moment on, she's been on the Dean 's list.

While not as dramatic an instance, Karen described a similar epiphany for her son Blake:

He had completed his first year, his first quarter at (school). He hit the wall as far as really having to take care of everything by himself, which of course is what happens whenever you leave and if your parent like interacts a lot in high school, which I did. But I remember him telling his younger brother that, "I've really learned that if you do things ahead of time, then you really have time. If something is due on Wednesday, you have to get it done on weekend so that you have a couple of days," which I – how many times did I tell him that before, but he grew up. He learned how to do what he needed to do. He got a couple of medium grades and he's a very good student so that, I think, shocked him to pull it together.

What is interesting in this analysis is that previous developmental experiences or parent/student relationships did not seem to be predictive of the students who would struggle to adjust to college. The seven who acknowledged a need for adjustment described students who excelled in high school as well as those who struggled. They also described students who had been considered more independent by their parents, and also parents who did not consider their son or daughter to be very independent. Regardless of the past circumstance, the parent expressed some relief that his or her student finally understood his or her need to be autonomous.

Pre-college experiences provide a head start. When speaking about growth in independence while in college, eight of 12 parents pointed back to an important extra-curricular developmental opportunity that helped build self-confidence and a sense of independence. These experiences usually occurred in either junior high or high school. There was wide variety in the nature of these important developmental experiences. Parents credited involvement opportunities from ice skating and swimming to choir and piano recitals. In terms of growth in confidence and independence, Emily credited the Boy Scouts for important growth in her son Frank:

Both my boys became Eagle Scouts in scouting, so that was another growth opportunity that we saw for them. We said “Frank, you’re going to do this and you’re going to go on these camping trips.” We joined up with a group that was out once a month because he needed that. Frank needed to learn how to interact with other people. He needed to learn basic survival skills, and he needed to learn from adversity, how to do things.

Parents like Carrie and Rich suggested early experiences like piano recitals and later experience in public speaking competitions really helped their daughter develop

confidence and allowed her to feel comfortable in her own abilities to navigate situations. Although Carrie and Rich described Melissa as introverted, they believed she could exhibit confidence publicly when needed. Joanne and Karen also commented on how their children's experiences really provided a level of discipline that they then carried with them through the rest of high school and into college. The students who had a significant extra-curricular experience while in high school were also the students who (according to the parents) had the least difficult time transitioning into college, and also the ones who parents anticipated having little difficulty transitioning from college to work life.

In addition to the developmental growth provided by these pre-college experiences themselves, many of the activities also seemed to provide some common ground for parents and students to communicate about developmental growth. This was the case when Kristina described her experience with John, her son, who played tennis competitively in high school. John usually played doubles (two teams of two) tennis, but was asked by his coach to play in a singles (one on one) match against a highly-ranked opponent. John, who felt he was outmatched in a traditional singles format, needed to come up with a non-traditional strategy to win this match. John did so by using by hitting several lob shots, negating the speed and quickness of his opponent. He eventually won the match, and for his mother, it provided an excellent opportunity to discuss his developmental progress. Kristina described witnessing the match this way:

John ended up winning the match and just, I always thought that was just an interesting way to handle [the match]. He was feeling really stressed and like 'I know I can't do this' ... but then his gears started to work, you

know, and he thought 'okay I may not be able do everything, but I can bring a lot,' you know?

Kristina reported that she and John talked about this event often immediately after it happened. From Kristina's description, it seemed that the growth in independence and self-confidence John experienced not only came from winning the match itself, but also by being able to process the event with his parents.

Developmentally, these pre-college experiences are in line with what previous studies reveal on the importance of early independence and its impact on college transition (Lee & Hughey, 2001; Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004; Rice, Cole & Lapsley, 1990; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). Having an early jump on the "relational autonomy" process that Josselson (1988) describes in re-defining the parental relationship to include a more defined and mature sense of self seems to ease or prevent a more abrupt adjustment that other college students may encounter without these experiences.

Student has shown more assertiveness in planning ahead for career. Career planning was an important topic for all parents, especially as students approach the end of their time in college. Ten parents commented on the growth of independence highlighted by the level of ownership their students were taking in terms of planning for their career after college. In each interview the level of assertiveness depended on whether students were beginning their junior or senior year, and also varied on the career choice. Some students had a more defined career path (for example, teachers need to complete student teaching and work towards certification) and some had a less defined path, such as entrepreneurship. However, parents still commented on the growth they had seen from

their children in terms of managing such aspects of their life autonomously. Samantha's experience with her daughter Carli symbolizes the experience for many parents. Carli is a student who is considering a career in fashion but decided to pursue a business degree rather than a fashion degree in preparation for this career path. Samantha was impressed with Carli's ability to create opportunities for herself:

Even though she is studying business she is still really finding ways to stay tapped into the fashion, she – you know she went out and found some internships all on her own and not really with any direct prompting from myself. And she has been very good about just going out there and finding those opportunities, so I find that she has definitely become more and more independent. I don't really have worries that when she graduates that she won't be able to hold her own.

While many parents described involvement in shaping this career plan, it was clear that the students had developed and were implementing these plans on their own. The behaviors these parents highlight fits in line with what Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe as “Developing Interpersonal Competence,” part of the overall development towards independence described in Chapter II. Developing interpersonal competence “accompanies increasing readiness to take responsibility, increas[ed] openness, and increas[ed] willingness to take risks with one's self-esteem” (p. 82). It was this growth that parents were describing, the ability not only to take responsibility for a plan, but to begin to take risks and branch out. As with the Chickering and Reisser model, parents seemed to recognize that such steps signified significant growth in personal autonomy and self-confidence.

Growth in practical life skills, financial literacy. Another behavior that five of 12 parents highlighted in the interviews was the growth in independence in terms of

practical life skills that their son or daughter had achieved through the college experience. Lauren described how her son Brendan had been able to develop cooking skills for himself and was finally able to cook meals consistently. Emily also described how her son Frank had begun to cook for himself after he moved out of the residence hall. In the prior year she had shown him how to make a few dishes and she was impressed that he seemed to take that knowledge and continue adding on to it. Emily described the important growth experience as follows:

The other skill [Frank] learned being in an apartment is cooking for himself. That's something that we worked on this summer, not just throwing something meat in a pan. It's making a balanced diet. Budgeting, living on a budget, and cooking from that, and sharing or not sharing with your roommates, all that kind of stuff.

Four of five parents also mentioned the growth experience in dealing with rental properties and working with a landlord as well as outside vendors (cable, internet service, etc.). While much of this growth involved learning how to navigate interpersonal conflict which is discussed in the next section, some of this growth was just learning how to problem-solve. These parents discussed how their son or daughter navigated broken items in the rental unit, negotiated costs prior to signing a contract, or learned how to solve smaller facility concerns on their own. Similarly, for those sharing an apartment, working with roommates to create a budget and develop a plan to pay bills was also a significant step toward an independent lifestyle.

Parental Observations Regarding Self-Direction

Students ask for advice about interpersonal conflicts. Another common theme that emerged in the relationship between parent and student is the way students asked for assistance around interpersonal conflicts. For most questions, parents described not giving “the answer,” instead allowing students to come up with a self-authored solution. This approach did not necessarily apply to interpersonal conflicts. When students encountered conflict with another person, whether it was a roommate, landlord, classmate, or instructor, the students were more likely to ask for direct advice, and parents were more likely to feel compelled to provide direct feedback. For Robyn, such a situation occurred with her daughter Carrie and a boss she was having trouble with at work. In this instance Carrie disagreed with how her boss was managing the restaurant where she worked. Instead of dealing with the situation herself, she called her mom to discuss the issue:

She goes, “How do I handle that?” And in the past, Carrie, I don’t think would have done that. Carrie would have said something really stupid at work and overreacted and got herself in trouble. I mean not in trouble but like you know, would cause friction because Carrie is very outspoken. Carrie is not a quiet person at all. So she would have just said it but instead she kind of caught herself and she stopped and thought well, let me problem solve this with somebody else.

In this instance Robyn really understood Carrie asking for such direct feedback as a growth step, suggesting that her reaction in previous situations would have been just to react in the moment. In this situation Robyn developed a direct plan with Carrie, talked about an overall approach to take in the conversation, and also helped Carrie see the conversation from the point of view of the manager. Ed and Joanne found themselves in

a similar situation with their daughter Jan after she had decided to drop an internship and accept an offer from another site, against the wishes of the internship counselor at the college. Jan reported that the internship counselor was upset by her decision and was making her thoughts known via e-mails to Jan. Again in this instance, rather than develop a plan and have her parents vet the response, Jan asked for direct advice:

And during that time when that counselor would email Jan, Jan would forward the emails to us and be like I need to respond, give me some input. And we'd look at it and (her brothers) would look at it and then she'd respond. And she would respond and then show us what she had already sent off. And it did go back and forth several times.

Only two parents discussed contacting the school directly to try and help solve a problem for their student, and in the case that it occurred with Lauren and her son Brendan, it again had to do with an interpersonal issue. Brendan reported difficulty having a professor drop him from a class, and finally Lauren felt that she had to step in because she felt that, despite his best efforts, Brendan's interpersonal skills were not going to be able to achieve the desired outcome:

And then last year Brendan, last spring six months ago, Brendan had a problem with a class that his professor said he would drop for him, because he wasn't going to, he was juggling classes trying to get in the right one and ended up dropping this one and picking up that class. So the class that he dropped never disappeared from his roster, and his professor wasn't doing anything, and so (Brendan) kept calling and calling. He says he is getting crazy and stressed over it, and we were too, and like ah, it's our money, in addition to the fact that our kid is getting screwed over.

Finally Brendan requested that his mother get directly involved, and Lauren did end up calling the school to resolve the situation. In this case Lauren did try to provide direct advice to Brendan, but in the end Brendan felt that this situation was beyond his ability to resolve. As described in the introduction to participants, Lauren had witnessed

throughout his youth that Brendan struggled with interpersonal relationships as a result of symptoms of Autism, so she understood because of this context that Brendan did probably need some assistance.

Again there did not seem to be any difference related to the frequency of communication that typically occurred between parent and student, or how “independent” parents considered their sons or daughters. In a fairly uniform manner, students and parents had an understanding that a more direct intervention was acceptable in the case of an interpersonal conflict.

In the process of developing a sense of self-direction, the possibility exists that such a direct approach in helping a student deal with interpersonal conflicts could slow or stunt growth in self-direction as laid out by Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (1999). According to the Kegan theory of growth in self-direction, such a direct involvement may allow students to continue to hold on to external definitions of the “self” provided by parents, and the shared realities created by both parent and student earlier in their youth. Instead, according to the Kegan (1994) theory, a more “hands off” approach would allow students to ask the question “How does my sense of who I want to be inform how I should respond?” Providing direct feedback allows students and parents to revert back to pre-existing shared understandings of how the student defines the “self.” As Baxter Magolda found in her 2000 study, providing ready external definitions for students allows them to delay defining the “enduring qualities” of the self that will serve as their guiding force in making decisions.

Need for approval of “plan” connected to amount of parental contact. One area that seemingly was connected to the amount of parental contact was the need for parent approval of a student’s “plan.” Parents who had less contact reported that they often vetted decisions with their son or daughter, but also reported that the whole process often resulted in their student coming to a conclusion that was different than one the parents had imagined. Robyn and Carrie fit the description of a parent and daughter relationship that had less contact when compared to the rest of the interview group. As Robyn described the vetting process, she would “plant the seed” of things for her daughter Carrie to consider. Carrie would then process these statements and make them her own, or reject them if she could not reconcile them with her own understanding of the situation. As Robyn recounted, either outcome was acceptable. “That’s what I do, I plant seeds. Sometimes they take hold, sometimes they don’t.” However, for parents who had more constant contact with their son or daughter, they sensed a higher level of need for parental approval from their students. Both Samantha and Jennifer reported a similar conversation with their daughters as it related to making a college choice. While neither parent directly suggested that they disapproved of their daughter’s initial college plan, they both strongly suggested to their daughters that the educational path they were planning would not be as effective as the plan the parents had offered as an alternative. For both parents, their plan included attending a “traditional” college with a wide offering of academic subjects rather than a school perceived to be more “vocational” in nature. Both parents reported their student quickly adopting their point of view and making a decision based on their parent’s perspective. While neither Samantha nor Jennifer

suggested that there needed to be an explicit approval of a plan, both acknowledged that the input of the family was a strong influence in the decision-making process. Jamie, who was in contact with her daughter Julie multiple times a day, also reported her daughter more explicitly seeking approval for a proposed course of action. In her interview, Jamie stated twice that Julie seemed to have a need to seek her approval on plans and seemed to have a need to please her. Jamie acknowledged that the nature of this part of their relationship had both positive and negative aspects. Positively, it limited disagreements or possible “mistakes” by Julie. However, Jamie hinted that this dynamic could be limiting to Julie, and that she did not quite understand why Julie had such a compelling need to please her at this point in their relationship.

For students like Julie, Carli and Jennifer’s daughter Sharon, the research about the impact of significantly incorporating family into the decision-making matrix is mixed. In developmental terms, Erickson (1959) suggests such relationships may cause students to retreat into a moratorium, relying on pre-existing models that rely on external definitions of self to make decisions. The theoretical models of Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (1999) also suggest that such a relationship could short-circuit the development of a self that stands apart from the sum of the external inputs received by the student. However, recent research by Weinstock (2010) and Hofer (2010) question the reliability of these theories, especially when applied to more collectivist cultural situations in which the family and the society at large play a larger role. While a comparison of the family/societal dynamic of Julie and her family with the participants in these studies in non-European countries is probably a theoretical stretch, it again highlights the path to

creating a sense of self does not necessarily include a point at which other voices must be silenced in order to find the “self.”

Asking for direct advice not a common occurrence regardless of the amount of contact. Finally, regardless of the amount of contact with parents or the parents’ perceived level of independence by their student, none of the parents interviewed described their students asking for direct advice on a regular basis. Even for those students who were asking for more direct advice concerning interpersonal conflict, parents suggested that, overall, asking for advice was a rare occurrence. The number of decisions that were vetted through parents did seem to depend on the amount of contact as would be expected, but even in the case of families who have fairly consistent contact with their son or daughter, there were fairly large decisions that were made completely independently of parents. Samantha, who speaks to her daughter Carli almost daily, described such a discussion involving Carli dropping a class. Carli called her to let her know that she had dropped class and that Samantha may receive an updated tuition bill as a result. When Samantha wanted to discuss the decision, Carli insisted that she would handle the situation independently and that she would not accept any input from her mother in the decision-making process. Robyn, who only speaks to her daughter Carrie once every few weeks, also confirmed that she did not believe Carrie often sought out direct advice. In fact, aside from interpersonal situations, Robyn could not recall any recent situations where Carrie had asked her for advice. She suspected that as she wrapped up her college career and was facing decisions regarding graduate school or job

prospects, she may ask for more direct advice, but other than those “big” decisions she did not anticipate Carrie asking for support in this way.

Parental Observations Regarding Critical Thinking

As discussed in Chapter II of this study, critical thinking and epistemology, or the way that students think about knowledge and the accumulation and processing of knowledge, underlie both concepts of independence and self-direction. In both cases, a reassessment of the student’s relationship to parents or other authority figures is necessary for growth. In essence, students must recalibrate their thinking from that which is guided solely by external forces to one that also takes into account the “self” as a valid constructor and evaluator of information. In the King and Kitchener (1994) model of critical thinking analysis, an “ill-structured” problem must exist to understand a person’s critical thinking pattern. An ill-structured problem, according to King and Kitchener, is an issue in which there is no right or wrong answer and where having all the facts will not produce an obvious outcome. In my study, the most common “ill-structured problem” that these juniors and seniors seemed to face was decisions about their career path. In this section I analyze how career choices and other difficult decisions were examined and how parents played a role in developing a plan.

Parental expectations regarding family input in big decisions relates to amount of parental contact. While I did not specifically ask about family dynamic in the interviews I conducted, parents who had contact multiple times a day or several times a week with their student were more likely to describe their family as “close” or the family structure as “very important.” This is not to suggest that family was not important

to the other interviewees, only to highlight that a certain group was more likely to highlight the role of the family in the interview process. One of the biggest issues where family became involved was in the consideration of career path. Families who were in closest contact with their son or daughter were most likely to describe a situation in which they expected their input to play a large role in career decisions. It is important here to highlight that these families did not feel that their son or daughter should be required to consider their families' viewpoint; they simply acknowledged that given their understanding of their son or daughter's decision-making process, they expected the family would be heavily involved. When I asked Samantha about the possibility of Carli relocating to further her career in fashion, she responded this way:

I think she feels a little intimidated by those large cities (that are fashion hubs). She recognizes there may be opportunity for her there but she is also very family-oriented. She does like to come home and see mom and dad and see the grandparents and you know hang out with her sister, so I do think there is a social piece of her, it's still a really important factor for her, so I think that's going to play into you know where does career take her.

Jennifer described a similar interaction with her daughter Sharon as she recounted recent discussions about where she might teach secondary school. Jennifer had definite opinions about Sharon teaching in a public school in an urban location, and preferred her to consider a suburban school. Jennifer also preferred Sharon consider living in a suburban area because she feared that areas where Sharon could afford to live in a city based on her starting salary would not be very safe. While Jennifer was not demanding any specific outcome, she did acknowledge that her opinion had a lot of influence on Sharon's thinking:

I think our influence is a big thing because there has been times where we have a huge fight or something and she ends up crying saying that it is important on what you guys think, so I think if I went about (discussing her options) the right way and talk a little bit right now, maybe in the end, it would make a difference.

Developmentally, students who place family in a central position in critically examining a decision are still adhering to remnants of Perry's (1970) dualistic thinking, defined by a clear right and wrong answer and a seeking out of authority figures to provide the right answer. However, in this case assigning the dualism label of the Perry model does not completely fit. In many aspects of the decision, these parents are describing a thought process that is extremely relativistic. The students are able to evaluate aspects of their career choice, such as their "fit" for a specific position, the monetary or other benefits of the position, and the possible risks of the position, such as a difficult classroom environment or a lessening of safety. As with a relativistic model, these students understand that a decision must be made within an understanding of the specific context and does not have a right or wrong answer. However, even given this understanding, the information provided by the family takes a central place in the decision-making process and is not simply evaluated on its own merits. As with the King and Kitchener (1994) model of a true "reflective thinker," the central place of the family does not allow students to feel empowered to evaluate criteria based on their merits, and as a result the "evidence" provided by the family is not evaluated critically and becomes significantly more important than other criteria.

For "low contact" parents and students, parental opinion not central. For parents who contact their son or daughter once a week or less, parents did not feel that

their opinion carried any more weight than other criteria that the students used to make decisions. Emily described watching Frank make decisions, and while she knew he valued her input, she thought that her opinion was evaluated and then possibly factored into the final decision:

He listens and he mulls things over. He doesn't make a decision very quickly. A major decision real quickly. He will mull things over, and sometimes, he will come back to me and ask a few more questions about my input, but he'll make the decision. You know, sometimes it's the way I would go, and sometimes not.

Carrie and Rich also describe Melissa's process as very internal, and while they felt that Melissa valued their input, they did not feel that it carried any special weight. They also commented on the fact that she really went about making these big decisions internally, and all that they get are "peeks" into her thinking. For instance, during the interview they reported that she had recently "let it slip" about which graduate schools she was thinking of attending. Carrie and Rich were happy to allow Melissa the space to make these decisions, noting that unsolicited advice would probably be resented anyway. However, in both of the case of Frank and Melissa as well as others, parents suggested that they expected their students to ask for more input in important "life" decisions. For example, Jan's parents Ed and Joanne believed that she would accept more input when making a decision to relocate for a job, or possibly make a decision about marriage. Nevertheless, these parents still felt that the additional input would not change the decision-making process of the student. Parents reflected that their sons and daughters would only be receptive to more input, but would still weigh the input as one source among many.

Frank, Melissa, and these other students definitely fit into King and Kitchener's (1994) model of a "reflective thinker." As King and Kitchener describe this stage, difficult decisions are evaluated "by criteria such as weight of the evidence, the utility of the solution, or the pragmatic need for action" (p. 15). In the case of Melissa, who was considering law school, her parents felt that she was weighing the benefits and risks of waiting to attend school, the costs associated with attending law school, as well as the educational plan of her long-term boyfriend and his career path. Based on their experience with Melissa in the past, they felt no concern about her ability to weigh these choices and come up with a sensible plan. Ed and Joanne also reported having little concerns with Jan making a career decision immediately after graduation, and they suggested that their experience with her decision-making process previously left them little doubt in her ability to properly manage her choices and make a decision.

Student is guided by passion, sense of calling. Another common theme that occurred across participants in the study was the understanding that in terms of a career choice, their son or daughter needed to be guided by a sense of calling or a love of his or her field. This trend was true even for those parents described earlier in this section who expected family to play a large role. These parents also understood the importance of their student entering into a career that the student felt best fit his or her skills and personal goals. Even if there was some disagreement later around the exact way the career choice would manifest itself, all parents I interviewed were very supportive of their student defining his or her own path. Tony described his thinking about Sarah's decision to pursue a career in teaching this way:

You know, you give your advice, your parental advice, and you have those conversations, those arguments, those disappointments but ultimately whatever they choose you have to support otherwise they won't put their whole heart into it, because they'll always sit there saying 'oh I disappointed dad or I disappointed mom' and it's just you don't want them to have that feeling.

Robyn related a very touching story when she questioned her daughter's decision to follow her mother's path and pursue a career in social work. When Robyn asked why she had not considered a career that would be less stressful or make more money, Carrie replied, "Mom, you can't argue with me about what I am called to do." Robyn reflected on the conversation in this way:

I remember I'm having the same exact conversation with my father which was very interesting because he said to me, because my father was old school and I originally went to (School) to go into law school. And he said to me, "Why do you want to be a sob sister..." that's what you know – years ago that's what they called it. And I said, "It's what I'm called to do." And I never told Carrie that story ever until after she said that. And I said to her, "I said the same thing to my father. I can't argue with it."

Likewise, Samantha encouraged Carli to "follow the passion" and "follow what gets [your] heart pumping" in terms of choosing a career. Interestingly, even though some parents expected to have a more central role in how the actual logistics of a career choice played out, they understood the importance of their son or daughter feeling empowered to judge what career choice would fit them best. In this regard, every parent was really supporting their student in using what King and Kitchener call "reflective judgment." They understood that only their son or daughter could evaluate his or her skills, hopes, and dreams and align them with a career, and in each case, parents chose to allow the student the space to make this decision.

Through these interviews, it became apparent that all parents were observing significant developmental growth with their son or daughter. Some parents were experiencing less growth, but they attributed outcome to the fact that their son or daughter had entered college as a relatively independent and self-directed teenager, and therefore did not have as much to learn relative to his or her peers. Also apparent through these interviews was the fact that amount of contact with parents did matter, especially in terms of the need for approval from parents. While no parent in the study demanded a certain outcome from their son or daughter, parents who had a significant amount of contact did suggest that their opinion carried significant weight for the student. Finally, through the interview process, an interesting trend developed. While parents mostly tended to be less directive in providing advice to students in most areas, when their student encountered an interpersonal conflict, parents were more likely to be directly involved. This trend seemed to hold true across all interviews where a parent described a student encountering a difficult personal situation. In the next section, my analysis moves from observations by the parent into their thoughts and beliefs about their specific role in fostering developmental growth in their son or daughter.

Research Question: What role do parents believe they serve in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college career?

An essential part of this study was not only to learn more about behaviors parents observed in their students, but also to understand what role parents felt they played in the developmental growth of their student. During interviews, parents were not only asked

about their communications with their student but how they thought about this communication, and what, if anything, they believed their student was seeking from the communication. The themes that emerged in terms of how parents thought about their own role in fostering growth are explored in the following section.

Parental Role in Fostering Developmental Growth

Parental role is just to allow students to vent and to listen. One of the strongest themes that emerged from the data analysis in terms of independence was the role of the parent in regards to complaints. Of the 12 interviews conducted, eight parents suggested their son or daughter did contact them to complain about something from time to time. The subjects of the complaints did not seem to have a pattern, and some students contacted their parents more frequently than others to complain. However, there was a fair amount of consistency in terms of how parents thought about their role in this conversation. Each parent described his or her role as a “listener.” Kristina described her journey from being more actively involved in problem solving to becoming more of a listener in this way:

I think I’m probably learning to be a better listener than I used to be. I know I used to kind of.....I don’t know just kind of restate and state and different angles—a different perspective on the same thing and as my husband says, “beat things to death” in that. So I’m learning to be a better listener. I’m learning to... and especially as the kids get older in that they’re now both adults in that just... really more of a listener.

In all eight instances, parents stated they were aware or had grown to become aware that their student was not looking for them to step in when they called with complaints. When asked if she thought her daughter Carli wanted her to step in when she heard complaints about how things were going, Samantha thought that this was not at all

what her daughter was seeking. Samantha believed that Carli was not looking for someone to provide direction or solutions, but instead allow problem solving to occur out loud. Samantha had this to say:

Carli would probably resent it if I attempted to fix (a complaint). She is just, her communication is just trying to process what's going on and by venting or complaining if she hasn't already arrived at an answer it may help her suddenly go, oh bingo that's may be why it has happened or may be what I could do. She is really looking for that, sympathy and validation.

Joanne reflected the same sentiment about her daughter Jan, saying that she doesn't "think she comes out and asks 'what I should do?' She vents, she vents it out." Jamie indicated the same of her daughter when she called with complaints, stating that she "(tried) not to say too much about what I'm thinking because she just wants me to listen." All the parents described having an opinion on what they were hearing, but they had grown to understand that providing that feedback was not their role.

Parents must allow student to experience negative consequences. In six of 12 interviews, parents also discussed the importance of letting students experience negative consequences based on their decisions. All six parents described this as an effective learning tool and a growth area in terms of independence. Carrie and Rich described this type of parenting as "love and logic" (also made popular by Foster Cline and Jim Fay's book, *Parenting with Love and Logic* (1990)). Carrie described this philosophy as loving your child, but not protecting her from the logical outcomes of her decisions. Carrie recounted times that she felt that her daughter Melissa had made poor decisions, but refused to "rescue" her from the logical outcomes of these decisions. Carrie said that she was supportive and loved her daughter through dealing with negative consequences, and

helped her process them, but did not shield her from them. Kristina agreed with this sentiment after she recounted a discussion with her daughter about her income realities if she took a job as a waitress at a struggling restaurant. Kristina realized that “there’s a point in your life you have to learn yourself that, you know, you’re not going to believe it until you experience it yourself. It makes more of an impression.” Mary recounted a similar story when reflecting on some of the more questionable entrepreneurial choices her son Jeremy had made:

...portable keyboards and the hacky sacks, you know, things that he was trying do some internet businesses, and invested, you know, anywhere from \$100 to \$500 in inventory and ended up eating all the inventory. But I didn’t feel as if it was \$500 down the drain, it was \$500 of a good entrepreneurial education to realize that what you thought was going to happen and what ended up happening is sometimes two different things, but you have to have so many failures to learn from that because I think, as a result of those small failures he’s going to, when he finally does put his mind and ideas and efforts into it he’s going to be successful.

In terms of the underlying growth in independence achieved by allowing students to experience failure, this approach aligns with Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) developmental vector “Moving from Autonomy Through Interdependence.” In this developmental stage, students must develop both emotional and instrumental independence by freeing themselves from the constant need for reassurance and gain confidence in their ability to gather the appropriate information to make the proper decision (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Even though the decisions described by parents have a negative outcome, parents describe this as a necessary step as students replace their parent’s decision-making structure with their own internal decision-making structure.

The parental role is perceived as vetting alternatives properly, not providing “the answer.” As described in Chapter II, the concepts of independence and self-direction are closely linked. At the same time parents describe giving their student more autonomy to make decisions and develop independence; they also expressed an understanding of the need to withhold their opinion in many circumstances so that the student could find his or her own way. However, many parents reflected that while withholding their opinion was necessary, they found a way to be supportive of their son or daughter by making sure their student was asking the right questions in order to arrive at a decision. Often parents described this conversation in a similar way. Students would declare their intention to pursue a certain course of action, but were implicitly asking their parent to vet this course of action through a shared analysis. Many parents felt this was an appropriate role for them. While they were careful not to provide what they saw as “the answer” many parents could provide a helpful point of view in which to effectively analyze the problem. However, parents often had a definite point of view of how their son or daughter should proceed, and this point of view sometimes came across in the questions asked by the parent. Mary, whose son is considering a career in entrepreneurship, described her conversation with Jeremy this way:

He said, “I’m going invest in Apple.” I said “great, I said have you looked at it?” I think in the past if he had said “what do you think of my investing in Apple?” I would have had an opinion on it. I just said “have you looked at the (price to earnings ratio), have you researched the company?” and also asking him to go online and do more research, you know, he has a great knowledge of Apple but that doesn’t necessarily translate into a good company. So, I would encourage him by asking additional questions to maybe give it some more thought.

Clearly, Mary helped Jeremy vet a decision through asking questions, but she was also communicating through her questions that Jeremy needed to do more research before making an investment decision.

Karen also described vetting conversations with her son Blake when making important decisions. Instead of rejecting her questioning, Karen thought that Blake welcomed the vetting as a helpful part of making decisions. Karen stated that Blake:

would have an answer to why he eliminated something ahead of time or had considered it. And he would be very forthcoming with describing how he would do that process. [Blake] wasn't resentful of me asking because quite honestly, we have a great relationship and I love his brain and he does a great job.

On some occasions parents were not even particularly vetting the decision but instead just providing a framework to analyze the data. Such was the case for Carrie and Rich when they helped their daughter Melissa make a college decision. Melissa was struggling with how to make such a large decision, and her parents helped her create a decision-making grid that helped her examine just the "pros" without worrying about the "cons" of each choice. This decision-making process worked for Melissa, and she felt from that point the college choice was clear.

Parental involvement in making academic decisions is extremely rare. One of the most consistent themes throughout the 12 interviews was the lack of parent involvement in day-to-day activity in the academic portion of attending college. While involvement varied slightly in the 12 interviews, no parents were involved with their student in specific aspects of the academic experience such as due dates of assignments, study schedules for upcoming tests, registration deadlines for upcoming semesters, or

plans for internship applications. In a fairly uniform manner parents suggested that it was up to the student to be responsible for these deadlines. Even parents who spoke with their student multiple times a day might have been aware through conversation that a paper or project was due soon and have a basic understanding of how their son or daughter was completing the work, but they offered no guidance or advice. The subject just never came up. In terms of registering for the right classes, many parents mentioned their son or daughter connecting to an advisor to help them monitor their progress and plan for the future. In terms of offering additional support, most parents felt that they would have a weaker grasp of the requirements than the student or advisor, so they simply chose to put the experience in their student's hands. Tony explained his approach with Sarah in this way:

Basically because she works with an advisor and they have the grid already set out. We just kind of go just at a very high level that she is following the grid, and it took her first two years to really decide what she wanted to do and by her junior year she decided she wants to become a teacher. So, I ask her just to make sure she is focusing correctly and constantly making sure she is keeping up with her advisor that her graduation dates are in line with what she is expecting.

Ed and Joanne described a similar conversation with their daughter Jan. They simply ran through a series of questions: "When it comes to selecting her courses all I really want to know is are you aware of your deadlines? Do you have some choices picked out? Do you have a plan B if you can't get into these? Other than that I don't ask what she's taking or anything else." It is notable that Ed and Joanne described coming to this approach after working with their two older sons and monitoring their grades more closely, especially in high school. They described the tension over this lack of

independence, and by the time Jan was late in her high school years, they realized that such a high level of involvement was actually counterproductive. Karen described a similar experience with her son Blake. On a day in early high school known in the family as “the day that mom screamed,” Blake mentioned to his mother on the way to school that he had a test first thing in the morning after denying all weekend that he had any studying to do. After re-evaluating her involved approach to Blake’s academics after this event, she realized that Blake needed some autonomy to control his academics. Karen also adopted a more laid back approach with her younger son’s academic progress, also with positive results.

While no data exist that specifically highlight how parents and students interact about academics specifically, some information exists through anecdotes and national studies that suggest this finding may be unusual. From speaking to parents of college students at my own institution, I am aware of parents who routinely use their student’s log-in to check their progress through the online course management system. Colleagues at other institutions have reported this as well (Colavecchio-Van Sickler, 2006; Hunt, 2008). Nationally, a 2007 study of parents concludes that 13% contact their student’s college frequently, and another 25% contacted the school occasionally. While the same study did not elaborate on the individual reasons why parents contacted their student’s institution, certainly some of this contact is likely to be academically related.

More direct parental role in vetting aspects of career choice. In terms of career preparation, parents continued to provide support by using the vetting model discussed earlier in this section. However, when discussing the career plan the process

was more direct than other conversations. Usually these conversations had to do with helping relay the parents' understanding of reality in terms of job prospects and also of monetary realities vis-a-vis the career choice of the student. Robyn certainly took this approach when her daughter Carrie told her of her interest in pursuing social work, asking "can't you find a field that makes more money?" Robyn asked this question tongue-in cheek but it also was aimed at communicating to Carrie her considerable understanding of Carrie's possible earning power in the social work field. Robyn is also in the field and wanted to make sure that Carrie clearly understood the monetary realities that went along with such a career choice. Tony relayed a similar conversation when his daughter Sarah decided to pursue becoming a teacher. Tony vetted the decision with Sarah to make sure she understood that she "would not make a lot of money" being a teacher. While Tony did not try to influence her decision to enter the teaching profession, his conversations were more direct with her in properly vetting this career path.

Robyn, Kristina, Lauren and Emily also had similarly direct conversations when their students were describing their possible path to employment. Interestingly, Robyn, Kristina and Emily all had students who were considering a career in video game design or more broadly in technology. Unlike some other fields students were considering, like teaching, the career path for game design is not as defined for these students. So, when Emily's son Frank described moving to the West Coast and getting a job in game design, she described a very direct conversation with him:

Now, he knows that the jobs are out there, but has he contacted a company? No. Does he have any friends out there yet? No. Does he

know the area where to live, where not to live? No. None of that has been done in his head and there are many times as I might say, “where’s that company? How many people do you think they hire? What if they’re not hiring you? What if they’re hiring five guys, not 500 guys?”

For parents who described these conversations, they often felt very conflicted about asking such direct questions. They all described their sons or daughters as optimistic about their prospects of a job after graduation. At the same time, they all had an understanding of the prevailing realities in the current economy and how difficult it is currently for college graduates. While not wanting to damper this optimism, they all felt that they had a responsibility to help their son or daughter create a plan that did not rely on just one path to employment.

Developmentally, parents are reflecting what the research about career choice suggests is the most supportive approach. One of the strongest predictors of career self-efficacy in students is the perceived support of their parents (Bandura, Barbanelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001). This parental support has the most direct impact on the student’s personal self-efficacy, which is the strongest predictor of career success in a chosen field. As a result, Emily walked a fine line with her approach, as did other parents. Emily did not say “You won’t be one of the 500 guys they hire.” In fact, she knows that there was always the possibility he would be. Rather, she worked with him to continue to pursue his chosen field should the first option not deliver as Frank had planned.

Research Question: What role do parents believe the college experience plays in fostering a sense of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience?

Parental Observations on the Role of the College Experience

In addition to understanding how parents viewed their role in their son or daughter's development while in college, this study also attempted to learn what role parents felt the college experience played in the developmental process. Several themes emerged as important growth points for students in their development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking.

Positive role of study abroad programs in development. Of 12 parents interviewed, five parents had students who completed a study abroad program or were in the middle of study abroad. Among the five parents, four highlighted study abroad as a major growth experience for their student while in college. The fifth set of parents, Carrie and Rich, had just sent their daughter off to a study abroad experience and could not yet assess how the experience may change her. However, even for Carrie and Rich, the process of choosing a study abroad location and making all necessary arrangements had already yielded positive growth. For all other parents, they described an increase in student self-confidence, problem-solving, and independence. Emily reflected on the positive impact that study abroad had on her son Frank. For him, the study abroad trip really led to positive gains in his sense of independence and his critical thinking skills.

Emily reflected about Frank's time abroad in this way:

You got to stand on your own; you got to rely on your own wits. If you don't know it by now, you should. So, learn it. That, I think, helped him realize that he really knows what the answer is. If he doesn't have someone to ask, he'll do it and he'll figure it out.

Robyn also described how Carrie had a different level of self-confidence once she arrived back from her study abroad. Carrie was now more willing to try new things and

take risks than she had been in the past. For Robyn and the other parents who had a student complete a study abroad experience, the growth they were describing was similar to what Chickering and Reisser (1993) outline in their developmental vector “Moving from Autonomy to Interdependence.” As highlighted earlier in this chapter, this growth first requires students to achieve some level of autonomy, and the parents of these students felt that study abroad really accelerated this growth. As the parents described study abroad experiences, growth seemed to occur in the areas of both emotional and instrumental independence. Essentially, the study abroad removed the need for constant reassurance from parents (emotional independence) and created a sense of self-confidence that they could problem solve on their own (instrumental independence). These accelerated gains in personal and intellectual growth are also highlighted in national and regional studies as well (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; NSSE, 2007).

Impact of roommate issues in developmental growth. Another theme that emerged was the developmental impact of roommate issues for students who experienced conflict. While only a few parents reported students experiencing roommate conflicts, for those who did experience this issue, it was a time of real growth. For Emily, she sensed that the roommate situation was becoming tense, but she refused to step in and directly assist Frank in addressing the issue. As discussed in the previous section concerning interpersonal conflict, she did not hesitate to give direct advice, such as “talk to the RA” or “find other friends on your floor or in your classes” who can become part of your social circle. Emily understood that allowing Frank to reconcile the issue in a way that he felt appropriate was an important developmental step:

That's part of growing up. If you don't learn it when you're 18, it's going to come up when you're 25, when in an office situation or wherever you're working, and you're dealing with somebody and you can't deal with them. Well, guess what? You got to deal with them. You have to figure out some way to do it. You don't have to like them. I told them, "You don't have to like your roommate. You just have to figure out a way to coexist."

Certainly Emily had her boundaries, and suggested she would step in if "something illegal" was going on, but aside from allowing Frank to be in a possibly dangerous situation, she was willing to sit back and allow Frank to solve the problem. Karen had a similar experience when Blake experienced an issue with his roommate. As Karen described it, Blake's roommate's response to a disagreement would be to take the cables out of his electronic equipment to "punish him." While Karen admits that she was very directive with Blake about how to proceed, she did allow Blake to come up with his own solution for the problem. In this instance, as with Frank's situation, Blake involved the Resident Advisor who was able to mediate the situation. In the end, Blake was very proud of himself that he was able to "stick it out" with this roommate and find a solution to living together. In terms of developing a sense of "self" these experiences appeared to be very impactful. These students have to figure out what living situation makes *them* comfortable without depending on the standards of their parents. While certainly an uncomfortable situation, these moments forced these students to come up with personal definitions of how they felt about their living space instead of depending on others to define it for them. Although in these instances a peer got involved to mediate the situation, the mediation was based on personally held beliefs rather than a reliance on external definitions of what was acceptable and not acceptable. As highlighted in Kegan

(1994) and Baxter Magolda (1999) development of a sense of self that exists outside of the authority figures in one's life is key to developing a sense of self-direction.

Increased “professionalism” and ability to interact in a professional manner.

Parents also noticed the impact of college in terms of their student gaining a sense of professionalism. Many of these changes in behavior were related to a specific internship or academic experience which required students to have more of a “hands on” experience in a professional area. However not all parents connected these changes to a specific event, but rather to overall growth in maturity and sense of self-direction. Samantha discussed how Carli had really grown recently in terms of presenting herself professionally:

She already does things that I notice from my conversations with my peers that some of her peers are not doing, I mean she knows how to dress herself well, she knows how to have an updated resume, she knows how to have an interview with someone and not be flustered on you know, she knows how to take a moment and ponder and give an answer to a question. I see that she presents herself very well and I think she has got very good written communication skills you know she is not sending the e-mail to a potential employer or current employer that's all in upper case or all in lower case or lol or you know.

Robyn also commented on the growth that Carrie had gone through in the last few months as she began to prepare herself for a career in social work. Robyn reflected that Carrie was starting to become much more aware of how she presented herself professionally and how she needed to present herself in the workplace. Robyn also commented that her experience in college was helping her understand how to plan ahead for her career. Robyn discussed that Carrie was trying to plan her schedule to allow a series of training sessions that would occur in eight months. Carrie knew, according to

Robyn, that this specific social work training would be an important asset to her and prepare her for her upcoming job search. Even for those students whose sense of “professionalism” seemed to arrive late, for instance the sons of Kristina, Lauren and Emily, they reported a recent increase in understanding in how to interact with others professionally and manage in a workplace.

Unique academic experience and/or internship assisted in growth. Another strong theme that appeared throughout the interviews was the impact that having an internship or other unique academic experience had on students developmentally. In this study, three students were specifically pursuing a career in video game design and were able to participate in an experiential project that lasted over the course of a year and allowed their school to compete with other schools. While this experience did not technically count as an internship, the parents believed that some of the same developmental outcomes resulted from this experience. Lauren, who is the mother of Brendan, commented on how much Brendan had learned about the give and take that occurs on a team through this experience. Frank had a similar growth experience after initially being frustrated with the game design project. The first few weeks he told his mother that he just seemed to sit around and watch others do work. Emily explained the conversation this way:

I said, “Well, you probably just have to wait for them to do their part and then it will open up for you. Just stick with it and see. Give it a chance.” He did stick with it and now he’s got a lot of work to do. Now, he likes it more. I think he just needed the encouragement to say, “You know, it’s not going to start with your work. The other people are doing their thing first, but then once you get it, you probably going have to race to finish it. Don’t drop out now because they need you.”

Emily felt that this experience created an opportunity for important growth in Frank as he witnessed the dynamics of a team. As Emily highlighted in our interview, the field of game design is competitive, and learning how to be “easy to work with” is an important preparation for the workplace. Kristina’s son, who also was in the game design program, commented on how her son John had really understood the value of networking and making connections in the field, especially as he watched older students who participated in this project graduate and move into the workforce. Ed and Joanne also felt that the internship experience for their daughter Jan was a tremendous growth opportunity. While she initially had difficulty landing the internship that was right for her, they felt that her current internship really helped her clarify her career options and gain specific skills that would help her make the transition. Even parents whose students participated in the internship program but were not having the best experience could appreciate the developmental growth. Jamie, whose daughter often found her internship position “boring,” could appreciate how these experiences would, in the long run, help her define her career path. Finally, for those pursuing a teaching career, specifically the daughters of Jennifer and Tony, their student teaching experience really helped clarify for them what type of teacher they wanted to be, and how they planned to seek out a teaching position that would be rewarding. In terms of the most developmentally impactful experiences, other studies have shown that an internship experience is a powerful force in personal growth, especially for students late in their college career (Astin, 1993; NSSE, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The nature of college necessitated a growth in self-management. Several parents also commented on how they felt the college experience itself had increased their student's ability to self-manage. The growth in self-management often was connected to things peripherally associated with attending college, such as solving housing issues, or managing their time, but parents considered this broadly as part of the "college experience." For Karen, a clear area of growth for her son Blake was not his settling on a unique course of study for his Computer Science degree, but his ability to manage this process solely by himself. During his sophomore year, Blake discovered a program that allowed him to graduate with both an international business and computer science degree and also allowed him to take classes abroad for a year. Karen described watching Blake work to achieve this new plan:

He has become very confident. He's 20. He's a smart and capable kid. So, it's big for him. He found the program. He did the research. He filled out all the forms online so he didn't show me the forms or what it looked like. He followed up. He found an additional grant of scholarship so he could afford because we don't have any money for sure. And he is going to school with all the scholarships and grants and a little bit of loans. And we literally have no – we had a really tough time financially the last four or five years, are down to zero, and there was no way I could give him all the money to go. And so it's great that he found this additional scholarship. I mean he's very self – he's like he's a grown up now. He's like, "Yeah, if it has to be done, well let's see, what do I need now? Let me find it." And he finds it.

For other parents, student growth seemed to be connected to living on their own for the first time. Even though Tony's daughter Sarah was renting the downstairs apartment from him, he still saw that the separation required Sarah to develop some self-reliance. As Tony stated, she was no longer just coming upstairs and asking "What's for dinner?" Ed and Joanne as well as Robyn also reflected on growth that occurred with

their children as they had to move out of the residence hall and find an apartment. While the parents often questioned the timeline of their student's apartment search (both sets of parents recounted the search going down to the wire) both of their daughters ended up finding a place that they were happy with and also fit into their existing budget. For Robyn, however, she noticed even more of a change once her daughter was living on her own:

So when she moved out, this whole kind of change, shift happened with her. This whole you know, I can do things on my own. I don't need to have a friend with me all the time. I can be on my own. I can make this you know. It was very different and I still think very different than some of the friends that she grew up with.

For Robyn, as well as other parents, these experiences related to attending college really seemed to create a situation that necessitated growth for the student. As described by Baxter Magolda (2000), these students each reached a "crossroads" point, where the old definition of "the self" would no longer produce an acceptable outcome. Because of the circumstances they faced and the goals they had set for themselves, the students were forced to evolve new strategies that centered around self-reliance. These circumstances, according to parents, are what seemed to spur the growth.

Parent/Student Communication Patterns

Undergirding this entire study is an understanding of exactly how parents and students communicate. While this study focused on the nature of the contact instead of the frequency, providing data on the frequency of communication provides a useful context to the nature of the communication. The next section reviews patterns that emerged from parent interviews in terms of their communication with their student.

Parents grouped as either high or low contact. As detailed in the beginning of this study, the amount of parent contact with college students has been on a steady rise over the last decade. An explosion of parental contact really began to occur after 2005, when cell phones and their accompanying texting plans became ubiquitous (Hofer & Moore, 2010). The most recent studies conclude that parents and students are communicating over 13 times a week, especially when texting, Skype, Facebook, and email are added in with phone conversations (Hofer & Moore, 2010). While this study found that many parents met or even exceeded this number (the most communicative parent estimated communicating between 25 to 28 times a week), many parents communicated with their son or daughter once a week or less. In my study, I found the average amount of contact in the group to be 8 times a week, but I do not believe that this statistic really tells the complete story. In my study, parents and students seem to fall into two categories: (1) those who communicated on a daily basis, and (2) those who went a week or multiple weeks without communicating. For five parents who communicated more frequently with their son or daughter, the communication averaged just over 17 times a week. For the seven who communicated less frequently, the average was .75 times a week, with three of seven parents going multiple weeks at a time without communicating with their son or daughter. With both groups, I found that who initiated the contact was roughly split, with parents initiating the contact half the time and half the time the students reaching out. This is slightly different than other recent studies regarding who initiates contact, which found students were more likely to initiate contact. (Hofer & Moore, 2010).

Parental communication pattern varies between siblings. An interesting trend that appeared throughout the interviews was differences in parent communication style between siblings. Through the interview process, it became apparent that all parents participating in the study had at least one other son or daughter. As I probed for information about the style, substance, and frequency of communication with their son or daughter in college, parents often reflected on their level of communication by comparing it to their other children. In each case, the parent described this communication pattern as something that had developed over time and was suited to what they felt were the needs of the specific child. This was especially true as Tony described communication with Sarah in comparison to communication with his younger son who had some slight developmental issues. In his communication with his younger son, Tony was much more directive. He was also much more involved with him registering for classes, and Tony described having the logins for his son's college accounts in order to check his progress. Lauren described a similar pattern with her son Brendan, who she also described as having some developmental issues. While she did not report more frequent communication with Brendan, she did describe being more directive with him about making plans and completing tasks. This level of involvement for students who may have heightened academic challenges is also reflected in national studies regarding parental contact as well as interviews with college administrators (Mathews, 2007; NSSE, 2007).

However, not all differences in parental contact were due to what parents perceived were needs of the student. Many communication patterns were based on the

personality of the student and the communication style that seemed most effective to parents to achieve desired results. Kristina, who communicated with her son John multiple times a day, had a much different pattern with his sister: “Our daughter is... probably much more... much more independent in a lot of ways and that’s so our communication is maybe once a week.” Mary also described a similar scenario with her son, Jeremy, who seemed very independent and in little need of direct advice, and her other sons, who needed more direct support to achieve in college.

Parents in high-level contact use text. For those parents who communicated quite frequently with their student, the question arose: What was the nature of the communication? For three of five participants who were in frequent contact with their student (28, 21 and 20 times a week), texting made up roughly half of the contact. When I inquired about the nature of this contact, all three parents agreed that the subjects were usually logistics, or simply updating each other about their day. Jamie described a typical texting “conversation” with her daughter Julie: “Like I texted her today, I was out at the mall. So I’m texting her, “Do you like this? Should I...do you want me to buy you this?” Or I was returning something for her, “Do you want a different size?” Other subjects included transfer of money, vacation plans, trips home over the weekend, and updates about other family members and friends. All three agreed that no substantial interaction happened via text, and that more significant interaction occurred via a phone call that typically happened either once or twice a day.

Axial Coding

After the process of open coding had been completed, I began the process of axial coding. As highlighted in Chapter III, the role of axial coding is to identify a central theme (phenomenon) that emerged from the open coding (Creswell, 2009). In addition, the process of axial coding allows for identification of causal conditions that lead to the phenomenon, as well as other factors that impact causality (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These other factors may include the appearance of intervening conditions (dynamics that “mitigate or otherwise impact the causal conditions”) as well as contextual conditions (a “specific set of conditions” within a time and place that impacts the experience of the phenomenon) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.131). By the reorganization of themes through axial coding, the researcher can examine how themes are linked, what factors cut across themes, and what interactions, relationships or conditions impact the central theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The results of the axial coding process are summarized below in Table 4.

Table 4. Axial Coding Results

Causal Conditions	View of the role of family by parents and students Relationship with son or daughter that has developed over years
Intervening Conditions	Learning or social adjustment issues as perceived by parents Experiences in childhood that jump-started developmental growth Need to follow one’s passion
Contextual Conditions	College experiences such as study abroad or internship Career choice by student and perceived need for parental input

In my study, I found two central phenomena which informed the relationship between parent and student while in college, and how they interacted in terms of development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. These two phenomena or “causal conditions” were: (1) the view of the role of family in terms of its self-described “closeness” and (2) the pre-existing relationship developed between parent and student prior to enrolling in college.

In terms of the first phenomenon, the perceived “closeness” of the family, parents usually identified this phenomenon in two ways. The parents typically discussed: (1) the daily interaction between student and parent; and (2) the central role of the family in important decisions. Parents like Jennifer, Jamie, Tony and Samantha and the relationship they have with their students fits this description. These parents did not demand any particular outcome during a decision-making process, but they did expect their student to consider the impact on the family as one of the main aspects of a decision. While some studies (Baxter Magolda, 1999) would consider such a central role for the family as inhibiting autonomy, recent studies of non-European cultures suggest that these students are just figuring out what Josselson (1988) describes as their “relational autonomy” or how they fit within the family structure (Baxter Magolda, 2010; Hofer, 2010; Weinstock, 2010). For parents who did not describe their family as “close,” the developmental model described by Chickering and Reisser (1993), in which autonomy from parents is established as part of the development of independence, is more applicable. Such is the case for parents like Corrie and Rich who describe just getting “peeks” into their daughter’s thinking, or parents like Ed and Joanne, who describe

learning of an emerging relationship with Jan after Jan had purchased tickets to travel to Israel for three weeks with a new boyfriend.

However, in this phenomenon there were intervening conditions. While Brendan's mother Sarah did not describe her family as "close" in terms highlighted previously, she did discuss a wish for a higher level of involvement with Brendan in terms of his next steps after graduation. Sarah wished for this more direct role because of Brendan's previously described social adjustment issues. Another intervening condition was the importance of "following your passion" in terms of career choice. Even self-described "close" parents encouraged their student to follow his or her passion and did not expect to have the family play a large role in choosing a career. However, especially for the parent of a "close" family, contextual conditions can change this approach. While these parents encouraged students to follow their passion, they still expected to have some role in career decisions, especially if the decision had the possibility of requiring a move far away from home.

The other central phenomenon that informed the relationship between the parent and the student was the family relationship that had been established prior to the student's arrival in college. This fact makes intuitive sense, as parents just do not discard the 18 years of knowledge they have gained in raising their child simply because he or she enrolls in college. While a parent like Karen began to reduce her involvement in her son Blake's life while in high school, the overall dynamic between Karen and Blake was not re-invented as he enrolled in college. His development was still understood by Karen in the context of his developmental "starting point." The same was true with Mary and her

son Jeremy, as well as Corrie and Rich's daughter Melissa. In both instances, the student had developed a significant level of autonomy prior to arrival at college, and the college experience just built upon this growth. However, parents like Mary and others highlighted that the type of interaction she had with Jeremy was not universal to all her children, and she often was more involved with her other children.

This causal condition seemed to stand on its own and, with one exception, was not greatly impacted by intervening conditions. Every parent interviewed described an arc of development for their student that had existed over years, and this arc significantly informed the way they continued to communicate with their son or daughter.

The one intervening condition which did inform this causal condition was the growth experiences that occurred during the high school years. The experiences dramatically changed the way parents perceived their child in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking. As discussed previously, these experiences ranged from scouting to swimming and from choir to public speaking tournaments. However, when parents spoke about these events they discussed a dramatic change in the way that they perceived their son or daughter and their level of autonomy.

In terms of the college experience, parents typically discussed growth as more gradual and understood in terms of their son or daughter's previous developmental arc. However this causal condition also had one contextual influence as well. Parents whose students participated in study abroad or a meaningful internship also tended to speak of this experience as transformative much in the same way that they had discussed the change through their extra curricular experiences in high school. For these parents, study

abroad or an internship required a developmental leap in terms of autonomy and critical thinking skills, and they credited the experience itself for jump-starting the growth.

Selective Coding and Grounded Theory

Although a goal of this study was ultimately to produce a grounded theory that student affairs professionals could use in working with parents, I believe further study is necessary to develop a useful theory for student affairs practitioners. As I began the analysis for selective coding, it seemed clear that while several important factors of the parent and student relationship were uncovered through this study, no unifying story which accurately described the relationship across dimensions emerged. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the process of selective coding as identifying one central theme that has the theoretical value to “pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole” and further state that the phenomenon identified “should be able to account for considerable variation with categories” (p. 146). While my study did highlight central phenomena through axial coding and outline the conditions that impact the phenomena, I do not believe the phenomena established in axial coding met the theoretical threshold described by Strauss and Corbin in selective coding. I believe that more robust examination is needed within specific parts of the parent and student relationship to establish a useful theory.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the viewpoint of parents and how they perceive their role in the development of their student’s independence, self-direction and critical thinking while in college. I believe this study yielded important results in understanding how parents view themselves, and I discuss

the implications of these results in the next chapter. However, as a result of these interviews I now understand that the developmental dynamic between parent and student is constantly evolving and leans significantly on the parent's view about parenting, the cultural background of the family or the perceived "closeness," and the pre-existing relationship between student and parent, among other factors. After interviewing parents and understanding the factors they believe impact their student's development, I do not believe a grounded theory can be produced using my study that can account for all factors. Despite of the emergence of a grounded theory, I believe that significant results have been produced by this study that warrant further research. These findings will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Member Checking

As highlighted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), a qualitative study must work to reinforce the credibility and dependability of results in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data. One step I took to improve the credibility and dependability of the findings was to implement a two-step member checking process. As mentioned in Chapter III, I e-mailed the transcript of the interview to each participant for review. In understanding that e-mail is not always a secure method of communication, I removed any personally identifiable information prior to sending the transcription for review. In the email sent to participants, I told them they had approximately two weeks to return updates/clarifications to the transcript if they wished. Five of 12 interview respondents replied to my email. Two respondents replied that the transcript "looked good" and indicated that they had read over the transcript in its entirety. Three respondents offered

additions to the transcript. Two of three changes were word or phrase clarification. For instance, one parent detailed her son working in game design attending a LAN (local area network) party. I had transcribed this as “land party.” The third parent, Kristina, had some substantive updates from our initial interview. After the interview, Kristina had really begun to monitor her contact with her son John and wanted to update her answers. Also, since Kristina’s interview was conducted in late summer, she wanted to provide updates on his summer internships, as well as some evolution in his relationships that she had noticed. This new information was very helpful and Kristina was very thoughtful to go through the trouble of providing the additional information.

Once I completed the open coding process and organized categories into overarching themes, I again e-mailed participants to see if they believed the themes adhered to their understanding of their relationship with their son or daughter. Four participants responded to my e-mail. All four said that they found the themes from my study to ring true and seemed an accurate portrayal of their experiences with their sons and daughters. In terms of findings of the study, Mary wrote that she was surprised to find that there was so little intervention in the academic experience. She noted that some of her anecdotal experience when talking to other parents led her to believe that at least some portion of parents were more involved in the academic experience than is revealed in the study. As related previously in this chapter, Mary’s assertion would fall in line with many anecdotal stories from student affairs professionals, as well as a few national studies that have touched on the subject.

Based on feedback from both transcripts that were reviewed as well as themes that emerged from the coding of the individual transcripts, I believe the findings of my study were confirmed by the participants. While participants did take time to provide constructive feedback on both the transcripts and the key findings, no significant challenge to emerging themes of this study surfaced. As a result of this member checking process, I believe the trustworthiness of my findings has been strengthened.

Peer Review

In an effort to add further credibility and dependability to this study, I also implemented the help of colleagues to help review both individual interviews as well as the emerging themes I identified in order to check for signs of bias in the coding process. In order to provide multiple viewpoints for my study, I selected two peer reviewers from different professional backgrounds to assist in reviewing the results. For my first reviewer, I selected a colleague who works in student affairs in the area of assessment. This colleague also holds her Ph.D. in higher education administration and works at a similar school to the one chosen for the study. Her expertise in examining the interview transcripts against the coding outcomes provided an excellent check on the trustworthiness of results. The second person selected as a peer reviewer for this study also holds a Ph.D. in higher education administration and works at a local university. This colleague works closely with students and also periodically comes into contact with parents. Her experience in working with both parents and students provided excellent background for reviewing the interview transcripts against the emerging themes.

In this peer review process, both participants were provided six of 12 interview transcripts to check against the themes I identified after the coding process. Prior to providing transcripts, I checked each document again to assure that all personally identifiable information was removed. Each reviewer had approximately one month to review the six transcripts and provide feedback about the coding.

One peer reviewer generally agreed with the themes in the study after reading through six of the 12 interviews and examining comparing the transcripts with the themes described in Table 3. However, she did provide important feedback in terms of the nuance of some specific themes. In terms of the “pre-college experience provides a head start” theme, the reviewer felt that it may not only be the experience itself that provided the growth in independence, but also the ability for parents and students to connect around a specific activity. After discussing this insight with my reviewer, I agreed with the assessment and incorporated her comments into the theme. It seemed through the interviews that the activities described, whether it was Boy Scouts, debate teams, or swimming, provided an activity in which parents could more actively communicate about opportunities for developmental growth.

Additionally, the peer reviewer questioned the parents’ motives during the vetting process described earlier in the theme “parental role is perceived as vetting alternatives.” She had the same concern with the theme “students should be guided by passion, sense of calling.” She questioned whether parents were actually vetting the decisions objectively or whether they had a preconceived idea of the “right answer” or “right career path.” I agreed with her assessment that parents did indeed have a “right answer” in mind or

would have often preferred if their son or daughter had made a different decision about their career aspirations. I also agreed that these parents may, through the course of the questions asked, be trying to steer the student towards an outcome. After this discussion, I went back through to these themes to make sure that I expressed that parents were not objective in their discussions, and did have an idea of how their son or daughter should proceed in important decisions. However, I still found that if their subjective vetting process did not change their students' minds, parents were comfortable allowing their students' to proceed on their chosen path.

In reviewing six of the 12 interviews, the second peer reviewer found that "all of [the] emerging themes have good support based on the six interviews I reviewed." However, like the first peer reviewer, she had some comments on the themes I developed. Her first comments related to the theme: "For 'low contact' parents and students, parental opinion not central." My reviewer felt, for big decisions, even these "low contact" students sought out their parents' advice. After reflecting on her comments and the transcripts she reviewed, I agreed with her assessment and incorporated the feedback into my themes. These students may accept more parental input as a part of an important decision, or may even ask for additional input. However, while independent students with low parental contact often did accept more input in big decisions, their decision-making process was still the same. These students still weighed the parent input along with other inputs, and reached a decision. In my review of the transcript, the parental feedback did not take a central role for these students, even in big decisions.

My second peer reviewer also suggested collapsing two themes: “Positive role of study abroad programs in development” and “unique academic experience and/or internship assisted in growth.” This was useful feedback, and I had considered this option myself during the coding process because the educational outcomes parents described were so similar. However, since both themes existed strongly in the interviews, and since parents talked about the experiences in different ways, I decided to keep them separate. However, as discussed in Chapter V, I did combine these two themes as part of the key findings of the study.

Finally, my peer reviewer suggested a pattern may have existed in terms of communication style based on the gender of the student. She noticed that in two of her interviews, the mothers described their daughters as “pleasers.” She noted that none of the males in the six interviews she read were described this way by their parent. However, she also noted that two of the interviews she reviewed were of parents with very independent daughters. After reviewing this theme again, I felt like the connective thread that defined the “pleaser” aspect described by the parents was the self-described “closeness” of the family rather than the gender of the student. While my reviewer is correct that the only two parents that highlighted a student’s overt need to please were parents of females, other interviews of parents of male students (which this reviewer did not examine) highlighted the central role of parent input in making decisions. While none of these parents described their sons as “pleasers,” I believe the subtext of the interview was the perceived importance of parental input on student decision-making.

Conclusion

The findings in this study really begin to illuminate the content of the interaction between parent and student during the college years. While many in the popular press have highlighted the new levels of interaction, few have paused to understand the nature of this interaction. Some findings here begin to reveal the nuance of the parent and student relationship. For instance, I found it interesting how a parent such as Mary could reflect on having a very hands-off approach with one child, and then imagining having a very direct and involved relationship with another child based on the child's needs. Previously I would have imagined that the style of parenting would have been universal, and that a seemingly over-involved parent would follow the same approach with all his or her children. Mary as well as the other parents helped me understand that, rather than a universal approach to parenting, these interactions are more reflective of an understanding of the needs of their specific child. Likewise, before this study I would not have imagined that many parents have almost no interaction with their student regarding day-to-day academic progress. Reflecting back on my time in college as I did at the beginning of this study, I remember speaking to my parents about upcoming assignments during our rather infrequent phone calls. However, even for parents in my study who spoke to their student once or twice a day, the specifics of the academic experience did not seem to be a large part of the conversation. This study provided many new insights into the parent and student relationship, and I hope that this deeper understanding of the relationship will allow student affairs professionals to better support students and parents as they move through their college experience.

The next chapter will focus on a summary of the key findings for the study, as well as offer important recommendations for student affairs professionals. Further areas for research in the area of the parent/student relationship are also recommended.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As referenced at the introduction of this study, the traits of those in the millennial generation are often a study in contradictions. Even the seminal book on the group, *Millennials Rising*, describe the generation as both “optimistic” and “team-oriented” as well as “sheltered” and “entitled” (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The impact of these traits has been widely debated, with researchers focusing on everything from the high rate of civic engagement to increased levels of depression and decreased levels of empathy (Debard, 2004; O’Brien, Hsing, & Konrath, 2010; Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). The same pattern has manifested itself in terms of the role of parents in the lives of the millennial generation. There is consensus among several researchers about the increasing role of parents in the lives of millennials (Carney-Hall, 2008; Debard, 2004; Hofer & Moore, 2010; Savage, 2008; Taub, 2008; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, & Ward-Roof, 2000). However, there are two divergent points of view as to the impact of this involvement. Many studies highlight the importance of a secure parental “attachment” on positive outcomes in college, such as academic success, coping strategies, self-confidence, and social and academic exploration (Cutrona et al., 1994; Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). While the opposing point of view does not discount parental involvement or a proper attachment to parents as an important ingredient in student success, this view suggests that a “tipping point” exists

where the relationship is no longer supportive but begins to prevent further development, especially in the area of autonomy (Hofer & Moore, 2010; Taub, 1997). In either instance, both groups of researchers acknowledge the importance of understanding the role of parental impact in student development, especially given the recent increase in the amount of communication between parent and student (Hofer & Moore, 2010; Pew Research, 2007). This study sought to learn more about the nature of the parent and student relationship, specifically through extensive conversation with parents of college students.

In narrowing the aspects of development examined by this study, I looked to recent employer surveys conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Employers highlighted several areas where they felt their new college-educated employees were entering the workforce unprepared (AACU, 2008). Among the top developmental tasks highlighted as needing improvement were the areas of self-direction and critical thinking, as well as the independence needed to be adaptable in new situations (AACU, 2008). As a result, this study focused on the involvement of parents in the lives of students while in college, and the impact of that involvement specifically on the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking. In an effort to understand development as students approach the prospect of entering the workforce, this study focused on students in the last two years of their undergraduate experience.

To understand the viewpoint of parents in terms of their student's development of independence, self-direction and critical thinking while in college, this study asked three main questions: (1) What behaviors have parents observed from their son or daughter in

terms of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as they approach graduation? (2) What role do parents believe they serve in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college career? and (3) What role do parents believe the college experience plays in fostering a sense of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience? This study sought to understand how parents perceived their influence and role in this developmental process, as well as the role of the college experience in this process.

Summary of Research Study

In order to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of parents and their views on their students' development I conducted a qualitative study consisting of 12 individual interviews in which 14 people participated. As highlighted previously, on two occasions both the mother and father of a student participated in an interview. The interviews in which two people participated were considered one data set. After each interview, I began the iterative process of coding the data while simultaneously reviewing existing coding categories informed by previous interviews and the new set of data. This process was both reassuring and perplexing, as some interviews affirmed existing themes, while also creating new categories to explore. This is consistent with the coding process as described by Anselm Strauss (1987), who states that "data collection never entirely ceases because coding [the data] continue to raise fresh questions that can only be addressed by the gathering of new data and the examining of previous data" (p. 27). Nevertheless, after 12 interviews, categories began to "dimensionalize" or fill in the

details of each phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 203). While undoubtedly additional interviews could have provided more fine-tuning of the dimensions, a level of saturation had been reached that suggested the subject areas in this study had been sufficiently explored. After following a systematic coding process, four major conclusions emerged from this study that help provide student affairs professionals the most useful understanding of the parent and student relationship in terms of development.

The goals of this study were to (1) better understand the relationship between parents and students and its impact on development and (2) to develop strategies to assist student affairs professionals in working with parents. As a result, the key findings of this study represent themes that strongly emerged from the coding process and also lend themselves to active engagement by student affairs professionals. While many key themes emerged through the coding process and were discussed in Chapter IV, I feel that the most important key findings are the ones that are the most actionable in redefining the relationship between students, parents, and institutions of higher education. These key findings allow student affairs professionals to have a clearer understanding of the current role of parents in the development of independence, self-direction and critical thinking, and also allow educators to engage parents as partners in augmenting student development.

In addressing the research question “What role do parents believe they serve in fostering independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college career?,” two themes emerged: Parents understand the need for intellectual “space” for growth in independence, self-direction and critical thinking; and

“close” families play a larger role in student decision-making. In addressing the question “What behaviors have parents observed from their son or daughter in terms of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as they approach graduation?,” One theme emerged: Students and parents handle interpersonal conflicts uniquely and are more apt to ask for advice. Finally, in addressing the question: “What role do parents believe the college experience plays in fostering a sense of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking as their student nears the end of his or her college experience?,” One theme emerged: Experiential learning opportunities spur growth. These four key findings for this study are discussed at length in the following sections.

Conclusions and Discussion

Parents Understand the Need for Intellectual “Space”

In interviews I conducted, parents expressed a need to hold back their direct feedback in certain situations in order to allow students to “hear their own voice” when making decisions. Although the circumstances varied, all parents understood that a decision-making matrix that was internally driven rather than externally driven was the ultimate goal of withholding their opinion. Some parents, like Emily, described her and her husband as having an explicit plan for moving their child from dependence to a place where he was making decisions on his own:

Well, one decision that my husband and I made right when we had the kids was these were our children until they’re 21, [through] high school or whatever you want to say. But our job is to get them from being totally dependent babies to being adults, functioning in society. Barring any disasters or accidents that happen that make them dependent on us; our job is to get them independent. That’s been going on their whole life. When you’re this age, you need to tie your shoes. When you’re this age, you need to be toilet trained. When you’re this age, you need to be able to

walk to school on your own. Everything is what are you going to do next year. What are you going to learn in this next year that is going to get you [prepared for] the next thing?

Likewise, Mary understood the need to replace external motivation (i.e., her ‘pestering’ her son) with internal motivation. Mary chose to address the topic directly with one of her children. While Mary did not have concerns about motivation for her son Jeremy, during our interview she recounted the time she had a very frank discussion about motivation with her younger son James. During our interview, Mary described James as less internally motivated than his older brother Jeremy. She described how she was constantly following up with James to make sure he had completed his schoolwork. After growing frustrated with his lack of motivation, she finally discussed her concerns with him:

James, this is your life. It’s not mine. I could sit here and pester you on whether you’re doing your studies but this doesn’t do you or me any good. You need to be pushing yourself to do well, as this is your life and I’m not always going to be around checking to make sure you’re pursuing your highest potential. You better start creating your own motivation, your own desires to do well. Otherwise it’s going to be very frustrating for you.

Although these parents often used the terms “independence,” “motivation,” or even “maturity” when describing their decision to provide less direction, what they really were describing was the growth of independence, self-direction and critical thinking that allows a person to determine his or her own path in life. For instance, Carrie and Rich as well other parents described the need for students to experience the logical negative consequences for decisions they made. While parents often discussed this as “maturity” they were really highlighting a discussion in critical thinking skills. Simple examples of this learning included the instance when Carrie and Rich helped their daughter learn that

not allowing enough time to make her own lunch would result in her being very hungry during the day. Emily had a similar example. She told Frank he may want to consider taking an umbrella with him. He looked outside and decided against it. When he came home wet that evening he looked at his mom and said “You were right.” A more forceful approach may have saved their child some momentary grief. However, that same approach would have only perpetuated a system that allows decisions to be made *for* the student instead of *by* the student.

In terms of career decision-making, a laissez faire approach for parents was also instituted in order to allow their son or daughter to find his or her own path. This theme, discussed in Chapter IV as “following your passion,” highlighted the need for parents to avoid being too directive as students explored different career opportunities. Karen, the mother of Blake, described how she had witnessed the effect of being too opinionated when students were beginning to explore different career opportunities. She described a conversation that her husband had with his son from another marriage as his son began to consider a career in advertising:

I heard his dad saying, “No guy has a job like that.” And I am like, “Oh my God, what? Where did that come from, Mr. Evolved?” And his son stopped dead in his tracks, didn’t pursue it, and now he’s doing construction and struggling though.

Tony brought up similar concerns when discussing career, and stated that his daughter should not be concerned with “pleasing mom and dad” but rather figuring out a path that made sense for her. While many parents did discuss a more direct vetting of the plan in terms of earning potential, job opportunities and other factors, no parent described trying to discourage his or her son or daughter from a chosen career path.

Whether the developmental model is Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector "Moving From Autonomy Through Interdependence," Josselson's (1988) relational autonomy, Baxter Magolda's (1999) theory of self-authorship, or King and Kitchener's (1994) Reflective Judgment Model, all of these theories describe the important role of replacing a decision-making matrix that is external and provided by parents with a model that is informed by internal considerations and self-knowledge. Although parents described that it can be a lot of work not simply to give the "right answer" and sometimes painful for the student to go through these growth experiences, there is no replacement for allowing students to fully experience their decisions. While parents did try and ask questions and help students make the most informed decision possible, they also ultimately understood that only their son or daughter can take responsibility for their lives.

"Close" Families Play a Larger Role in Student Decision-Making

As stated in Chapter IV, a sub-group of interview participants were similar in their constant communication with their son or daughter. Each of these families had contact with their college student at least twice a day. For these parents and students, the preeminent role of the family seemed to be an important factor in decision-making. Although it was not part of the interview protocol, the topic of "closeness" also came up a few times in the interviews with these same parents. While I did not ask questions about how emotionally "close" the parent was with the student, this group of parents volunteered the information. The closeness of the family usually came up in the context of how family played a role in decision-making. For families that described themselves

as “close” and who communicated with each other multiple times a day, commonalities emerged as to the expected role of the family in decisions. For example, the closeness of the family was important to Kristina and her son John as they made the decision of where John would go to college. John was considering attending colleges near his home and also ones that were a little farther away. Once they began to visit these schools it was clear to John, according to his mother that the distance was going to be a bigger factor than he first thought:

We went... junior year [to visit schools during] spring break and we were driving to [school] which was the closest one. We were about four or five hours into the drive [and John decided] “this is too far.” So we never even looked at the other two. You know, and he says even if I were to fly, it would still be taking (over five hours).

It is important to note here that, at least according to his mother, this was John’s decision to stay closer to home, not hers. She did not describe putting pressure on him to be closer. He just wanted to be closer because of the nature of the relationship with his family. Similarly, Jennifer’s daughter Sharon and Tony’s daughter Sarah also never considered attending school far away from home, instead choosing to attend a college that was a few miles from their family. In these instances, it seemed clear through the interviews that the family played a significant role in the decision of college choice, although, as in the instance with Kristina, it seemed that the decision was still made by the student, free of overt pressure from parents. In the case of Samantha, a more direct conversation occurred with Carli about college choice. According to Samantha, she and her husband made it known that they preferred a four-year college over a two-year associate’s degree “technical school.” However, Samantha describes Carli internalizing

their rationale in making her own choice, finally describing the benefits of pursuing a business degree at a four-year school rather than an associate's degree in fashion.

The other area in which these self-described "close" families had significant input was in the area of career decision-making. As described in the previous section, these parents encouraged their son or daughter to follow their passion and pursue a career they found fulfilling. However, where parents did exert influence was in the physical location in which their student would pursue his or her career. For example, Samantha imagined Carli pursuing her career in fashion, at least initially, close to her home. She believed that Carli was not ready to be very far apart physically from the rest of her family.

Similarly Jamie, whose daughter Julie was still considering grad school or job searching after graduation, did not have specific ideas about an exact career path, but she did hope that Julie was close to home. Jamie even speculated that there was a good chance that Julie would live at home for a period of time after she graduated, and Jamie admitted that she would be a little sad if this did not occur. While scenarios still existed that could take Jamie far away from home, none of the options that Jamie had previously discussed involved Julie leaving the area where she currently lived. The outlier in this group was Kristina and her son John who was pursuing game design. While Kristina expressed some discomfort with the idea of her son moving far away from home, she had resigned herself to the idea that his career would likely carry him to the West Coast:

It seems like... the reality is a lot of the companies that hire people to do what he wants to do are not in the [the] area and his dad and I have, you know, all of our roots are [local] and... when we bought this house in [a local neighborhood], we sort of bought envisioning, you know, the grandkids coming and, you know, so that's... not going to be reality I

don't think for either of our kids. And so that's going to be big for me, because I'm an only child. I've been real close with my family – with my mother. That's all. So it's going to be a huge change for me.

However, Kristina was still concerned about how to keep the family close. At the time of the interview, John was beginning his junior year, and Kristina had already begun to consider solutions to maintain her relationship with John:

I... envision, you know, trying to keep... all of us kind of keep connected, you know, the way we are and because so much is electronic now and I don't see that changing that much, but we're going to miss the lunch every... few weeks and that sort of thing.

Although Kristina had resigned herself to the fact that John would need to leave home to “pursue his passion,” family still clearly played a role in the decision-making process. Kristina and John had discussed ways they could see each other in person, and had looked to other families who had gone through a similar transition to get an idea of how to manage the change.

For these students whose decisions are more heavily intertwined with family input, there is some risk that the development of independence and self-development are being slowed as a result of the significant role of the family. In these relationships, it is easy to imagine students continuing to defer to their parents when making a decision, and some authors have made the assertion that such a relationship does slow developmental growth (Hofer & Moore, 2010; Taub, 1997). However, the parents in this study did not demand an outcome. They are not declaring that a student must stay home in order to participate fully in the family. These students are simply being asked to make their family a prominent part of their decisions. In many cases, these students are not even

being asked to consider their family, but are just doing so because to not do so would seem unnatural to them. For many cultures, such an approach would be the norm, and a lack of consideration of family and community would be considered abnormal (Melendez & Melendez, 2010; Weinstock, 2010). Without further study specifically with the student regarding developmental outcomes, it is difficult to say if developmental differences exist because of the role of these families in decision-making.

Students and Parents Handle Interpersonal Conflicts Uniquely

When their son or daughter is faced with a challenge that involves interpersonal conflict, parents are more likely to give direct advice about an appropriate response. As discussed in Chapter IV, the underlying dynamic that exists between parents and students in college which includes a shared questioning and vetting of a plan developed by the student, does not seem to apply to challenges that involve interpersonal relationships. Instead, students are more likely to ask directly for advice, and parents are more likely to give it. According to parents, interpersonal conflicts that were most likely to become the topic of a conversation were ones in which students were encountering a new type of relationship. These relationships included interactions with roommates, college faculty, employers or internship site managers, and college administrators. While relationships with friends did come up, the advice sought by these students involved a new aspect of managing friendships they had encountered as a result of the college experience.

As these new types of relationships emerged throughout the college experience, students often turned to their parents for advice, no matter how parents had described their relationship with their student in other areas. Whether parents described the family

relationship as “close” or they described their child as fiercely independent, their son or daughter often turned to them when they encountered a relationship in which they were unfamiliar with the dynamic.

A good example of this dichotomy in relationship management is Ed and Joanne’s daughter Jan. Joanne described learning about her daughter’s new relationship with a person at school by piecing together information Jan had offered over time. Jan entered into this new relationship without even so much as a direct conversation with her mother. Her mother was not concerned by this, as she intimated that Jan had been in a relationship previously in her life. However, when Jan encountered an interpersonal conflict with a college administrator as a result of changing internships against the wishes of the school, both Jan and Joanne understood implicitly that a more direct discussion of an appropriate response was needed. In fact, Jan’s brothers as well as her father helped craft and vet the e-mail responses Jan sent to the administrator. Sharon, who communicated with her mother more than Jan, also turned to her mother for direct advice when she did not know how to move forward in a relationship. For Sharon, it was developing a relationship with an instructor with whom she was having a hard time connecting. Sharon’s mother Jennifer coached her on meeting with the faculty member and trying to learn more about what she wanted in order to shape Sharon’s papers accordingly. After receiving a good grade on a paper, Jennifer was also reminding Sharon to continue with the model that had worked previously. During our interview, Jennifer, like Ed and Joanne, was more likely to mention these interpersonal conflicts that arose during her student’s college career when I asked her about whether her student had

ever asked directly for advice. While Jennifer's communication pattern with Sharon and Ed and Joanne's communication pattern with Jan were different in many ways, the way they supported their daughters through managing interpersonal conflict was largely the same.

While not as common, some students also asked parents how to assist in managing certain aspects of friendship in college. In terms of the experience with friends, Emily's son Frank had trouble during the beginning of his college career connecting with others given the new open environment in college. Emily's approach with Frank was very direct in how he should go about making those connections. First, Emily required her son to join a student group. Emily believed that these activities in her son's high school years, such as the Boy Scouts, helped him connect, so she required that he join some type of group. When Emily felt that Frank was still struggling to connect, especially in his residence hall, she stressed to him the importance of attending social programs to make connections. When Frank did not find anyone with whom to share his meals, his mother suggested that he stand by the elevator in his residence hall until he saw someone he knew and then he could just go along with the group. While Emily had faith that Frank would find his own way in making connections, she also felt the need to provide him with some specific tasks in order to facilitate the process.

Mary described a similar change in approach when speaking with her son Jeremy about his friends. While she offered hands-off support for her son when he was exploring an investment or business opportunity, she saw that he needed a more direct approach when he was struggling with his college friends. The issue Jeremy was having with his

friends stemmed from him re-locating into a new condo building from the residence hall. Jeremy believed his friends saw his new condo and assumed he was “rich” and should buy rounds of drinks when he and his friends went to a bar. Jeremy bristled at this new view of him, noting that he was the same person now as he was before he moved. After discussing this with Jeremy, Mary sensed it was time for some direct advice:

Since the confrontation seems to be when there’s alcohol at both ends, [I] just said, “why don’t you sit down with them and have a professional conversation and just say, what bothers you. Explain why it bothers you, this is who you are, ask them to accept you for who you are and what you do.”

Jeremy eventually took his mother’s advice and he said that the conversation went well and he felt that the situation was resolved to his satisfaction. Even in the case of Jeremy, whose mother described him as extremely motivated and highly independent, she recognized that Jeremy needed some direct intervention to help him tackle his issue.

Developmentally, the findings in this study suggest a new wrinkle in the application of parental attachment theory discussed in Chapter III. In this model, a “secure” attachment with parents is signified by a positive self-image and a positive relationship with the parent (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Such a connection allows students to engage in mature relationships more readily because of a feeling of self-confidence and a confidence in the level of support structures (i.e., their family) surrounding them (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Based on the parents’ descriptions of their relationship with their sons and daughters in this study, I consider all parent-student relationships in this study to fit within this “secure attachment” model. However, the significant number of new “types” of relationships seemed to require students to

revert back to a more direct interaction with their parent, with the student feeling less self-confident in how to develop this emerging relationship based on their experience with pre-existing relationships.

In terms of developing skills in managing interpersonal conflict, signs exist that students may be entering the job market unprepared to manage this challenge specifically. In a 2006 employer survey, 76% of employers suggest that more emphasis needs to be placed on teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings (AACU, 2006). This response was the second highest response by employers, only trailing an “increased focus on science and technology” as the most important change colleges could make for improving their learning outcomes (AACU, 2006). While subsequent studies (AACU, 2008) highlight that teamwork skills are on the rise, the most recent survey of employers suggests that 90% of companies expect new employees to work even harder than in the past to coordinate with other departments (ACUI, 2009). My study’s findings combined with the expectations of employers suggest that a focus on skill development in managing interpersonal conflict is necessary for both parents and higher education institutions if the goal is to better prepare students to meet the evolving needs of the workplace.

Experiential Learning Opportunities Spur Growth

Whether it was a study abroad experience, a meaningful internship opportunity, or a uniquely experiential academic class, parents all pointed to one of the more important roles of the college experience was to provide experiential learning opportunities within the construct of the overall academic experience. Five of 12 parents pointed to the study

abroad experience specifically as one of the important experiences of their students' college career. Robyn described how she had perceived how her daughter Carrie had changed as a result, even though Carrie had not yet returned from her trip. Here is how Robyn described Carrie prior to her leaving for her trip for Italy:

Carrie was the girl who couldn't go to summer camp without having a friend there. I never sent her away to summer camp because she wouldn't go to summer camp..... Carrie was much more of a homebody. She's much more like (husband), not as adventurous, more home-centered, things like that.

However, Robyn described how even Carrie understood how important a study abroad experience could be, and heavily considered the study abroad possibilities in even choosing a college. At the close of our interview, Robyn detailed a conversation she had had a few nights before with Carrie who was leaving from Rome to go to Barcelona the next day. Carrie said: "Don't worry about me mom, I'll be fine." To Robyn this statement highlighted just how dramatic the change had been. The student who in high school would not go to summer camp and was more of a "homebody" is now in Rome preparing for her impending jaunt to Barcelona. For Robyn, the amount of independence and self-direction that the experience provided was significant. Robyn summed it up this way: "(Carrie) feels she can do what she needs to do. She can do it on her own"

Other parents felt similarly about the role that their son or daughter's internship or experiential class was playing in their growth. Lauren, the mother of Brendan, highlighted the developmental impact of a recent class project. For Brendan, who historically had issues making social connections, a team project which centered around

entering a game design into a national competition provided a unique opportunity for learning. Lauren described her observation this way:

Well, I think that being on this project has been very helpful for him just to learn how to interact and stuff. I often ask how the team is getting along because I can imagine how they might be getting along at times. He usually says “pretty good-- there are a couple of people that we are not getting along with.” He had told me about this one guy that is just (difficult and verbally abusive), and we talked about how that wasn’t good behavior to be in a team. He has mentioned a couple of times “I know that in this field people will be looking and asking if you are the kind of person who can work in a team and be willing to compromise and those kind of things and I want to be a person that’s good to work with.”

For Lauren, this was a “wow” moment. She highlighted that such reflection in Brendan is uncommon, and she attributed the reflection to the opportunities presented in the game design project. While Ed and Joanne did not discuss such a dramatic learning moment, they also highlighted how their daughter Jan’s internship had fostered significant growth. Jan was completing her internship in International Human Relations, and they highlighted that her position had really helped her to learn how to work with others and also handle herself in professional situations. While her parents considered Jan a well-prepared person prior to the internship, this experience helped Jan understand how to manage personalities at work as well as how to manage her professional image in terms of the social as well as the professional expectations of her position. For example, Jan found ways to engage with her co-workers socially, but would choose not to go on a trip with her colleagues where heavy drinking was likely and she could not excuse herself easily. For her parents, they felt that these learning experiences would help translate to an easier transition to a full-time professional position post-college.

In terms of developmental growth, parents described these various experiential opportunities as directly impacting development in independence, self-direction and critical thinking. For example, for many parents a study abroad experience was described, but there were other very important experiences that jump-started the growth according to parents. The importance of internships, as well as highly experiential academic classes, was highlighted in other interviews. In terms of preparing students for the job market, recent surveys by the AACU suggest that employers trust experiences like a highly experiential community-based project or an internship to provide the most useful data in assessing student readiness for the workplace (AACU, 2008). In fact, employers suggested such experiences were the most important area for colleges to devote additional resources (AACU, 2008). This fact would suggest that employers also understand the value of gaining “real world” experience and its importance in addressing the gaps in independence, self-direction and critical thinking that are identified in this same study (AACU, 2008).

As highlighted earlier, the positive experience described by parents mirrors the positive outcomes of previous studies regarding the developmental importance of study abroad, internships and other experiential learning opportunities (Feldman, 2002; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; NSSE, 2007). A 2007 study by the Higher Education Research Institute found that students who participated in a study abroad program reported more personal and intellectual growth than their peers who did not have this opportunity (NSSE, 2007). This jump in development was consistent with what was described by Robyn and her daughter Carrie as well as Emily and her son Frank. Recent

studies also suggest that internships help clarify for students how a job will line up with their personal characteristics and expectations, a key factor in obtaining a job that provides employee personal satisfaction (Feldman, 2002; Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2000). As described in the interviews, the internships helped these students prepare to achieve these exact outcomes. Even for a student like Julie, whose mother described her as being “bored” by her internship, the experience was still able to help her properly shape her upcoming job search to be in line with her personal expectations. In terms of other experiential programs, the importance of combining traditional “classroom” learning with an experiential component is an educational theory that began in the United States as early as John Dewey and his landmark work *Experience in Education* (1938). Since then, many studies have confirmed the value of experiential education in various forms and its impact on outcomes as diverse as critical thinking skills to self-efficacy (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Lewis & Williams, 1994; Ryan & Cassidy, 1996).

Recommendations for Higher Education

Partner with Parents

The strongest recommendation resulting from this study is to recognize the crucial role parents play in the success of college students. While colleges and universities have adapted to the increase in parent contact over the last decade, much of the change was to alleviate concerns of parents as consumer. The creation of parent offices across college campuses as well as the increase in satisfaction of parents in terms of communication from the college certainly shows that institutions of higher learning do recognize parents

as an important constituency (Noel Levitz, 2010; Savage & Petree, 2011). However, colleges and universities need to shift the paradigm and begin recognizing parents as an important partner for the learning process that occurs while in college. From my interviews, it is apparent that parents want to support their son or daughter in any way possible, and would welcome more involvement from the school. However, many colleges and universities are still struggling *whether* to involve parents in the college experience. As stated in the beginning of this section, many colleges who have chosen to involve parents view them as the ultimate consumer, making sure their student is “getting their money’s worth.” I suggest that it is time for a change in the paradigm in our field that recognizes that parents are an important part of a student’s development up to their arrival to college, throughout the college experience, and even after they graduate. In order to create this partnership, the college must acknowledge the parental role and communicate with parents that a partnership is needed to create the conditions for a student to thrive and develop the skills they will need upon graduation. A good example this paradigm shift may be engaging parents in a discussion of the developmental importance of an internship program. While I have witnessed institutions often engage parents on the importance of such programs in terms of “real world” experience on a resume, I have not witnessed an institution engage parents on the impact of internships on independence and self-direction. My research suggests that parents are receptive to this type of information, and would help their students process their internship with developmental outcomes in mind if the institution prepared parents differently.

Roadmap for Personal Development

Another recommendation for the higher education community is to provide parents with a roadmap for the personal development of their student. As established at the beginning of this study, students have a high level of trust in the insight of their parents throughout college, so student affairs professionals should use this existing relationship to partner with parents in the achievement of developmental goals (Laughlin & Creamer, 2007). For parents interested in this partnership, some guidance is needed in order to be an effective partner. A good example of developmental advice that institutions could provide parents as a result of this study is offering ideas for how to support their student through interpersonal conflict. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, parents are more likely to provide direct advice to their student in navigating difficult personal interactions. They are less likely to use the “vetting alternatives” technique as many parents describe using in other situations. Unfortunately, the “direct advice” approach may prevent students from further developing coping skills in dealing with others. If parents were aware of this dynamic, they may be able to alter their approach if they knew the possible implications. Helping parents better understand the resources available at college and how to coach their son or daughter through the situation will create valuable partners in supporting students. This roadmap may also highlight when colleges believe parents should take a more direct role in supporting their son or daughter, such as when they suspect their health may be impacted or if they are making unsafe personal choices that put them at significant risk. I believe that parents are interested in such a partnership, and colleges can begin to build that relationship. Recent

publications such as *Letting Go* by Kevin Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger (2009) and *The Happiest Kid on Campus* by Harlan Cohen (2010) take this approach to educating parents. These books are not only helping parents understand the lingo of higher education and the way to navigate the system, but also the underlying learning and growing that should be taking place. By providing much of the same framework that is tailored to a specific institution, parents will be able to support their student much more effectively and with an eye towards developmental goals.

Explore Experiential Education with Parents

A strong developmental influence in this study was the experience of students in unique experiential learning activities. As described earlier, these opportunities ranged from study abroad programs to internships to very hands-on academic classes that allowed “real-world” problem solving and integration and synthesis of their previous experiences. Parents of students who participated in such programs described the experiences as transformative, especially as related to enhanced self-confidence and a sense of autonomy. However, not all parents interviewed had discussed the possibility of such an experience with their student. While I did not explore reasons why they had not made such plans, one reason may be the cost of programs such as study abroad. For students and parents who are stretching resources to afford college, the extra costs of study abroad or any other experience where there may be significant additional cost may be prohibitive. Other restrictions may also include the academic requirements of a particular degree. Regardless of the reasons, institutions of higher education should attempt to remove roadblocks involved in making these experiences occur. My

interviews, as well as other studies, confirm experiences like these are crucial to the development of independence, self-direction and critical thinking; and colleges should encourage all students to participate in these experiences. In addition, colleges should help parents understand the educational value of these experiences. At colleges, such as the one examined in this study, many parents are supporting first-generation college students and may not be familiar with the outcomes of study abroad or other experiential programs. Even for those families who are familiar, helping parents make the connection between study abroad or experiential classes and important learning outcomes is necessary in providing them the tools they need in order to support their student.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study began with the premise that many aspects of the student and parent relationship had been examined recently. These studies examined the amount of contact between parent and student and the satisfaction of both the student and the parent with college experience. However, very little research had been conducted to examine the developmental impact of the heightened levels of interaction between parent and student during the college years. This study has provided a snapshot of how some parents and students interact, hopefully providing a framework for additional investigation.

Cultural Background of the Family

One variable that may be connected to the type of relationship that is forged between student and parent is the accepted cultural background of the family unit. This study did not probe the cultural background of parents. However, on two occasions, cultural implications played a large part in how the parent described interacting with his

or her student. In both instances, these self-described “close” families highlighted how the centrality of the family was significantly informed by a larger cultural understanding of the importance of family. In the case of Jennifer, she described her background as Italian. To Jennifer, the importance of family in the Italian culture is what informed her relationship with her daughter (as well as her younger son). Jennifer expected her daughter Sharon remaining emotionally close (and at least for the meantime, physically close) to the family. Although Jennifer did not address this question specifically, she seemed to suggest that she expected that her daughter Sharon would adapt the same cultural understanding of the centrality of the family, and therefore continue to include her parents in her life permanently.

In a similar fashion, Samantha’s understanding of family was influenced by cultural norms of India. While Samantha was raised in the United States, her husband’s family was from India. Samantha described the “closeness” of her family at least being somewhat informed by the central position of the family in the Indian culture. Adding to this influence was the fact that her husband’s mother lived with the family, providing a more constant reminder of the traditional role of an inter-generational family in the Indian tradition.

These interviews were two of the later interviews I conducted, and the interview with Jennifer was the last interview of this study. Because this “theme” seemed to develop late, I did not have the chance to fully explore it. Even within the interviews themselves, I did not fully explore how much the “closeness” of the family was informed by cultural expectations, and how much the “closeness” was informed by other factors.

Precedence exists for the impact of race or nationality/culture on the norms for interaction with parents (Hofer, 2010; Melendez & Melendez, 2010; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). However, it seemed in my interviews that the cultural component to the centrality of the family may be even more nuanced than examined in these previous studies. In fact, it is likely that had I added race to the parent questionnaire and used the typical categories (White, Hispanic, African American, etc.) these two interviewees would have identified as “White.” Nevertheless, the Italian and Indian cultural influences were at least somewhat informing my participants’ outlook on family. To further understand this interaction, I recommend that additional studies examine factors that create the self-described cultural background of parents, and how these factors inform the view of the role of family as a means of support. Many aspects could inform this self-described family culture, including national, regional and community norms, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and the parent’s experience in his or her own upbringing, among others. I believe to comprehend exactly how these factors inform the parent’s understanding of the parent and student relationship is vital in understanding variations that occur among parent expectations.

Coordinated Parent/Student Interviews

This study was specifically designed to interview parents and gain a better understanding of the view of parents in terms of their student’s development. As described previously, few studies have examined the experience of college student development from the perspective of parents, even though parents have become a more significant part of student lives during the past 10 to 15 years. While I believe this study

added to this understanding, the next step in providing a more complete context for this new information is to add the student point of view. In the one interview conducted with Mary, her son Jeremy decided to sit in on the interview. While Jeremy was not interviewed, there were times he was able to provide a level of feedback on how the communication and support tactics his mother was using were impacting him. It was helpful in this interview to understand how Jeremy was receiving his mother's messages and incorporating them into his decision-making process. After witnessing this interaction, I believe the next step in understanding how parents are impacting the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking is not only to examine the input of the parent and the parent's perceived impact of this input, but also an understanding how the student integrates this input into his or her larger decision-making process.

Mixed Methods Approach

This study sought to provide a better understanding of the nature of the contact between parents and students, and the perceived impact of that interaction on developmental outcomes. I believe this study has provided a rich amount of data upon which additional studies can be built. However, I believe additional studies should include a quantitative element to begin to build a bridge with existing theory about the impact of parental attachment and parental authority. Examples of a quantitative study could include an implementation of measurement tools such as the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987), the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991), or the Perception of Parental Reciprocity Scale (Wintre, Yaffe, & Crowley, 1995). Each of

these questionnaires is designed around aspects of parental attachment theory which was examined in Chapter III.

The Parental Attachment Questionnaire is designed to measure three aspects of attachment, including the affective quality of attachment, parental fostering of autonomy, and the parental role in providing emotional support. This measurement of parental attachment was based on parental attachment theory developed by Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, and Wally (1978). Parental attachment, according to Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, and Wally, is an enduring affective bond which serves as a secure base in fostering autonomy. By having both a quantitative tool to apply the underlying theoretical framework as well as the individual interviews to provide the first-person narrative of the interaction, I believe a stronger connection to existing theory could be created.

Another possibility for quantitative examination is the Parental Authority Questionnaire. The Parental Authority Questionnaire was developed based on Baumarind's (1968) model of parental attachment, which ranks parents from "authoritarian" (where parents have significant if not total control of their child's life) to "permissive" (where parents do not provide much guidance). In terms of developing independence and self-confidence the most successful approach, according to the Baumarind theory, is the "authoritative" style which provides significant direction but also allows for input from the student (Baumarind, 1968). If such a quantitative study was used in further investigation, collecting such data on participants would hopefully allow the researcher to identify parents as having certain "styles" based on the Baumarind

theory and then try to identify the behaviors and interactions that inform the particular style through rich description that would accompany individual interviews. Likewise, the Perception of Parental Reciprocity Scale study would be helpful as this questionnaire measures the perceived reciprocity by a parent, or the amount of “give and take” that occurs when the parent and student are interacting around a decision. Since my study highlighted differences in the way parents interacted with students based on self-reported closeness of the family, a tool that provided a matrix for analyzing the perceived “give and take” of the parent could be useful to contrast with the relationship as described by the parent in individual interviews.

I believe my study offers valuable findings in the way that parents and students interact, as well as identifies factors that may play a role in the differences between families. By implementing one or more of these areas for further research, such as further exploring cultural background, combining student and parent interviews, and adding a quantitative component to test theoretical ties, I believe the themes uncovered in this study can be more fully explored and analyzed.

Limitations

Selection Bias

At the outset of this study, I was concerned about the possible implications of selection bias. Selection bias is the skewing of a sample in comparison to the larger population based on the self-selection of participants in the study (Boehmke, 2004). This study does not claim to have selected a random sample of parents, and this study’s conclusions do not claim to be generalizable to the parent population. However, a sample

group that is representative of the population as a whole is preferable in the sense that a wider array of responses is possible. Should the study's self-selected participants skew towards a particular trait, then the "pool" of possible responses could be smaller. For the benefit of the reader, this section examines how the self-selected participants (or in this case their sons or daughters) compared with the population of the college as a whole, and how any difference may have impacted the interviews. It should be noted here that the following section highlights the participating institution's demographics versus the participant pool in the study. In this comparison, only the combined undergraduate and graduate statistics were available, and as discussed previously, only parents of undergraduate juniors and seniors were eligible for my study. Nevertheless, I believe an examination of the data highlights where the participant group may vary from the institutional population, and where it may be representative.

In many instances, I found the characteristics were similar regarding the participant group and the overall population. First, I examined the gender of the students as reported by the self-selected parent group. In this study, the gender of the student was representative of the institutional population as a whole. Of the self-selected participants, seven parents discussed their daughters in college, and five discussed their sons. This statistic compares with a 53% female and 47% male breakdown for the institution as a whole (institutional website, 2012). In terms of distance from home, the design of this study somewhat limited the representation of the population. This study limited the individual interviews to a four-hour drive from the institution. In gathering the demographic data, it was established that ten of the 12 parents actually lived within one

hour of the institution. This represented 83% of the participants in the study. Despite the built-in limitations of the study, 75% of students at the institution list their permanent “home” address within an hour of campus (their parent’s address presumably) so this selection was fairly representative (institutional website, 2012). In the selected institution, 18% of students are from out-of-state (institutional website, 2012). While the study did have parents of two students who technically lived out-of-state (representing 17% of the participants), these parents still lived within a three hour drive of the institution. Given the way that out-of-state data are presented by the institution, it is hard to ascertain if this selection is representative. However, all but one of the “feeder” states listed on the institution’s website are states in the Midwest, suggesting that this selection may, in fact, be representative (institutional website, 2012). Approximately 5% of the undergraduate enrollment at the institution is international (institutional website, 2012). Based on the design of the study, no parent of an international student was eligible to participate.

While many traits of the self-selected participants were in line with the population as a whole, two aspects were fairly skewed. First, only one parent described neither herself nor her husband as attending college. This represents 8% of the participants in the study. However, 36% of students enrolling in the institution were first-generation college students (institutional website, 2012). In this study, Jennifer was the one parent who had a first-generation college student. She described speaking to her daughter at least twice a day, and characterized her family as very close. Given the fact that parents of first-generation college students were underrepresented in this study, it is hard to know if

some of the themes identified would have been more pronounced if the study had included more parents who were similarly experiencing college for the first time.

Also of note were differences in my participants and the institutional population in the course of study chosen by the student. Of all parents interviewed, 25% of the parents described their son or daughter as participating in a program for game design. According to the institution's website, only 14% of the population was enrolled in this program, which included game design as well as other technology-related areas (institutional website, 2012). In addition, of the 12 parents interviewed, only one parent described her student being in a business program, or 8% of the participants. However, 25% of students at the institution are enrolled in this major (institutional website, 2012). The remaining majors for the students were closely aligned with the enrollment of the larger student population. These differences in enrollment also may have impacted the study as I noticed a pattern to the parent/student relationship that was somewhat connected to the career path chosen. For those parents considering game design, there was considerable vetting of the career plan in terms of locating a job. These parents described how their sons or daughters would likely need to move to specific locations in the country and likely compete for a handful of job openings. Such a perceived "long shot" by these parents had them really working directly with their students to make sure they were prepared and had also considered alternative plans. However, for parents of the student with a business focus, there was very little vetting of career path. Ed and Joanne felt that with a business degree and her experience with internships, Jan would have considerable job opportunities. Since 25% of the institution's undergraduates are

enrolled in the business major, it is possible that had more interviews occurred with parents who were similar to Ed and Joanne, this may have influenced the themes concerning a career path.

In terms of marital status of parents in the study, 100% of the parents participating in the study were married. While data were not available for marital status of students' parents at the institution, other studies that examined the percentage of college students whose parents were married put the percentage around 70% (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001). While it is hard to speculate how this statistic may have impacted my interviews, national data suggest that students not from so-called "intact" families typically struggle more with social adjustment and academic success, as well as financial issues (Kunz & Kunz, 1995; McIntyre, Heron, McIntyre, Burton & Engler, 2003; Turley & Desmond, 2011). As noted in the previous chapter, almost no discussion occurred between parent and student about day-to-day academic progress of the student, and no parent described any chronic academic issues. It is possible that more diversity in the marital status of parents may have altered this theme to some extent.

Finally, the amount of communication that parents had with their student seemed to be skewed compared to national norms. As referenced in the previous chapter, the average amount of contact between parent and student in this study was approximately eight times a week. While no institutional data were available, a recent national study suggests that this finding of my study is significantly lower than the average amount for parents of juniors and seniors, which is estimated at just over 13 times a week (Hofer & Moore, 2010). This study's average was brought down significantly by seven of the 12

participants, who, on average, communicated to their student only .75 times a week. In terms of how selection bias may have played a role here, it is easy to imagine. All parents received a description of the study, and may have decided to participate specifically *because* they have relatively little contact with their son or daughter. Many parents have become aware of the “helicopter parent” stereotype and may have chosen to participate because they view themselves as the anti-helicopter parent. In fact, two parents made this statement explicitly. Because of this fact, it is likely that the average amount of communication between parent and student in this study is not representative of the larger population.

Social Desirability Bias

Another possible limitation to this study is the effect of a social desirability bias. Essentially, a social desirability bias is a skewed response by a participant who attempts to make the participant “look good” in the eyes of the researcher (Paulhus, 1991). As referenced in the previous section, the perceived over involvement of parents has been the subject of much discussion in the popular press in recent years, and the idea of the “helicopter parent” is a concept with which many parents are familiar (Armour, 2007; Carrol, 2005; Gordon, 2010). As a result, parents participating in the study may have chosen to describe the nature of the communication with their student in a way that was perceived as more socially acceptable. To help decrease this possibility, I spent some time at the beginning of each interview discussing the importance of describing the context of conversations when they actually occurred, without the additional perspective that may have been acquired over the intervening months or years. In addition, I

reassured each participant of the confidentiality of the interview. Some studies have found that taking such measures at the beginning of data collection can reduce the effect of social desirability bias (Paulhus, 1991). While there is no way to sense when an individual interview participant is providing a “socially desirable” answer, I believe indications of such a limitation may show itself in incongruent answers throughout the interviews, or a perceived lack of trust within the interview context. In my study, I perceived neither outcome. In all interviews, participants seemed engaged and willing to offer information that could be perceived as not “socially desirable.” I recall Lauren’s description of her “lurking” on her son’s Facebook page once or twice a day when he was a first-year student. I also recall Karen’s description of how she stopped the car and “screamed” when her son Blake told her that he had not studied for a test on the way to school in junior high. Other participants had similar stories that did not put them in a socially desirable light, and I believe that the level of trust that was established as a part of the interview process allowed the participants to share these meaningful stories.

In addition, many themes carried across interviews well, and did not tend to vary widely based on a single interview. In essence, there were very few outliers or cases that did not fit into some dimension of a category. Illustrative of this pattern was the description of the amount of contact parents had with their student in regards to their day-to-day academic plan. Almost universally parents stated they were not involved. While some parents may have known more about upcoming due dates or specific projects, they did not offer feedback or even attempt to “vet” the plan. As far as the parents were concerned, the academic deadlines for school were the student’s responsibility. The

sheer uniformity of the answers across all 12 interviews makes it seem unlikely that parents were shifting their answers in an effort to look more in line with societal norms.

Conclusion

This study has added to what will eventually be, I believe, a significant new area of research in the coming decade. With each passing year, more and more student affairs professionals are recognizing the central role parents play in college student development, and I believe colleges and universities will begin to examine how to involve parents appropriately in the college experience. The first step in making this shift is to gain a better understanding of the role parents currently play in the development of their son or daughter while in college, and I believe the findings in this study add to this understanding. By providing insight into how parents offer support in areas ranging from interpersonal conflict to career choice, I am hopeful that student affairs professionals can begin to move from parent interaction that just works to achieve parent satisfaction to a model that recognizes them as valuable partners in achieving learning outcomes. One fact that was reinforced for me during this study is that parents want desperately to support their student in the best way possible, and are looking for any guidance into how to support them through the college experience and beyond. Student affairs professionals are uniquely situated to provide this support and should consider partnering with parents as a key opportunity to improve the student experience.

In closing, I would again like to thank the parents who participated in this study. The stories that inform the findings in this study are more than just mere anecdotes; they are some of the most personal stories that define a relationship between parent and child.

I was very moved that these parents took the time to assist with this study and let me into these very personal experiences. Quite simply, this study would not have occurred without their introspection and wisdom. I also want to take a moment to thank the students about whom we spoke as well. I did not get the chance to meet most of them. However, I feel that I have gotten to know them through the eyes and hearts of their parents. I came to understand that their drive, their optimism, their passion, and their general *joie de vivre* were awe inspiring to their parents. It was inspiring to me as well. I, like their parents, was fascinated by who they had grown to be, and am equally fascinated about what is in store for the future. While I may never know how their lives progress, I leave this study knowing they have some amazing people to support them as they find the way.

APPENDIX A
STUDY INTRODUCTION LETTER FOR INSTITUTION

Date

Name

Title

Institution

Address

Dear [INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE],

I write you to request authorization to conduct a study at your institution for my doctoral dissertation at Loyola University Chicago. The study I am proposing examines the communication between parents and students in the last two years in college and its impact on the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking skills. To understand this communication, I propose to conduct individual interviews with parents. My qualitative study seeks to a) clarify parental expectations in terms of these three developmental goals by the end of their student's college career, b) explore the nature of the contact between the parent and the student, especially as it relates to the three developmental tasks identified, and c) understand how the nature of contact between student and parent fits with the parent's developmental expectation at the time of graduation.

The goal of the study is to create a more granular understanding of the nature of the communication between parent and student, especially as it relates to these developmental tasks. It is my hope that by having a better understanding of the parent/student dynamic, student affairs professionals can better support both students and their parents as the students prepare to end their college career and move on to the next phase of their lives.

The information gathered in interviews with parents will only be used for the purpose of my research. The identity of your institution as well as the parents who volunteer to participate will not be revealed. The attached Synopsis of the Research Study will provide you with more detailed information.

I truly appreciate your consideration and I hope to speak with you in more detail about my study. Please contact me via e-mail at pspence@luc.edu or by phone at (312) 307-4418 if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Patrick T. Spence
E-mail: pspence@luc.edu
Phone: (312) 307-4418

Attachment: Synopsis of Study

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE APPROVAL LETTER FROM INSTITUTION

Date

Mr. Patrick T. Spence
1464 W. Berwyn Avenue
Chicago, IL 60640

Project Title: Parental Involvement in the Lives of College Students: Impact on Student Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking.

Researcher: Patrick Spence

Dear Patrick:

You have proposed a study for which you will serve as investigator. Having read the synopsis of your study and having satisfied IRB requirements at our institution, I grant you approval to conduct this study at [INSTITUTION] on behalf of the institution.

In this study, I understand that you will collect data from individual interviews with parents of current students in their last two years of study. To facilitate the arrangement of these interviews, I will ask that you contact [PARENT LIAISON] in the [INSTITUTION OFFICE] at [PARENT LIAISON PHONE] or [PARENT LIAISON E-MAIL]. [HE/SHE] will be able to assist you in making contact with a random sample of parents. During this process you will not receive any information about the pool of candidates being solicited for an interview, and [PARENT LIAISON] should not be informed of who responds to your inquiry. Based on our conversation, I understand that you ask [PARENT LIAISON] to contact 50 parents initially, and then contact an additional group of parents if needed.

This consent is provided on the condition you also receive permission from Loyola University Chicago's institutional review board panel to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

[INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE]
[TITLE OF INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATIVE]

APPENDIX C

STUDY INTRODUCTION LETTER TO PARENT LIAISON

Date

Name

Title

Institution

Address

Dear [PARENT LIAISON],

As you know, I have recently contacted [INSTITUTION] and received authorization to conduct a study at your institution for my doctoral dissertation at Loyola University Chicago. The study I am proposing examines the communication between parents and students in the last two years of college and its impact on the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking skills. To understand this communication, I will conduct individual interviews with parents. My qualitative study seeks to a) clarify parental expectations in terms of these three developmental goals by the end of their student's college career, b) explore the nature of the contact between the parent and the student, especially as it relates to the three developmental tasks identified and c) understand how the nature of contact between student and parent fits with the parent's developmental expectation at the time of graduation.

The goal of the study is to create a more granular understanding of the nature of the communication between parent and student, especially as it relates to these developmental tasks. It is my hope that by having a better understanding of the parent/student dynamic, student affairs professionals can better support both students and their parents as the students prepare to end their college career and move on to the next phase of their lives.

The information gathered in interviews with parents will only be used for the purpose of my research. The identity of your institution as well as the parents who volunteer to participate will not be revealed. The attached Synopsis of the Research Study will provide you with more detailed information.

Thank you again for assisting me in contacting parents about this study. I truly appreciate the assistance as my study could not move forward without you. If there is anything I can be of assistance to make this process to more smoothly please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail or phone with the information below. I look forward to meeting with you face-to-face in the coming days to discuss this study further.

Sincerely,

Patrick T. Spence

E-mail: pspence@luc.edu

Phone: (312) 307-4418

Attachment: Synopsis of Study

APPENDIX D
SYNOPSIS OF RESEARCH STUDY FOR INSTITUTION

Synopsis of the Research Study: Parental Involvement in the Lives of College Students: Impact on Student Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking.

Researcher: Patrick Spence, Ph.D. Candidate, Loyola University Chicago

Faculty Sponsor: Terry E. Williams, Ph.D.

Introduction

This is a research study being conducted by Patrick Spence for a dissertation under the supervision of Terry E. Williams, Ph.D. in the program of Higher Education at Loyola University Chicago. This study seeks to identify and interview 12-15 parents of college students in their last two years of study in order to gain a better understanding of their communication with the student around the developmental areas of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking.

Purpose

Recent studies have shown that both employers and employees are struggling with expectations as new college graduates are hired for positions immediately after graduation. Many of these struggles seem to focus around the areas of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills. Since parents are often in contact with their student through the college experience, this study seeks to understand the goals of parents in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking for their son or daughter at the time of graduation. In addition, this study seeks to understand the nature of the communication between parents and their students around these developmental areas, and how parents understand the communication furthering their stated goals.

Procedures

Parents who agree to participate in this study will be asked to sign a consent form, to provide basic demographic information, and also to participate in a face-to-face interview. Participants will be asked to provide their student's class year, their own educational history, their ethnicity, their family income level by category (Below \$25,000, \$25,000-\$50,000, etc), the location of the family in terms of distance from school, and marital status. Participants will provide this data via an information form that will be provided to them prior to the interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio-taped for later transcription. During the interview, participants will be asked about their goals for their son or daughter as they relate to independence, self-direction and critical thinking at the time of graduation. They will also be asked questions about the nature of their communication with their son or daughter specifically as it relates to these three developmental areas.

Risks/Benefits

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. Measures will be taken to minimize the possibility of a breach of confidentiality. All individuals and the participating institution will be assigned pseudonyms.

By participating, interviewees will provide valuable information about the nature of their communication with their student. This new information will hopefully lead to better institutional support provided both to students and parents as a result of this study.

Confidentiality

All information collected will be kept confidential and secure. The names of all participants and the participating institution will not be released. This study plans to use a professional transcription service to transcribe audio recordings of the interviews. The transcriber will also sign a confidentiality statement and destroy any documents related to the transcription after it is completed. The data collected will be analyzed and reported as part of my dissertation. A summary of the results of the study will be available upon request.

Contacts and Questions

If you have any questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact Patrick Spence at pspence@luc.edu or by cell phone at (312) 307-4418. You may also contact Mr. Spence's faculty sponsor, Dr. Terry Williams, at (312) 915-7002 or twillia@luc.edu.

APPENDIX E
E-MAIL TO PARENTS

Date

Name

Title

Address

Dear (insert parent(s) name here),

My name is Patrick Spence, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Loyola University Chicago in the area of Higher Education. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study for my doctoral dissertation examining how students and their parents communicate as they enter their last two years of college. Specifically, I am interested in how the contact you have with your son or daughter impacts their development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking skills. To understand how you communicate with each other I would like to interview you about the nature of your communication with your son or daughter. I am also interested in learning the level of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills you would like your son or daughter to achieve by graduation, and how these goals impact your communication with him/her.

Should you agree to participate, I will provide a \$20 gift certificate to [INSTITUTION] bookstore as a token of my appreciation for assisting with my study.

If you do participate, I will hold the data obtained from the interview in strict confidence, and you will be identified through the use of a pseudonym. All information related to you or [INSTITUTION] will be removed prior to my analysis. No one at [INSTITUTION] will know of your involvement in the study should you decide to participate.

I have enclosed a synopsis of the research study for your review in making a decision to participate. I greatly appreciate your consideration. If you would like to participate in this study, or have any questions about participation, please respond to me via e-mail at pspence@luc.edu by [DATE]. Once you have contacted me and agreed to participate in my study we can discuss the details of our interview. Again, thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Patrick T. Spence

E-mail: pspence@luc.edu

Phone: (312) 307-4418

Attachment: Synopsis of Study

APPENDIX F
SYNOPSIS OF STUDY FOR PARENTS

Synopsis of the Research Study: Parental Involvement In The Lives of College Students: Impact on Student Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking.

Who am I?

My name is Patrick Spence and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the program of Higher Education in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago. I received my Master's degree in Higher Education from Texas A&M University and my B.A. from Hendrix College. I am currently the Assistant Dean of Students at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in Chicago, IL. I have been in the field of higher education as a full time professional for 12 years.

What is the purpose of this study?

Since parents are often in contact with their student through the college experience, this study seeks to understand the goals of parents in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking for their son or daughter at the time of graduation. In addition, this study seeks to understand the nature of the communication between parents and their students around these developmental areas, and how the communication is impacted by the stated goals.

How is this study being conducted?

This study purposefully selected a mid-size, Midwestern university like [INSTITUTION] that draws a diverse population of students to its campus. I hope to individually interview 12-15 parents of current students in their last two years of school to gain a better understanding of their communication with their son or daughter. Permission has been granted to conduct this study from both Loyola University Chicago as well as [INSTITUTION]. [INSTITUTION] has been gracious enough to work with me to contact you about this study. Please note that I have not been given any specific information about any potential participants who have been contacted. In addition, no one at [INSTITUTION] will know if you contact me to participate in this study or not.

What would I need to do?

This study is seeking 12-15 parents to participate in this study. Should you agree to participate, I will provide you with an information form that collects demographic data such as your son or daughter's class year, your own educational history, your ethnicity, your family income level by category (Below \$25,000, \$25,000-\$50,000, etc), the location of your family in terms of distance from school, and marital status. At a time and place convenient for you, I will ask you to meet with me for a 60 minute interview which

will be audio-taped for later transcription. During the interview, I will ask about your goals for your son or daughter as they relate to independence, self-direction and critical thinking at the time of graduation. You will also be asked questions about the nature of your communication with your son or daughter specifically as it relates to these three developmental areas. One or both parents may participate in an interview. For participating in the interview, I am happy to provide you a \$20 gift card to the [INSTITUTION] bookstore to show my appreciation for your time.

What are the possible benefits for participants

You would provide valuable information about the nature of parental communication with their student as they approach graduation. My review of the literature regarding the nature of parent/student contact shows that very few studies have focused on the topic, and this study may be able to shed new light on the subject. It is the hope of this study that having a better understanding of the communication will allow student affairs professionals in higher education to provide better support to parents and students as they approach graduation.

What are the possible risks to participants?

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. Measures will be taken to minimize the possibility of a breach of confidentiality. All individuals and [INSTITUTION] will be assigned pseudonyms. All data will be kept safely secured in a locked file cabinet and then destroyed within two years after the study is completed.

How will the results be handled?

All information collected will be kept confidential and secure. The names of all participants and [INSTITUTION] will not be released. This study plans to use a professional transcription service to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality statement and destroy any document related to the transcription after it is completed. After a transcription of the interview has been made, I will also provide a copy of the transcript to the participant so they will have another opportunity to check it for accuracy or provide clarifying information. The data collected will be analyzed and reported as part of my dissertation. A summary of the results of the study will be available upon request.

APPENDIX G
REMINDER E-MAIL TO PARENTS

REMINDER E-MAIL

Name
Title
Address

Dear (insert parent(s) name here),

This is Patrick Spence again following up on the e-mail that was sent to you on [ORIGINAL SEND DATE] regarding participation in my proposed study. If you have responded to my request already, I thank you so much for your help. If you have not had the chance to respond, I am writing you to provide a reminder that the deadline for participation is quickly approaching. I understand that you may not wish to participate in this study, and if so, I appreciate you taking the time to consider it. However, if you are still interested, in participating in the study or have any questions, please contact me at pspence@luc.edu by [PARTICIPATION DEADLINE]

As a reminder, I will provide a \$20 gift certificate to [INSTITUTION] bookstore as a token of my appreciation for assisting with my study.

I have attached a synopsis of the research study for your review in making a decision to participate. I greatly appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick T. Spence

E-mail: pspence@luc.edu
Phone: (312) 307-4418

Attachment: Synopsis of Study

APPENDIX H
NO PARTICIPATION E-MAIL TO PARENTS

Date

Name

Title

Address

Dear (insert name),

Thank you for responding to my invitation to participate in a research study for my doctoral dissertation examining the role of parental involvement in the development of independence, self-direction, and critical thinking in college students. Though your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated, I no longer need your participation at this time.

Please accept my personal appreciation of your willingness to help with my research project.

Sincerely,

Patrick T. Spence

E-mail: pspence@luc.edu

Phone: (312) 307-4418

APPENDIX I
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

CONFIDENTIAL PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Name of Participant:

Sex of Student:

- Male
 Female

Classification of Student:

- Junior
 MD, MBA, JD, PhD, or other professional degree

Educational Level Obtained

- Some high-school
 High School Diploma
 Associate's Degree
 Bachelor's Degree
 Master's Degree

Family Distance from College

(Check one that applies)

- Under \$50,000
 \$50,000--\$100,000
 \$100,000-\$150,000
 \$150,000-\$200,000
 Above \$200,000

(in miles)

-----mi.-

Marital Status (Check all that apply)

- Single
 Married
 Divorced
 Widowed

APPENDIX J
PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part I (Study Background and Participant Information)

Provide a short personal introduction. Describe my background and discuss my interest in this field of study.

Discuss the scope of the study. 12-15 parents will be interviewed for this study, all in an individual interview style. Before conducting this study, both Loyola University Chicago and [INSTITUTION] reviewed the proposal and approved its administration.

Discuss the purpose of the research. Since parents are often in contact with their student through the college experience, this study seeks to understand the goals of parents in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking for their son or daughter at the time of graduation. In addition, this study seeks to understand the nature of the communication between parents and their student around these developmental areas, and how the communication fits in with the stated goals.

Receive Demographic Information sheet back, and go over the areas of the interview. Receive the Demographic Information Sheet and answer any questions related to it. Communicate to participants that they will be asked about their goals for their son or daughter as they relate to independence, self-direction and critical thinking at the time of graduation. They will also be asked questions about the nature of their communication with their son or daughter specifically as it relates to these three developmental areas.

Provide and review “Parent Consent to Participate in Research Form”

Discuss Transcription process and Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Discuss providing answers that reflect past thinking as well as current thinking

Part II (Establishing Communication Patterns)

1. I'd like to start by learning about your son/daughter's experience in college. Since you are approaching the end of their time in college, what have you noticed about how your son/daughter has changed?
2. I'd also like to learn more about the communication patterns between you and your student while he/she is at college. When communication occurs, who usually initiates the contact? If you had to assign a percentage, what percentage

of time do you initiate contact and what percentage of the time does your student contact you? (Communication Pattern)

3. Can you estimate for me how many times each week you and your student communicate by telephone, email, texting, Skype, Facebook, etc? (Communication Pattern)
4. I'm also interested in learning more about the nature (or focus) of the communication when you and your student are in contact. Can you describe for me the typical topics that you discuss? Who would you say perhaps 'leads' the conversation most of the time? Why? (Communication Pattern)

Part III (Communication Regarding Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking)

First I would like to speak about your communications with your son/daughter about life currently, and then I would like to steer the conversation to areas that focus on graduation and what might happen during that transitional period.

Communication about Current Events:

1. Can you describe instances when your student has raised questions and/or asked you for advice (on any subject)? Is asking for advice or your opinion on something a common occurrence? Why or why not? (Self-Direction)
2. When your student is seeking advice from you, what does the advice generally center around? In your opinion, what do you think your student is needing or seeking from you in these instances? (Self-Direction)
3. In what ways, if any, has your child become more independent throughout their college experience? (If Yes). Can you tell me about the process of growth you noticed over their college career? (Parent Expectation of College)
4. Will you please describe any times when your student had called to complain about something going on at college? How have these conversations typically been handled? In what ways have they been resolved to your satisfaction? (Independence)

Communication about post-Graduation:

5. I'd like you to describe for me the kinds of conversations you may have had with your student about what 'life' will be like for him/her after college graduation.

Would you please describe any particular focus, topics, or themes that come up when you have these conversations? (Parent Goals)

6. As your son/daughter enters the workforce, what skills do you see as the most important for your son/daughter to succeed? (Parent Goals)
7. In your opinion, following graduation, how might your son/daughter's life look different from now? (e.g. return home to live, obtain employment in home community or elsewhere, get his/her own place, live a fully 'independent' life from you, see you more often, less often, the same, live with someone else, go to graduate school, etc?) (Parent Goals)
8. What challenges do you think your son/daughter will face post-graduation? (Parent Goals)
9. What factors (individuals, experiences) will play a role in your son/daughter's decision-making post-college? (Probe for their specific role in terms of advice) How do you see these factors changing over time? (Independence)
10. Are there areas about the transition in which you and your son/daughter disagree? If so, can you describe the nature of the disagreement? (Parent Goals)
11. About what issues/topics do you expect your student to ask you for advice following graduation? Why? (Self-Direction)
12. In what ways, if any, will you want to be involved in key decisions that your student will make following college? Do you feel your student will want you to be involved in these decisions? Why or why not? (Self-Direction)
13. As you talk to your son/daughter now about important decisions, how do you think they use the advice you give them? (Critical Thinking)
14. What other factors (besides your advice) do you think impact his/her decision-making? Would you prefer your son/daughter to seek your advice when making important decisions? Why or why not? (Critical Thinking)
15. I want to give you a fictional scenario that your student could face post-graduation, and have you reflect on how you think he/she would come to a decision. Let's say your son or daughter was offered an outstanding job that was in the field they wanted, but had also applied to graduate schools in their field and been accepted to the best graduate school in their field. How do you think your son/daughter would go about making this decision? (Critical Thinking)

16. Can you please describe for me any conversations you have had with your student about what experiencing an independent life following graduation will require? What has been his/her reaction (e.g. confidence, optimistic/pessimistic, anxiety, nervousness, no real concern, unclear what to do, ready to make decisions, not ready, etc)? (Independence)

17. Finally, what type of impact do you feel your communication and involvement with your son/daughter during his/her college years may have on his/her ability to be fully independent, self-directed, and a good decision maker following graduation? Why? (Parental Role)

Part IV Closing

Thank the parent for participating in the study. End the audio recording. Provide the parent with the gift card as agreed. Talk to the parent about further communication back to them to ensure the accuracy of the information collected.

APPENDIX K

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FORM

PARENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Parental Involvement in the Lives of College Students: Impact on Student Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking.

Researcher: Patrick T. Spence, Ph.D. Candidate

Faculty Sponsor: Terry E. Williams, Ph.D.

Introduction

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Patrick Spence for a dissertation under the supervision of Terry E. Williams, Ph.D. in the program of Higher Education at Loyola University Chicago. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a parent of a currently enrolled college student who is in the last two years of their undergraduate college experience.

Purpose

Recent studies have shown that both employers and employees are struggling with expectations as new college graduates are hired for positions immediately after graduation. Many of these struggles seem to focus around the areas of independence, self-direction and critical thinking skills. Since parents are often in contact with their student through the college experience, this study seeks to understand the goals of parents in terms of independence, self-direction and critical thinking for their son or daughter at the time of graduation. In addition, this study seeks to understand the nature of the communication between parents and their students around these developmental areas, and how they reconcile this communication with the stated goals.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to provide some demographic data and also to participate in an interview. Participants will be asked to provide their student's class year, their own educational history, their ethnicity, their family income level by category (Below \$25,000, \$25,000-\$50,000, etc), the location of the family in terms of distance from school, and marital status. Participants are also asked to meet with the researcher for a 60 minute interview which will be audio-taped for later transcription. During this interview, you will be asked about your goals for your son or daughter as they relate to independence, self-direction and critical thinking at the time of graduation. You will also be asked questions about the nature of your communication with your son or daughter specifically as it relates to these three developmental areas.

Risks/Benefits

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. Measures will be taken to minimize the possibility of a breach of confidentiality. All individuals and the participating institution will be assigned pseudonyms.

By participating, interviewees will provide valuable information about the nature of their communication with their student. This new information will hopefully lead to better institutional support provided both to students and parents as a result of this study.

Confidentiality

All information collected will be kept confidential and secure. The names of all participants and the participating institution will not be released. This study plans to use a professional transcription service to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality statement and destroy any document related to the transcription after it is completed. The data collected will be analyzed and reported as part of my dissertation. A summary of the results of the study will be available upon request.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to participate in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions

If you have any questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact Patrick Spence at pspence@luc.edu or by cell phone at (312) 307-4418. You may also contact Mr. Spence's faculty sponsor, Dr. Terry Williams, at (312) 915-7002 or twillia@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola University Chicago's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent

Your signature below indicated that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research at this time. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant(s) Signature

Date

Participant(s) Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX L
TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

I _____, agree to transcribe the interview for the doctoral

(Insert Printed Name)

research of Patrick Spence entitled “ Parental Involvement In The Lives of College Students: Impact on Student Independence, Self-Direction, and Critical Thinking.” I will maintain strict confidentiality of the data files and transcripts. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- I will not discuss them with anyone but the researcher
- I will not share copies with anyone except the researcher
- I agree to turn over all copies of the transcripts to the researcher at the conclusion of the contract
- I will destroy the audio files I receive upon conclusion of the contract.

I have read and understand the information provided above.

Transcriber’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date

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VITA

Patrick Spence was born and raised in Texas, attending high school in his hometown of Denton. Patrick attended Hendrix College to receive his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1996, and attended Texas A&M University to complete his Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration in 1999. Patrick is currently the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, Illinois. The School of the Art Institute (SAIC) is a world-renown school of art and design located in Chicago's downtown Loop area. Patrick has been at SAIC since 1999, and has also served in many capacities, including the school's Assistant Dean of Student Affairs for Residence Life.

Among other tasks, Patrick currently works at SAIC to develop new initiatives that allow parents to be more closely involved in the lives of their students. In 2012, Patrick presented these new parental involvement initiatives at the annual conference for the First Year Experience as well as the annual conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Patrick and his wife Rebecca and his daughter Clara currently live in Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood on the north side of the city.