

**Author:** Bont, Anita, M.D.  
**Title:** *Navigating the Life Transition from Home to College*

The accompanying research report is submitted to **University of Wisconsin-Stout, Graduate School** in partial completion of the requirements for the

**Graduate Degree/Major:** MS Marriage and Family Therapy

**Research Advisor:** Terri Karis, Ph.D.

**Month/Year:** Spring, 2012

**Number of Pages:** 77

**Style Manual Used:** American Psychological Association, 6<sup>th</sup> edition

- I understand that this research report must be officially approved by the Graduate School and that an electronic copy of the approved version will be made available through the University Library website
- I attest that the research report is my original work (that any copyrightable materials have been used with the permission of the original authors), and as such, it is automatically protected by the laws, rules, and regulations of the U.S. Copyright Office.
- My research adviser has approved the content and quality of this paper.

**STUDENT:**

NAME Anita Bont      DATE: May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**ADVISER:**

NAME Terri Karis, Ph.D.      DATE: May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012

-----  
**This section to be completed by the Graduate School**

This final research report has been approved by the Graduate School.

Director, Office of Graduate Studies:

DATE:

**Bont, Anita, M.D. *Navigating the Life Transition from Home to College***

**Abstract**

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of four young adults when transitioning from home to college. Interviews were designed to get at the essence of the participants' experiences. The central finding was that each student used his strengths and internal resources to best navigate this life cycle change according to individual needs and values, and each also experienced factors which inhibited the transition process. The transition from home to college was characterized by two themes: formation of a balanced transition and counter-productive factors. Factors which supported their formation of a balanced transition included hope, assimilation, identity formation, purpose, and self-efficacy. Factors cited as counter-productive factors include dependence, unrealized expectations, thinking errors, distractions, and guilt/shame. The study offers suggestions for future research.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my research advisor, Dr. Terri Karis, for believing in me when I journeyed through “being comfortable with being uncomfortable.” Her constancy and gentle guidance enabled me to achieve what I did not think possible. Thank you for teaching me more about life than simply the process of a thesis, not to minimize that daunting task. Thank you.

I am in deepest debt to my husband, my best friend, who has supported and challenged me to follow my passions. To my adult children, I am grateful -- thank you for teaching me about family, about loyalty, and how important balance is to relationships. Welcome to Amelia Melodee Schmidt – you are pure joy.

I also want to thank the participants of this study. I am grateful to be a welcomed recipient of your personal stories. Thank you for your willingness to participate and genuine responses. I am honored by your trust in me.

## Table of Contents

	Page
.....	Page
Abstract .....	2
Chapter I: Introduction .....	6
Purpose and Significance .....	6
Self-of-the-Researcher .....	7
Chapter II: Literature Review .....	12
Chapter III: Methodology.....	16
Qualitative Research.....	16
Phenomenological Research .....	17
Case Study Research.....	17
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.....	18
Participant Selection and Description.....	21
Data Collection Procedures .....	22
Data Analysis .....	24
Validity .....	26
Interpretive Validity .....	27
Descriptive Validity .....	30
Theoretical Validity .....	31
Generalizability .....	31
Ethical Considerations .....	32
Strengths of the Study’s Methodology.....	33
Limitations of the Study’s Methodology.....	36

Chapter IV: Case Studies .....	38
Isaiah .....	38
MBTI Interpretation.....	45
David .....	46
MBTI Interpretation.....	50
John .....	51
MBTI Interpretation.....	55
Ethan .....	56
MBTI Interpretation.....	60
Chapter V: Discussion .....	61
A Balanced Transition .....	61
Counter Productive to Transition .....	65
Comparison of MBTI Personality Types.....	68
Chapter VI: Conclusions.....	69
Self-of-the-Researcher.....	71
Future Research .....	72
References .....	74
Appendix A: Consent Form.....	76
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	77

## Chapter I: Introduction

“I’ve never let my schooling interfere with my education.” – Mark Twain

### **Purpose and Significance**

The life transition of moving away from one’s childhood home to college is often anticipated with both excitement and distress. The uncertainty and fear of the unknown can be a significant source of emotional distress (Paul & Brier, 2001). This critical transition may be the most difficult period of adjustment a student faces. Academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustments are often primary concerns (Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004). Academic pressures for success are predominant during the college adjustment. For many students, this is the first time living away from home – requiring a renegotiation of family relations and the need to establish new friendships. While life transitions can create opportunities for growth, they can also be a time of discouragement and fear of failure. The purpose of this paper is to explore four college students’ experiences during this transition. By inquiring about the students’ experiences, this study investigated the influences in the transition process, personal meanings of independence, role of support from family, expectations prior to the transition, emotions experienced prior to and during the transition, personal strengths and skills deemed necessary during this important time, and the level of involvement in on-campus activities. The significance of this study is to get at the essence of students’ life experiences and pull out themes of personal strengths, personality traits, and strategies that college students utilized to negotiate the life cycle transition from home to college.

## **Self-of-the-Researcher**

“You need to know you can achieve what you desire. If graduating from college is the most important thing in the world to you, you’ll graduate. Period. If partying is the most important thing to you, you’ll have great fun. You won’t graduate, but you’ll have fun.” (Harrison, 2008).

Having experienced this life transition myself – first, as a college freshman, and then as a parent, having sent two young adults to college – I am able to look at this experience from dual perspectives. In both situations, there were common values and beliefs pertaining to this life transition. Another hat that I wore in the past was an educator – a home-schooling parent. This experience as a teacher, principal, and administrator creates a wide range of biases about what it takes to succeed in college.

My memory has to go a long way back to recall my own transition from home to college. First message received from my own parents – education is necessary only for males. This belief was not intended to be mean to their daughters. I believe that my well-being was taken very seriously. At that time and in the fundamental religious culture in which I was raised, females needed to be protected and provided for by males. These traditional roles were deeply engrained into the system that I grew up in. I was not aware of any other way of knowing. Being the youngest of nine siblings, the majority being females, my parents made it clear that I was to attend college. By this time, they had figured out that college was a good place for a daughter to “catch” an educated husband. In this way, I would be well provided for and my father could relinquish that responsibility. If I happened to get a degree as well, that would be fine, but not necessary. The male siblings, on the other hand,

were highly encouraged to get college degrees and white-collar careers. As you might guess, this was in order to become good providers for a family.

The next message received was that most careers are gender specific. I was encouraged to pursue the humanities – music, art, drama, teaching, maybe psychology. If I were to pursue an education in the health sciences, that would be limited to nursing, certainly not becoming a doctor. My brother married a female medical doctor; neither she nor the idea was heartily embraced. Consequently, my two sisters who received bachelor degrees are both elementary teachers. I knew that teaching was not a fit for me – I hated babysitting.

I assumed that the positive experiences of high school would transfer over to college. I did well in high school academically, participated in many extracurricular activities, competed in piano performance, and had a number of good friends. Most important, I liked to have fun. Initially, the thing I remember about moving to college is the mixture of emotions – excitement, fear of the unknown, some confidence in my intelligence and abilities, fear of not fitting in, confusion, and fear of inadequacy. While many of these emotions were diffused over time, my grades were not as high as I had hoped, my self-confidence went down, and I did not have a clear reason or purpose for being there. But, I did have fun, and I did find “an educated husband.” I did not attain a bachelor degree at that time.

Move ahead twenty-five years, from 1980 to 2005, the year my daughter graduated from high school. Both my husband and I were actively involved in our children’s lives – emotionally, socially, academically, and spiritually. Their well-being was a priority for us as parents. We believed that finding a balance was important in most, if not all, areas of life. We had a motto that exemplified our philosophy, “Work hard to play hard.” The perfect



balance from our perspective – we lived it and expected it from our children. With great certainty, I believe that this message rang loud and clear to our children.

As a mother, I was quite intentional in “developing the hearts” of my children. This by far took precedence before academics. Character development was, from my perspective, my most important job.

All of this said, my daughter was valedictorian of her graduating class – a 4.0 GPA and a score of 29 on the ACT exam, she entered college with several college credits received from passing various AP tests. She was a violinist and member of the Minnesota Youth Orchestra throughout junior high and high school. She was actively involved in music and drama in high school. She received a number of scholastic scholarships for college. Sounds like awesome credentials for great success in college. Indeed, she did succeed. She graduated as an honor student in three and a half years – summa cum laude.

One might think that my husband and I would pat ourselves on the back, and feel like quite the expert parents. We were proud of her achievements, but there were other areas of her life that were not as shining – matters of “the heart” and spirituality. We were concerned about the imbalance in these areas for her. Her emotions seemed to drive her decision making, except when it came to school work. Albeit, there was a time when she let me know that “C’s get degrees.”

Two years later, our son was graduating high school. He was in the top 10 % of his class with a 3.9 GPA, received a score of 32 on the ACT exam, and he entered college with several college credits received from passing various AP tests. He received the Presidential Award from the principal of the high school along with other scholarships for college. He was actively involved in sports, music, drama, and forensics in high school. He was asked to

give the graduation speech for his class. Sounds like awesome credentials for great success in college. The day we dropped him off at college, my heart ached and I cried pretty much all of the time, except when I was with him. I somehow sensed that school was not going to go well for him despite all the accolades he had received. I hoped otherwise. Indeed, there came a day of academic probation. My husband and I embraced him and asked for the “good, bad, and ugly” explanation.

Lastly, there was my role as a “home-school mom.” We decided to home-school our children after our daughter had gone through first grade in public school. I had spent time each week volunteering in her classroom. My observation was that certain children needed far more attention from the teacher to be able to reach a minimal level of competence. The children that were advanced did not receive the same amount of time or attention. Secondly, many of the students, my daughter included, could not spell and I was instructed not to correct their errors because their creativity might be smothered. I also discovered that they were not teaching phonics. At that time, we were looking at sending our son to kindergarten, which was being changed to all day instead of half day. We did not see this as a fit for him. His learning style did not include sitting quietly at a desk all day. He learned by being active, touching, and through sensations. So, we made the decision to home-school both of them for the next year – I introduced phonics to our daughter, and let our son learn how he learns best, jumping on the trampoline. Thus, my new hat as educator began. We home-schooled our children for seven years; each year we spent time evaluating what form of education was best for them. When our daughter was going into the ninth grade, she requested to return to public school. She wanted to be with her friends more and we thought this would be a good thing as well. So, she entered the ninth grade, and our son entered the seventh grade that fall

semester. That was a large transition for me – my “job” was gone, my children were gone (only during the day, of course), and I was left to figure out what I was going to do with this new found time.

I returned to college the year our son was a senior in high school. While unsure of my ability to succeed, the day that I dropped out of college to get married, I knew I would return someday to finish a degree. I found that many factors had changed for me being a “non-traditional student,” a.k.a., older student. Most notably, my motivation now was to learn. I also had a purpose in mind which concentrated on my passion. All the distractions were managed and my focus was to obtain knowledge in my field of study, and ultimately, a bachelor degree. I found that as long as I absorbed as much knowledge as possible, really good grades followed – instead of focusing on performing just enough to get the grade. Indeed, I graduated with honors and enrolled in a graduate program.

In this section I have reflected on my own experiences with the life cycle transition from high school to college, in order to increase my self-awareness of biases, beliefs, and values which could influence my ability to be objective and open to different ways of experiencing this time in life. As a researcher, I hoped to gain some understanding of this phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants and to view each participant through an impartial lens by putting my own assumptions aside as much as possible.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

“You need to know that when your parents said, ‘You can be anything you want to be,’ they were humoring you. You were six. You need to find out what you’re good at.” (Harrison, 2008)

Every year there are thousands of students who pack up everything they own and make the transition into college life. Universities attempt to admit and recruit the best students possible. College admission is based on a number of factors, including high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, letters of reference, essays, or individual interviews. A score of 28 on the ACT in 2007 has a 92nd percentile national ranking for academic achievement (ACT Profile Report, 2007). Advocates of standardized tests in college admissions would assess this score as a strong predictor of college success (Calvin, 2000). Opponents argue that the tests are flawed and the instruments are poor predictors for the admissions process. Much research has been conducted to find the specific indicators of college success. One might assume that if a student is academically proficient in high school, then the transition to college should be successful.

In reality, some students are better able to adjust to the home-to-college life transition than others. It is estimated that thirty percent of college students will drop out without getting a degree within the first year (Bowler, 2009). Clark (2005) stated that “the transition to college is not something that just happens; it is something that students build” (p. 314). Research has identified multiple factors that may contribute to the successful adjustment of college students. This research informed the research questions used for this study. I wanted to get rich and thick descriptions of this process of change from the perspective of the participants.

A study by Kelly, Kendrick, Newgent, and Lucas (2007) indicated that students who become involved in extracurricular activities at the onset of college attain a greater sense of fitting in and feeling that the college is a good match for their needs. The researchers also stated that students who remain in these activities develop cognitively, and gain a better understanding of themselves.

There are a number of internal and external factors that can influence the process of navigating the freshman transition (Clark, 2005). Findings reveal that these influences can be both negative and positive. Clark suggested that strategies should be developed to identify and respond to the barriers that students may experience. The study found that successful students overcome these negative influences through “practical knowledge and action” (p. 298).

Mattanah, Hancock, and Brand (2004) defined individuation as “the absence of negative feelings about the process of separation, including feelings of anxiety and guilt” (p. 214). Identity formation for students entering college is a process of personality and value consolidation (Kelly et al., 2007). This growing sense of autonomy can increase pressure for problem solving and making personal decisions. Students reported feeling more certain about their own choices after transitioning to college, but reported that the process continued to be hard, confusing and stressful, and often led to the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Paul and Brier (2001) found that their participants showed a high level of concern about social adjustments. Mattanah et al. (2004) reported that secure attachments with family members, particularly parents, were associated with positive college adjustment. This finding applied to both men and women. From an adolescent developmental perspective, the transition is ideal when the student is able to develop some autonomy, while continuing a

supportive and close relationship with the parents. When an adolescent tries to completely separate from their parents, the student is at risk for the development of behavior problems. The researchers concluded that “the goal of development is interdependence, not independence” (Mattanah et al., 2004, p. 213). The success of transitioning is increased by a balance between the student maintaining a secure attachment with their parent and simultaneously developing individuality-- while decreased by a cutting off from their parents and pursuing independence.

Research by Paul et al. (2001) found a discrepancy between precollege expectations and college experiences. They found that precollege expectations were more positive than the actual college experiences. The results of a study by Kelly et al. (2007) suggested a need for programs that will prepare students for the actual expectations of college life (e.g. study skills, time management skills, coping skills, and decision making skills).

Students often perceive responsibility and persistence as personal attributes needed to accommodate all the expectations of college life (Clark, 2005). In addition, confidence has been identified as a characteristic that can prompt success or hinder the ability to manage challenges. Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) found that optimism and positive self-esteem predicted that students would experience better physical and psychological health. Conversely, they found that perfectionism predicted poorer health and an increase in alcohol use.

Students in Clark’s study (2005) created strategies in order to handle challenges that they experienced in college (e.g. overcoming an obstacle, seizing an opportunity, adapting to a change, and pursuing a goal). These strategies were identified as the part that the students play in managing their experiences.

Getting a high education is important for creating a happy and productive life, as well as contributing to society in general. My study resulted from my curiosity about the experiences of students who by all the right predictors, should have thrived and succeeded when transitioning from home to college, but actually did poorly according to their GPA scores. What were their unique experiences?

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological case study was to explore the life cycle transition of adolescents from home to college. The study was designed to identify themes and strategies that participants used in order to address challenges they experienced. My research question was: What are the experiences of young adults when transitioning from home to college? The interview questions were designed to get at the essence of the participants' experiences. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (described later in this chapter) was used to increase awareness of personal strengths and preferences the participants might have utilized during this transitional period.

#### **Qualitative Research**

This study was conducted within the qualitative research paradigm. This paradigm focuses on describing, understanding, and clarifying human experiences through open-ended, discovery-oriented questions. The following are characteristics of qualitative research as described by Creswell (2007): data collection within the participants' natural setting; researchers interact with the participants and collect the information themselves; multiple sources of data collection; through the use of inductive reasoning, a theory, or a set of themes, develops through data collection and analysis; the research is concerned with the meaning that the participants hold pertaining to their lives; the research process is flexible, able to change in order to better understand the issue being studied; researchers may use a particular point of view, or world view, within their study; the researcher interprets the data; lastly, the objective is to develop a contextual understanding of the issue being studied, making room for multiple perspectives and identification of the complexity and depth of the phenomenon.



## **Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenological research studies the meaning individuals give to their experiences (Creswell, 2007). The purpose is to hone the essence of the human experiences with the chosen phenomenon, to understand the “lived experiences” from the participant’s point of view. In order to gain understanding of the nature of the phenomenon, the researcher first identifies the phenomenon being studied, then collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, and last, describes and interprets how the participant makes meaning of the phenomenon. In this process, the researcher looks for themes and patterns, differences and shared experiences of the phenomenon, individual perception of the experience, and development of meaning in life. Phenomenological research offers a deeper understanding with regard to the common experiences of each participant. This approach allowed the participants flexibility when reflecting on their own experiences with transitioning from home to college. The intent of this study is to contribute to the literature on this topic from the perspective of the participants’ lived experiences.

## **Case Study Research**

In this project, I used a case study approach for the purpose of investigating a specific phenomenon in order to advance knowledge of the human experience. I was interested in understanding the factors that had an impact on the level of success for students during the transition from home to college. Taking a case research perspective facilitated my objective to explore the whole experience of the participants. My aim was to be open and receptive about each participant’s transitional experience, so that I could learn what the experience was like from their perspective.

The case study methodological approach seeks to study an issue using one or more cases within a particular context, which Creswell (2007) refers to as “within a bounded system” (p. 73). The researcher seeks to explore a bounded system, through detailed, in-depth data collection, using multiple sources of information, and then reports findings in the form of case descriptions and case-based themes. Following are the procedures for conducting a case study as described by Creswell (2007):

1. Identify cases within a bounded system, and seek to provide an in-depth comparison of the cases.
2. Identify the types of cases selected.
3. Do data collection drawing from multiple sources of information.
4. Through data collection, data analysis, and interpretation, the researcher creates a detailed description of the case, and themes within and across the cases.
5. The researcher reports the meaning of the case, or what may have been learned from the study.

### **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator**

I administered the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to each participant at the end of the interview. The purpose of the MBTI (Myers, 1988) is to increase awareness of how individuals perceive things, experiences, other people, and thoughts, and how they draw conclusions from these perceptions. The report can help increase the understanding of the participants' unique interpretations and meanings.

The MBTI is a personality inventory which is primarily concerned with the value differences in people that result from where they prefer to focus their attention, the way they prefer to take in information, the way they prefer to make decisions, and the kind of lifestyle

they prefer (Myers, 1988). The MBTI was designed to test Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung's theory of psychological type – the theory that an individual's seemingly random behavior is really not random at all, but “due to basic differences in the way individuals prefer to use their perception and judgment” (Myers & McCaulley, p. 1, 1988). Meyers and Briggs (Myers, 1988) created the MBTI in an effort to help people understand personal differences and appreciate the value of these differences.

The MBTI reports one's preferences on four dichotomous scales, as described below (Myers, 1988). It organizes people's behaviors into predictable patterns according to these opposite preferences. The MBTI sorts eight different preferences into four pairs of opposites.

- First preference type – central focus of attention
  - Extraversion (E) – focus and get energy from the outer world of people and things, prefers action and interaction, are sociable and expressive, share their thoughts freely, have a wide variety of interests, take the initiative in social and work settings, often appear relaxed, confident, accessible and easy to know; to get re-energized, usually go out and get involved in activities that involve other people
  - Introversion (I) – focus on their own inner world of ideas and impressions, prefers reflection, think things through in order to understand them, process thoughts internally before expressing them, prefer written communication; to get re-energized, need to be alone, prefer to focus on what's inside their head, own ideas and images, prefer privacy, being with only one or two others, or being alone

- Second preference type – take in information
  - Sensing (S) – prefer to gather facts and details, want concrete information, like to experience the world directly, relying on what they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch; trust and rely upon what has been experienced, tend to be practical, like specific details, are present-oriented, relatively patient with routine, enjoy using skills already learned and mastered, look for details, facts, and concrete information
  - Intuition (N) – prefer to interpret and add meaning, look for patterns, meanings, relationships, and possibilities for the way things could be, focus attention on what lies beyond the surface, envision future possibilities, enjoy learning new skills and trying new experiences, are abstract, theoretical, patient with complexity, try to see the big picture
- Third preference type – make decisions
  - Thinking (T) – prefer to be objective and look at logical consequences, solve problems through analysis, use cause-and-effect reasoning, like things to be fair and just
  - Feeling (F) – prefer to stay involved and make decisions based on what is important to self and to others; prefer to be subjective, based on human values and how each decision will affect self and others; considered sympathetic and compassionate, want harmony and agreement without conflict
- Fourth preference type – basic approach to life
  - Judging (J) – prefers structure, makes decisions quickly, comfortable when things are settled and organized, like to know the objective that will be achieved before

any activity takes place, organized and purposeful, steady and efficient work habits, like to plan ahead, commit quickly to decisions and often finish tasks before a deadline

- Perceiving (P) – prefers spontaneity, take time to take in as much information as possible before closing off options and making a decision, like to stay flexible, keeping options open, see things through a variety of perspectives, work in spurts, with varying levels of intensity, and enjoy working on several projects simultaneously, appear to be adaptable and tolerant of ambiguity, unmotivated by deadlines

The MBTI is about preferences – eight preferences in all, as described above. A personality type is made up by combining the liked preference from each scale. There are 16 possible personality type combinations. No one type is best and no two people with the same type are exactly the same.

### **Participant Selection and Description**

The participants for this study were selected using a purposeful sampling methodology (Morrow, 2005), and negative case sampling (Johnson, 1997). I selected three cases in which participants appeared to be struggling in college and one case in which the participant appeared to be successful. This process of negative case samples builds on the researcher's identification of common patterns and themes within the phenomenon being investigated by consciously selecting a case for contrast and comparison that may not fit with the dominant interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were male students who graduated from high school in 2007, each scoring a minimum of 28 on the ACT college entrance exam. I recruited three participants

who are currently attending college and have a GPA of 2.5 or below. I recruited one volunteer who is currently attending college and has a GPA of 3.5 or above. I was able to attain these participants through personal networks, and contacted the students to inquire about their willingness to participate in this study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I initially contacted the potential participants by telephone. Upon confirmation of their willingness to participate, I scheduled an appointment for the interview and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment. I asked each participant to pick a room on campus that would be comfortable and somewhat quiet. Three of the participants were interviewed in a library study room. The last interview (the student with the highest GPA) was done in a conference room at the participant's dorm. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. All interviews were audio-recorded by a digital voice recorder. At the completion of the interview, each participant was given the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Form G.

Before the interview began, each participant was again informed of the purpose of the study, risks and benefits of the study, what the process of involvement would require, and the voluntary nature of their choice to participate. Informed consent was obtained from each participant.

The initial question of each interview sought to ask for a description of the participants' experiences using a "Grand Tour" question: "How would you describe what it was like when you moved from home to college?" The follow up questions were designed to be open-ended and went from a broad to more specific inquiry. Each participant was asked the same questions.

1. How would you describe what it was like when you moved from home to college?
2. How do you think your high school experience affected this transition?
3. In what ways did you get involved in extracurricular activities on college campus? Why or why not? How does this level of involvement compare to your involvement in extracurricular activities during high school?
4. What kinds of support did you receive from your family during this transition? How important was the support from family and pre-college friends in your transition? How did the support or lack of support affect your transition? How do you think your relationships are affected this transition?
5. What things have you encountered since moving to college that influenced you in a positive or helpful way? What things might have been considered a hindrance or a distraction to your success?
6. What were some of your expectations before moving to college? How have your experiences compared to these expectations?
7. When you were planning for this life transition, what emotions do you remember experiencing? When you were going through this life transition, what emotions do you remember experiencing? How do you feel about the transition now?
8. What does it mean to you to be independent?
9. What personal strengths do you possess that are needed to make this change successful overall? How well do you think you utilized these strengths? Are there things that got in the way of utilizing these strengths?
10. What skills did you bring that were helpful in your transition? If you were to advise seniors in High School about preparing for college, what would you say?

During the interview, I made a point to validate the participant by nodding my head, but remained silent unless specifically asked a question. My answers were short and supported the participant's understanding of the interview question, but did not offer advice. Three of the interviews were approximately an hour in length. One of the interviews was completed in fifteen minutes (one of the three participants with a GPA of 2.5 or below).

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including false starts and "ums." Due to this arduous task, all of the interviews were listened to multiples times. I also tabulated the

results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Upon completion, each participant reviewed their own transcribed interview for accuracy, and was given a report of their own results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Each of the participants wanted to discuss their own results. Time was allowed for reflection and discussion of the interpretations. In addition, each participant was given a copy of the data analysis of their interview. Each of the participants reviewed their own analysis and gave feedback on my interpretations. Three of the participants asked for a copy of the completed project. Only one of the three participants with lower GPAs did not request a final copy of the study.

When transcribing the interviews, participants were identified as “Interview I, Interview II,” and so on. No demographics were used in the research paper that would lead to identification of the participants. Names used in the Case Studies section of this research paper are not the actual names of the participants. The names used were picked by using the first male name that randomly came to mind. No one, other than myself, had access to the original voice recordings. Participants were only allowed to proof read their own interviews and receive reports from their own personality assessment.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of reducing or “taking apart” the transcriptions into patterns and themes of the participants’ experiences and meaning, and then interpreting this information (Creswell, 1994). A detailed description of each case was developed and themes within the case were identified, while continually comparing cases and identifying themes across the cases throughout the process.

In qualitative research, the first step of data analysis involves the researcher developing a deeper understanding of the data. During the second step, the researcher begins



to interpret the data and make meaning out of it. Lastly, the researcher then organizes the data into a format that captures the essence of the data and highlights the major themes and important points (Creswell, 2003).

Data from the interviews were coded using a constant comparison strategy. I started with one transcript and made notations in the margins and created a list of names for the themes that arose. I made two lists of categories – one of positive coded in black, and one of negative coded in red. When reading the remaining transcripts, I compared back to previously coded transcripts using similar names if appropriate and/or refining the names in order to better represent the overlapping concepts and themes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The individual results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator results were compared to the themes of that participant as well as being compared with the results of each other participant. This compare and contrast analysis across cases provides a richer and thicker description of the research topic from the perspective of the participants.

Data analysis began simultaneously with data collection. Analyses of the information began alongside and continued throughout the interviews, while transcribing the interviews, and interpreting the interviews. During the interview I began to get a sense of the major themes within each interview and across interviews. Personally transcribing the interviews also provided the opportunity to listen more thoroughly and develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants. The transcribed interviews were deconstructed into major patterns and emerging themes. These patterns and themes were then separated into categories pertaining to experiences of transitioning from home to college. These categories were then used to formulate meaning and interpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 154.)

## Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which the results are true. In other words, the researcher is held accountable for “getting at” what the researcher claimed to study. Quantitative researchers use the scientific method, with a focus on cause and effect, to develop validity. Qualitative researchers are interested in validity as it relates to their research as well, and are purposeful about the accuracy of their research, as are quantitative researchers. In qualitative research, however, there are a number of differing thoughts on the role and structure of validity. Creswell (2007) defines validity as “understanding one’s own understandings of the topic” as a researcher (p. 206). In order to delineate qualitative research from quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed alternative terminology to identify the “trustworthiness” of “more naturalistic research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 202). Validity is sought after in the form of:

- Credibility – the extent to which the data analysis reflects the reality of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
- Transferability – the extent that the interpretation of a study is applicable to other cases through rich, thick description of the participants’ experiences
- Dependability – the extent that the data collection process and analysis techniques are accurate and repeatable
- Confirm-ability – the extent that the findings represent the phenomenon being researched

In this study, I incorporated Johnson’s (1997) idea of interpretive, descriptive, and theoretical validity in order to contribute to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirm-ability of the study.

**Interpretive Validity.** Interpretive validity refers to “accurately portraying the meaning attached by participants to what is being studied by the researcher” (Johnson, 1997, p. 121) thereby developing credibility. Gasson (2004) described this concept as “internal consistency” – “how we ensure rigor in the research process” (as cited in Morrow, 2005, p. 252). In the process of developing this study, I employed a number of strategies presented by Johnson to increase and strengthen interpretive validity, such as researcher reflexivity, prolonged engagement, peer review, method triangulation, negative case sampling, member checking, and low inference descriptors.

In qualitative research, the researcher is recognized as a vital part of the process of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Due to the intimate level of participation, data analysis is subject to the interpretation and personal biases of the researcher. Johnson (1997) presents reflexivity as a tool for the researcher to engage in deliberate self-reflection and self-awareness in order to set aside his/her own biases which may influence the process and interpretations of a study. As a researcher, it was critical that I take the time to identify my own past experiences, biases, values, and ideas about this life cycle transition. I spent some time journaling, since my own experience of moving from home to college was thirty years ago. I also spent time contemplating what my preconceptions were when sending my own children off to college. In addition, I reviewed my experiences of returning to college as a non-traditional student. For this study, I wanted to be able to approach each participant without prejudice, from a place of curiosity and openness. This could only happen when I consciously set my own assumptions and biases aside as much as possible and approached new concepts from a place of discovery to pursue the participants’ meanings of the

phenomenon. This process of researcher reflexivity enhanced the validity of data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the findings.

In addition, I employed prolonged engagement with the topic of investigation and with the data. My personal engagement with transitioning from home to college began over 30 years ago. Upon graduating from high school at the age of 18, I enrolled in college and moved to a dormitory. Twenty-five years later, I experienced this transition as a parent of a new college student. At this point, I also observed the experiences of friends of my children, as well as nieces and nephews. I would call that “prolonged engagement.” Prolonged engagement was also established by being persistent in accurately transcribing the interviews prior to presenting them to the participants. A cross check for any misinformation is accomplished by allowing the participants to verify the information gathered. Due to the nature of transcribing, each interview was personally listened to a minimum of three times. During the data analysis process, the interviews were read and reread, notations made, thoughts jotted down, and comparisons made within each case and across the cases. All of these steps were rigorously executed, thereby employing persistent observation to their stories (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996).

I sought peer feedback and review (Johnson, 1997) throughout the process as a validity strategy. I sought advice and suggestions from my advisor after writing the study proposal, interview questions, designing the research methodology, transcribing the interview data, and data analysis. This peer challenged me to be open to the experiences of each participant, while accurately articulating their thoughts and insights as reported. By utilizing peer review, alternative ideas and possibilities, new understandings of the participants’ meaning were provided, as well as accountability for potential researcher biases.

In this study, I used method triangulation (Johnson, 1997) to enhance validity. By incorporating interviews and administering a personality assessment with each participant, multiple sources of information were available to confirm or disconfirm commonality of themes across data sources.

I also employed what Johnson (1997) called negative case sampling. I included in my study one participant who did not fit the parameters of the other participants. This participant was intentionally found to potentially disconfirm or confirm interpretations and themes pertaining to the phenomenon being studied.

Member checking (Johnson, 1997) was another design feature used to enhance validity. Upon completion of transcribing each interview and tabulating the results of the personality assessment, each participant was given a copy of their own interview to review for accuracy, and a report on their own Myers-Briggs Type Indicator results. In addition, each participant was given a copy of the analysis of their interview. The participants gave feedback on my interpretations from their own story. Qualitative research requires the researcher to accurately understand and portray the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Validity is enhanced by the researcher checking to see if their perceptions are a valid account of the participants' perspectives.

In addition, interpretive validity was enhanced through the "rich and thick descriptions" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209) of the individual interviews within the text of my research paper. Many verbatim quotes have been included in the case studies to provide the reader with detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences. The use of low inference descriptors strengthens the validity of this study by increasing the reader's ability to determine the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation. The reader has the opportunity

experience the language and words used by the participants, compare and contrast his/her interpretations with what is presented by the researcher. This process is intended to add depth to the readers' understanding of each participant's perspective.

**Descriptive Validity.** Descriptive validity refers to “accuracy in reporting descriptive information” by the researcher (Johnson, 1997, p. 120) thereby developing dependability. In quantitative research, reliability, or the ability to replicate a study so that the results would be about the same each time, would increase descriptive validity. Due to the naturalistic nature of qualitative research, this definition is not as clearly measured. In qualitative research, it is important that the research context and processes are explicit so that another reader would be able make an informed judgment and come up with similar interpretations of the data (Morrow, 2005). The participant selection and descriptions are specific and detailed; the data collection process is clearly articulated within the methodology section of this study. Intentional choices and careful craftsmanship about research design and procedures were employed to enhance reliability (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). I was purposeful in choosing a negative case sampling. The interviews were conducted in person. I deliberately chose to limit my interaction with the participants during the interview. I validated the participant in order to establish trust while remaining silent unless specifically asked a question. My answers were designed to elicit more disclosure while being as short as possible; and I did not offer advice. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, thus tapes were listened to repeatedly, and transcripts were read and re-read multiple times. I also tabulated and explained the results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to each participant. All of these steps enhance the descriptive validity of this study.

**Theoretical Validity.** Johnson (1997) defined theoretical validity as the degree that the data interpretation from a study is “credible and defensible” (Johnson, 1997, p. 121) – referring to how and why a phenomenon operates, thereby developing confirm-ability. In order to enhance theoretical validity, much attention was given to finding literature that provided a framework for factors and theories pertinent to the design of this study. Many previous studies have looked at this life cycle transition and provided various theories and explanations for this phenomenon. I researched the literature and tried to identify as many factors as I could think of that could impact a first-year student’s transition from home to college. No articles were found that specifically looked at the personal experiences of college students who appear to have struggled academically despite extensive academic success during high school years and above average college entrance exam scores.

**Generalizability.** Traditionally, in quantitative research, external validity is expressed through generalizability. There are a number of strategies that quantitative researchers use to control variables and increase external validity based on the assumption that value and meaning stem from findings being applicable to other populations. This study is certainly not representative of all college students. Due to the small and homogeneous sample (four participants – all male, white European-American, middleclass, who are enrolled in Midwestern universities) the generalizability of this study’s findings is limited. However, Merriam (1988) suggests that it is not the intent of qualitative research to generalize findings, but to “form a unique interpretation of events” (cited in Creswell, 1994, p. 158). Based on this understanding, the findings from this study provide for rich and meaningful themes based on the participants’ stories thereby developing transferability. The findings may be transferable from case to case, and may have implications for others in

similar settings, but cannot formally be generalized from this sample to a larger population (T. Karris, class handout, September 14, 2009). This study did find some generalizations that fit across the participants, indicating common patterns in the ways they thought and responded. These results may provide direction for further research.

In summary, the trustworthiness or “truthfulness” of my interpretation is supported by the various strategies I incorporated into the study design. It was important for me to accurately portray the experiences of the participants. It was my goal to rigorously design a study that had practices which enhanced validity, helping to get to the essence of the phenomenon under study. The methodology section of this study is clearly stated. I tried my best to be open-minded and curious. My own interpretations and understanding of the participants’ perspectives were reviewed and validated by each participant. It was my intent to tie together the data, the analysis, and the findings in a way that provides a clear connection to the interpretations. The themes identified within and across participants offer a starting place for further research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In this study, I took care to address the issue of informed consent. Approval of the research proposal by the Institutional Review Board was received before the interviews could begin. Before the start of each interview, I informed the participant of the purpose of the study, described the process of participation, the risks and benefits of participation, my commitment to confidentiality and the participant’s right to withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant at the start of their interview. The participants were informed that they might experience some emotional discomfort when answering questions related to personal topics. Participants were given the option to not



answer any of the questions posed to them, and/or to discontinue the interview at any time. All of the participants expressed comfort with the process from the beginning and I intentionally paid attention to comfort levels during the interviews. The participants seemed to be willing and motivated to participate; it appeared that all the questions were received well and understood given the amount of information that each participant shared; and each participant appeared to feel fine at the conclusion of the interviews.

The issue of confidentiality was a major concern. Precautions were taken to ensure that the participants could not be identified. Pseudonyms were used in place of participant names. Demographic details which may identify the participants were omitted from the transcripts. The tapes and transcripts remained in my possession throughout the study. Each of these considerations was addressed to respect the participants' anonymity.

### **Strengths of the Study's Methodology**

The use of a phenomenological approach to explore this topic greatly contributed to the strength of this study. The most obvious strength of descriptive case study research is the formation of rich and meaningful descriptions of the participants' experiences of a critical life cycle change. The purpose of this study was to find meaning in the experiences of the participants – in particular from the participants' point of view. The genuine human conversations provided not only factual information, but emotions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts as well. This methodological design made it possible for participants' to share the richness of their own stories, which is generally lacking in less personal methods of data collection.

The use of multiple data sources, participant interviews and personality assessment, provides additional strength to the study by broadening the range of information available for

interpretation. The participants expressed interest and appreciation for the results from the MMPI assessment.

I was determined to transcribe the interviews as accurately as possible, including all pauses, umms, and ahhs. I listened to the tapes, and rewound to listen again, over and over, to get each response just right. As I listened and transcribed the interviews, I became more familiar with each participant, noting recurring themes, comparing themes from other interviews, and understanding the meaning from each participant's perspective and use of language.

The use of negative case sampling reduces the effect of researcher bias (Johnson, 1997). By using this strategy, the results are credible and increase the breadth of information available for analysis.

Every step and procedure was conducted by me, the researcher. I have been immersed in the research process, providing structure to the interviews – while allowing space for the participants' to create and express their own story – as well as making the interpretations and writing the findings. There is no point in the process which I could gloss over and delegate to another co-researcher. My saving grace – my brilliant and patient advisor – has brought me through many arduous challenges.

The participants themselves were amazing. They were willing to participate, seemed open and genuine, and freely shared their experiences. Their trust was a gift to me. Due to the nature of the subject and the associated expectation of “good grades” and shame of “bad grades,” I feel truly honored they were willing to let me explore their personal stories. This study would not have been possible without these four courageous young men.

The researcher's involvement is inherent to qualitative research, which in many ways, greatly influences the quality of the study. My interest in this particular life cycle change brought energy to the process and genuine desire to find meaning in the participants' experiences. In the process, I was willing to look at my own biases, values, and preconceptions regarding this life transition, and attempted to set these aside during data collection and analysis. When writing the interview questions, my scope of questioning was broad, yet limited to one focal issue. All of the participants reported having a high level of comfort during the interview. I spent a great deal of time contemplating and reflecting during the coding of themes from the interviews.

In order to minimize my impact on the participant's answers during the interview, I attempted to remain silent unless the participant asked me a direct question. I kept the answers short and supportive of the participant. I did validate the participants during the interview through body language, eye contact, nodding my head, and smiling at them. My intent was to be respectful and supportive while avoiding giving advice or directing their responses.

Overall, my objective was to accurately portrait the participants' meaning in their process of moving from home to college. In order to do so, I employed a number of strategies to strengthen this study's validity, such as use of a phenomenological study design, multiple data sources, low inference descriptors, accurate transcribing of interviews, and negative case sampling. As a researcher, my goal was to be as objective as possible in how I approached the study development, data collection and conclusions. I employed strategies that involved self-awareness of my own experiences and potential biases which may influence the research process and interpretations. I incorporated researcher reflexivity and

employed prolonged engagement with the research process and data. As is true for most research, this study was designed to offer a unique but narrow glimpse, one limited view of this enormous topic. All being said, the study could not have any merit without the willingness of the participants'. I hold much gratitude for their investment in furthering the information about this topic and authenticity about their own experiences.

### **Limitations of the Study's Methodology**

Due to the small sample size of this study, the data collected and findings are limited and not sufficient to generalize from this case study to any group beyond these participants. As noted by Sprenkle and Moon (1996), having more than one case offers some support for the themes across cases because they fit for more than just one case study.

The participants were all males, thus the results may not reflect female experiences of transitioning from home to college. All of the participants were from similar backgrounds – middle class, same ethnicity – white European-American, and similar Universities – state colleges and Midwestern. Although the information obtained was rich, these factors do limit the scope and generalizability of the study.

A distinct limitation of this study is the absence of multiple coders to analyze the transcribed data (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research, multiple coders offer an external check as well as another perspective on the identification of themes, and thus increase reliability of the study. A peer reviewer(s) could provide a fresh perspective in which to review the study. I did not include these steps in the methodology due to time constraints. Conversely, throughout the study, an academic advisor, extensively experienced in qualitative research, provided much needed and continuous guidance to the research process.

Although the scope of the study was limited in many ways, the results may stimulate curiosity and provide direction to more fully explore this topic in future research.

Another limitation of this study was my lack of experience as a researcher. While I did attempt to be rigorous in my methods and provide the highest level of validity, there are elements where my lack of experience affected the outcome of the results. I have a couple of ideas of how I would change the study just a little, such as the order of questions for the interview, other information that I think might be meaningful, and the use of multiple reviewers. Nonetheless, I believe that the study yielded information which was thick, rich and meaningful despite my inadequacies.

## Chapter IV: Case Studies

There are four case studies in all. The first three participants, Isaiah, David, and John are the students who were attending college and had a GPA of 2.5 or below. The fourth participant, Ethan, was also attending college and had a GPA of 3.5 or above. The case studies are presented in the order that the interviews took place. Each participant was interviewed once. Each participant was asked the same questions and in the same order. Each interview lasted between fifteen and seventy minutes. While the transcribed interviews include everything, the direct quotes have been edited for readability (e.g. removal of superfluous words and phrases, umm, ah, well, like, etc.). The MBTI interpretations are written to provide a brief summary of the report given to each participant. Also included are links to each participant's interviews, and their respective responses to their personality profile type and test results. Two of the participants, David and John, had identical personality types; two of the participants, Isaiah and Ethan, had opposite personality types, and each had two of the four preferences the same as David and John.

### Isaiah

“You need to know to go to class. Seriously. It's the key to getting a degree.”  
(Harrison, 2008)

“You need to know what you're signing up for: constant studying, difficult exams, pressure to perform, organizing your time, prioritizing your work, meeting expectations, and acting like an adult. And some unforgettable parties.” (Harrison, 2008)

Isaiah was looking forward to college with anticipation and optimistic about his new beginning. While he acknowledged the need for prioritizing, he expressed a lack of concern about and inattentiveness to the responsibilities of college. He embraced the autonomy of college and the development of self-efficacy.

... at first it was just really busy. So much stuff to do when you get to college and you are doing it, you know, you got your parents help, but at the same time you are trying to get out of that a little bit and explore your new surroundings. OK. It was exciting, and very, very busy at first, just had a lot of stuff to get done, but I wasn't necessarily fully worried about getting that stuff done.

During high school, Isaiah perceived himself as successful and popular. He recognized the influence of an intact support system in high school, but did not utilize that support in college. Hard work and excellence were priorities in high school and his expectation for college as well. Isaiah expressed shame and demoralization when failure became a norm during his first year at college. He suppressed any negative emotions.

Most things that I did, I did quite well, and I had a lot of support, even though I didn't really recognize it at the time. I had a lot of people guiding me to do the right things. When I came into college, I didn't have people guiding me to do the right things, so I did the wrong things. That affected my college career a lot. Like this unknown dependence on teachers, on family, on friends. I didn't recognize it was probably the biggest hindrance in my college career. Also, striving for excellence in high school taught me to strive for excellence in college and in everything that I did. It's just when you keep failing to do that, you start to expect that you are going to fail to do it and it doesn't affect you as much anymore, because you just expect that is going to happen. Kind of like when you excel in things, you just expect yourself to excel in things. So, when you start failing at things, you start to expect yourself to fail anything, and it doesn't affect you emotionally, mentally, or physically anymore, or at least you don't acknowledge that it does.

Isaiah had minimal involvement in extracurricular activities on campus. He gravitated to social events, such as dorm activities, working out at the recreational center, and frat parties. He showed initiative by starting a video game club, but soon after dropped out. His social need not being met, Isaiah lost interest.

...there is tons of extracurricular stuff to do; I just didn't really get involved in it. I was really trying to just find my social scene and hang out with my friends and my girlfriend and go to class every now and then.

When asked how this matched with the level of involvement Isaiah experienced in high school, he stated "It doesn't. I was in tons of stuff in high school, which was a very positive thing; ...challenging things for my body, for my mind, for creativity." When attempting to get involved in theatre in college, he was self-defeated and "couldn't focus on anything and do it correctly, or well enough," experiencing fear and shame.

Isaiah continued to have contact with several high school friends. "I had some very good friends in high school." He detached from family and became more egocentric and self-reliant.

During the transition, my family, my parent, called me a lot. I didn't really respond to it too much because I was kind of doing my own thing; which turned out to not be the greatest idea. But my family did call me quite a lot, especially during the later parts of the transition when I was having a rough time. I just didn't really respond to it terribly well. So, the support was there. I just didn't really accept it. That I didn't accept it had a very large effect on me.

Isaiah identified his romantic attachment as his primary support system during this transition. He also relied on past success in high school for a predictor of success in college.



...because I fully invested myself into the wrong sort of support system, I kind of fell apart. I also had a support system in my success in high school that brought a bit of arrogance to what I did in my classes. It didn't help that in my first semester, in my first tests, I did exceptionally well on it without really going to class very much. So the support system of my previous education, I think, really, it kind of hindered me because of arrogance.

His girlfriend left the relationship when Isaiah began struggling academically and socially. The sense of underachievement, isolation, broken heart, and detachment from family created an out-of-control inner crisis. "I wasn't keeping track of myself." On the other hand, Isaiah equated maturity with "not needing anybody." He believes that attachments are not necessary for success.

...but I am just saying that some people are able to depend only on themselves, their own ability and smarts, and do miraculous things. But, as for me, and I think the majority of people, that is not the case; that you need support. But, I was not ready to just let go of all support that I had.

Isaiah identified "being out on your own" as the primary thing that influenced him in a positive or helpful way since moving to college. "...it feels very freeing, and you feel like the world is your oyster." A sense of autonomy and self-rule, despite potential negative consequences, "teaches you to grow up, make new encounters, both good and bad." He believes that what is achieved in college is based on "the decisions you make, what you do or what you don't do;" development of self-efficacy.

Isaiah considered this same freedom to be counter-productive to his success in college. "...there are pros and cons to just about anything; having freedom certainly has led to some

major distractions for me.” He identified assimilation as a major hindrance to his success.

While Isaiah perceived freedom as an integral part of college, he struggled to get personal needs met, made irresponsible decision, detached from life-long relationships, and demonstrated a need for an abundance of new life skills (e.g. “money management, time management, stress management); all created an overwhelming sense of inadequacy about his ability to “make it on your own,” as well as fear of lack of self-efficacy.

...being put into a situation where you have to make it on your own, but you don't know how to make it on your own, can be very destructive. ...freedom is reflective on how mature you are, if you are ready to do the things you are supposed to do or not. ...it's not an intimate setting like high school in a small school, so it's certainly a different sort of atmosphere for learning, and whether or not you excel with that or whether it hinders you is really up to your own style and how you adapt. So, I guess the real hindrance of freedom is whether or not you are good at adapting, and changing your life style for what you need it to be, versus, what you want it to be.

Before moving to college, Isaiah had an expectation of freedom and doing well academically. Freedom, though, seemed to result in irresponsibility and disappointment.

I expected to have a lot of freedom, but I expected to do well academically. I thought that was going to happen. But, I just had my priorities all wrong. I really expected myself to be able to do whatever I wanted to do. I did do whatever I wanted to do for a very large amount of time. There were surprises, and that sort of thing – surprising how much you can disappoint yourself, surprised at the way your relationship with people goes, surprised at the consequences of your actions. I was given the freedom

that I was expecting out of college. It is just not always a good idea to do what you want to do. That's not what I expected.

When planning for this life transition, Isaiah remembered feeling an overwhelming anticipation – absolute excitement. A new beginning was before him, an opportunity of forming a new identity.

I was excited, really excited. I enjoyed my high school, but I needed to get away. I was really focused on the idea of escapism, taking my past, which, coming into college, that does not really matter anymore. All that matters is who you become then. So, I was interested in how I would take things of my past, and merge them with this person that I was going to present myself as in college. So, I was interested and I was excited. I mean, I was sad to leave my friends, and my family, and my dog, all that sort of thing. But, it was a new era, and a new way to live, really, and that was the overriding thing. I just wanted to go to college.

While Isaiah recognized his lack of ability to prioritize, he feels no regret for the lessons learned during this transition. “But, the way that I lived led up to the person that I am now.”

Isaiah defined independence as “choosing to be your own person.” He perceived self-determination as central to achieving independence. Isaiah contrasted obedience to authority with thinking for oneself as an individual.

Being independent is having a say in what you do, and being able to think about the things you do, and being able to say that this is you doing this. It's not somebody saying, “You are going to do this,” and even if somebody says, “Stand up,” and you are not, if you yourself, without them telling you to stand up, would not stand up, I do not consider that independence unless you have weighed the pros and cons of

standing up for the person who tells you to stand up and whether that person has good reason to tell you to stand up. I think that independence is knowing who you are, or trying to learn who you are and acting upon it. Something that high school doesn't teach you is to do that on your own. It teaches you, this is your teacher, listen to your teacher, have them tell you what to do and what not to do. But, I do not consider that independence. It is probably the smart thing to do, but it is not, it is just teaching you how to follow without thinking. I don't consider that independence.

Isaiah described a number of personal strengths which he believed necessary to make this transition successful overall. The first strength was critical thinking skills – “I think through my actions.” The second strength was sensitivity – “I am a fairly caring person, somewhat emotional, and so that helped as far as socially finding a place.” The third strength was hard work – “...when I actually tried hard in classes that has served me well.” “I think between being very analytical and very caring, and being groomed to be a successful young man, I think those were strengths that I came into college with.”

Isaiah acknowledged that he did not utilize these strengths for academic success in college primarily because his priorities were imbalanced.

In the beginning of college, I used them fairly well socially, but that was about the extent of my care to use them. That's what I was focused on. One of the biggest things of going to college is figuring out how to prioritize for you. You know, prioritizing fun things isn't necessarily a bad thing to do. It's important. There are tons of distractions at college, just at a computer desk, there's an infinite amount of stuff that you can do. When you are at college, there are tons of things that you could be doing instead of doing what you are supposed to be doing. That was a hindrance.

Isaiah would advise seniors in high school to be responsible and “go to class.” In a lengthy soliloquy, he describes the impact of skipping class, as well as the cost and benefits of attending class.

People who don't go to class don't get good grades. There is no way that you cannot pass your class if you just go to your classes. If you have 100% attendance in a class, I cannot imagine a way that you are going to fail unless you have slept through the entire thing, which teachers don't really allow you to do. So, yeah, go to class.

**MBTI Interpretation.** Isaiah's MBTI personality profile indicates a preference towards Extraversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Perception – ENFP personality type. He appears to prefer to focus his attention and energy on experiencing the world and people in it. He likely prefers to acquire and interpret information by looking for meaning, patterns, relationships, and new possibilities. He also appears to make decisions based on values important to him or to other people. The profile indicates a preference for perceiving the outer world in a flexible way, keeping his options open and seeking to understand the human experience.

Isaiah approached the transition to college with much enthusiasm and saw the opportunities available from a broad lens – he sought the possibility of doing things in a new way. In addition, he strived for personal authenticity, while showing concern and sympathy for others as well. His profile suggested that he is generally good with people and has a wide range of personal relationships. Isaiah showed insight into what is going on inside of him – he was observant and perceptive to his emotions and motives.

It is fitting that Isaiah has chosen a career that requires a focus on the abstract, and an understanding of others. His interest is in counseling psychology, with a strong passion for social issues. While his ACT score indicates a high level of thinking and knowledge, Isaiah expressed little interest in factual data and details.

Isaiah was surprised how well this assessment could depict him. Initially, he was skeptical and expressed distrust in the test. He was pleased to have his strengths identified rather than perceived shortcomings.

### **David**

“You need to know that everyone is scared to death about fitting in. You’re no different.” (Harrison, 2008)

“You need to know the newfound freedom that college offers will either make you or break you.” (Harrison, 2008)

Initially, David experienced anxiety when he moved from home to college. He found support from his roommate, who was from back home.

I felt it was kind of intimidating for the first few months, before I knew all of the people on my dorm. I knew my roommate from back home, so I hung out with him for the first while, and I met a couple other people. I’d have to say, I was very uncomfortable.

After assimilating into the new setting, he became optimistic and engaged in the college experience.

David described high school years as the time of his identity formation.

High school was when most people’s personalities, in my opinion, really come out. It allowed me to be who I am, it helped me to express myself a lot better, and I think that has helped me in my transition to college.

David got involved in extracurricular activities on college campus right away. He recognized his participation as instrumental in assimilation. "...earlier on, I played intramural soccer and a couple other sports. So, that helped me get involved in the campus, and it allowed me to meet new people."

David acknowledged receiving much support from his family during this transition. He depended on them for emotional support, as well as preparation for assimilation into college life.

During the transition, I think I had a lot of support from my family because they helped me get everything together that I was going to need. I didn't know any of this stuff. They helped me plan everything that I was supposed to get, bring there, that I'll need, because they knew, they knew what was going on.

Being enmeshed with relationships back home delayed the transition.

When I first moved in, for 6 months to a year, I went home about every 2 to 3 weeks. Relationships I had back home kept me staying there. It kept me in both worlds – my world here and my world back there. They mostly were separate, but I still had a huge link back to my home, my family and my girlfriend.

David was influenced in a positive way by observing responsible work ethics in other students on campus.

My work habit has definitely been influenced in a positive way. Before college, at the end of the high school career, I kind of got lazy and didn't work as hard as I really should have. But once I got into college, things became a lot more challenging. Eventually, I noticed others around me working a lot harder and

doing the things that they were supposed to be doing. I thought I should pick it up and I've been working a lot harder lately.

He experienced the typical college dorm distractions, such as “people yelling in the hallways, playing Frisbee golf instead of studying, staying up all night trying to get the thing that was due the next day done.”

David expected college to be more work than high school, but he did not expect the intellectual challenge that he experienced.

As much as people say, “It’s a lot of work,” I didn’t expect it would be as much work as it actually is. But, that was generally in a different way than I thought it was going to be. I’ve been mainly challenged in terms of my mental capacity, as opposed to incredible amounts of homework. My expectations were definitely different than the experience. I’ve had a lot more different work type things than I expected. Sometimes it was less work, sometimes it was more work. But, mostly, it has been more mentally challenging to me, and more intellectually.

When planning for this life transition, David recalled feeling a mixture of anticipation, fear of the unknown, and overwhelmed.

I remember feeling a lot of anticipation, but also hesitant; anticipation because I didn’t really want to be in the new environment, or meet new people. I liked what I had back then. I was excited for something new, but I was also holding back because I didn’t want to be disappointed, I guess. I did want to stay back at home. I would have a lot more on my plate than I experienced previously, what with all of school, living by myself, taking care of myself, making sure I got things done, hanging out with other people, and making sure I live my life.



Familiarity and acculturation helped relieve his anxiety about the transition.

It's a lot easier because I know what is going on. I know people. I know where to go. When I first moved, I got lost, because I didn't exactly know the layout.

But now I can pretty easily walk from one side of town to the other without getting lost. I got a lot less hindrances now.

David defined independence as a combination of self-efficacy and the ability to act responsible.

I'd say it means to be responsible, and doing things, making my own choices, decisions on what I should be doing at any particular time. General living things, by making your own choices and making sure you are being responsible.

Being social is the personal strength that David identified as helping him to successfully transition overall. He believed that assimilation was possible when he made social connections on campus.

I think being social was a huge part of making this transition become more successful. I began meeting people here that just helped me kind of fit in more. That really helped me settle down, and actually be comfortable living away from home, away from everything else that I have been; I'd have to say that being social and making friends and having fun, and basically, making jokes and laughing together. That was a big part of me starting to feel comfortable after moving here.

David would advise seniors in high school to have a good work ethic and "stop slacking off."

I did things last minute; did them sloppy. Didn't work as hard as I should have, and then, I came around and it just hit me. When I moved and classes started, and it piles up, you kind of got to get ahead of it.

**MBTI Interpretation.** David's MBTI personality profile indicates a preference toward Introversion, Intuition, Thinking, and Perception – INTP personality type. He appears to prefer to focus his attention on his own inner world. He likely prefers to acquire and interpret information by looking for meaning, patterns, relationships, and new possibilities. He also appears to make decisions by thinking objectively, and predicting the logical consequences. The profile indicates a preference for perceiving the outer world in a flexible way, keeping his options open and seeking to understand the human experience.

David approached the transition to college in a logical and objective manner, utilizing his support system and strengths to navigate and assimilate into his new environment. People with similar personality types use their ingenuity to focus on new possibilities.

David found a small group of friends to be most comfortable. Initially David approached the new setting with reservation, until he saw the possibilities beyond what was already known. He appeared to be insightful with regard to the ideas he had spent time thinking about.

At the time of the interview, David stated that he was studying computer science. People with this personality type are usually logical, analytical, and objective – they also choose careers which will utilize these traits.

David showed the least amount of interest in the results of his assessment. While polite, I felt that he found the report rather tedious. He did not ask any questions or make any comments in order to process the results with me.

**John**

“You need to know when there will be a test. It’s there on your syllabus.”  
(Harrison, 2008)

“You need to know that if you work more than twenty hours a week, you’re at a higher risk of dropping out.” (Harrison, 2008)

John had imaged a new beginning – “a rite of passage.” He articulated the process of transitioning as “odd:” first packing his belongings and “having to put all this stuff somewhere else;” his parents having “You’re a college student now” conversation over lunch; being away from home for more than a week at a time and thinking, “Wow, I’m going home!”; and finally, setting boundaries and adjusting to living with a complete stranger. Overall, John described his experience of moving to college as “different than anything I had ever really gone through. I actually consider myself pretty lucky.”

John saw high school as necessary for necessary for social and academic development. He believes that all the time spent with the same people, day in and day out, “was sort of enough to prepare you for social life in college.” On the other hand, academically, he felt that high school, particularly in a rural area, did not adequately prepare him for the rigorous expectations and work load.

There are a whole lot of things in college that teachers will just expect you to know upon starting class. I was going in kind of blind to that. ...if I knew what I know now, and I could go back in time, and do something differently, I think I would have actually tried to learn some of this stuff in my free time, because it would have been helpful. I wish somebody would have told me that, “If you study this, you will want to know this.”

John was open to being involved in extracurricular activities in order to make connections with students who shared common interests. In the process, he experienced a shift in his own identity perception. While the expectation was “common ground,” the impact was a realization that stereotypical labels do not accurately define any given group.

...friends in high school that I shared interests in sort of the nerdy aspect.... At my (college) orientation, I saw groups that kind of catered towards the nerdy crowd....  
...it's not until I was in college that I realized, nerds are actually different than that. I don't like any of these people. I couldn't associate with those people, not in a social thing.

John stated that in high school, he was involved in many extracurricular activities, “all those that were available, and that was all good fun at the time.” His intention was to join a lot more organizations, but “overall, I'm less involved.”

John had an intact support system upon moving to college. He received the typical kinds of support, such as money, e-mails, and advice. He valued the consistent connection with his parents. “The support was very important because I was going somewhere where I didn't know anybody. It's really important to have people to turn to, friends to talk to, before you meet people.”

Since then, John has disengaged from his old friendships – “it seems like I have changed and we are all in different places.” At the same time, he has a closer relationship with his family than during high school, “it's just something that you learn to appreciate more.”

The people that John met at school have been a good influence on his transition to college. Initially, John's priority was far more social than academic. “I was more in it for

the experience, and started slacking in studies. The people that I'm around really help; and I think I've gotten much better as far as school goes.”

John considered “the lack of structure” to be a distraction upon starting college. “...to go from home to total freedom. There's a lot you can do rather than study. That's the biggest distraction; you really don't have to listen to anyone anymore.”

John expected college life to be a big change, and “thought it would be more hectic than it was, more chaos.”

I expected to make a lot more friends, be in weirder situations, and go to parties and things like that. There are a lot of stereotypes about college that you see in movies... I guess my expectations were different than what actually happened.

When planning for this life transition, John remembers feeling two things – nervous and excited, both at the same time. Along with anticipating something new – was the fear of something new. “The thought of it was just different, is what made it exciting. But I was also, at the same time, really nervous because it wouldn't be the same as at home.” John needed to acquire skills for survival, such as cooking, laundry, finances, and the emotional experience of no one to come home to every day.

I was nervous to learn to make my own food; nervous that I wasn't going to be eating the right things, just eating cheap food, like noodles, or something all the time.

Which, realistically, I did end up doing. So, I guess I was nervous for a reason.

John felt an increase in stress when going through the life transition.

When the whole process actually starts, then you have to start worrying about how it's going to go – I have to go to class; class wasn't going to be as easy; a lot of work

to do now; you couldn't just, not do homework; you are the only one responsible for keeping a schedule.

Eventually, John felt satisfied with his growth during this transition. "It does feel like it really helps prepare for life in the long run. I think it was good overall."

John defined independence as "making decisions by yourself." He saw critical thinking and financial responsibility as measurements of independence. "...being able to figure out a complicated procedure by yourself ...now it is something that is on your shoulders, like paying bills."

John described thinking skills and a sense of independence as personal strengths needed to make this transition successful overall. He identified the ability to make sound decisions as assisting in time management and keeping out of trouble. John felt prepared to encounter the transition – "I had learned enough about life living at home, that I was able to be more independent upon moving."

John admitted that he struggled to prioritize the responsibilities of class work and too much time spent at a job.

...it definitely got in the way because there are nights that I got home from work at 8 or 9 and had a huge assignment that I hadn't even started because I worked the night before, or I had other assignments, and ended up staying up until 6 a.m. trying to get it done. It's really hectic, really hard to get all your work done. You are spending your free time doing work, while you're not at work – that kind of got in the way.

John would advise seniors in high school to "actually take it seriously" and "know what you are getting into." John warned of the hazards of independence and freedom. He

focused on learning and self-efficacy. “You need to be ready to take charge, if you are serious about school. You need to actually try for it, don’t get used to just sliding along.”

**MBTI Interpretation.** John’s MBTI personality profile indicates a preference toward Introversion, Intuition, Thinking, and Perception – INTP personality type. He appears to prefer to focus his attention on his own inner world. He likely prefers to acquire and interpret information by looking for meaning, patterns, relationships, and new possibilities. He also appears to make decisions by thinking objectively, and predicting the logical consequences. The profile indicates a preference for perceiving the outer world in a flexible way, keeping his options open and seeking to understand the human experience.

John approached this transition by thinking through his ideas regarding moving to college and anticipating the consequences – such as his concern for living with a stranger. He expressed a curiosity about different ideas and how they might play out. He was able to systematically organize his thoughts and ideas for achieving success in school.

John gravitated toward a small circle of close friends. Although he was quite talkative during the interview, he acknowledged being somewhat quiet and reserved at times. He expressed an interest in the research topic and had been thinking about the subject. He appeared to be insightful and intellectually curious throughout the interview.

John chose to study computer science in college. This subject had interested him for a number of years, and he liked the challenge of reaching solutions to problems.

John thought that most of the report was interesting. He identified himself as more of an extrovert than introvert. We discussed how each scale is on a spectrum and that his E/I score was close to the middle. Other than that, John thought the information attained from the assessment could be helpful.

**Ethan**

“You need to know to bring your character into the classroom.” (Harrison, 2008)

“You need to know that if you find the balance between studying and fun, you’ll graduate.” (Harrison, 2008)

Ethan did not perceive the move to college “as a huge transition,” and even went so far as to call it “fairly easy.” Ethan expressed the ability to use self-efficacy, even prior to leaving home for college. Secondly, he moved into a situation in which assimilation was provided for him.

When I was little, I had gotten used to not really needing them [his family] with me all the time. That aspect wasn’t very difficult, I guess. Then, the dorm community that I was part of was very cohesive kind of group. It was all IT Honors people right on the same floor. We had all our classes together; we were pretty much together as the same group all of the time. It allowed us to get to know each other, and gave a kind of family atmosphere – that was helpful.

Ethan also related that, while it was the “hardest part of the transition,” he and his girlfriend had broken up, so there were not any romantic attachments which might have impacted the transition.

Ethan believed that he was unprepared academically for the degree of difficulty in college, particularly in physics. He did not verbalize any thoughts about social needs or support systems. He was only concerned that the physics class in high school “wasn’t that in-depth or useful.”

Ethan used the extracurricular activities in college as a way to have fun. He was able to be self-aware of his own needs and identify.



There's no one there who really wants to win kind of thing. Everyone is just enjoying it. I feel like some sort of intramural sport would be much more "We're going to win – rrrrrrrrr," which is not really my cup of tea.

This level of involvement was not congruent with what Ethan experienced during high school when he'd had the time to be involved in everything. In college, Ethan prioritized time, developed organization, and looked at the big picture.

On one hand, in high school, everything was organized in a fashion that you could be in this and it won't really conflict. But now, I have to be more aware of when something is happening, be more capable of being organized. I see where things fit together and then try to get things in some sort of system – try to fit it in my mind with everything else that's going on.

Ethan had a minimal level of contact with his high school friends. "I haven't spoken to them a lot. But, when we are all back in town, then we call each other up and seeing who's in town."

Ethan identified his ability to assimilate and focus on academics as the primary things which influenced him in a helpful way when moving to college. As a cohesive group, they were able to find a balance between the need to study and down time.

...that communal kind of feeling that my floor had was very positive..., we were all fairly focused people; so when we needed to study, it was quiet. It was a good atmosphere because when we wanted to have fun, everyone wanted to have fun – when anyone had free time, everybody did. It was called the Living and Learning Community.

Ethan was distracted by the freedom to “not go to bed, and pulling all-nighters for no apparent reason other than to watch a couple more movies.” This was the only hindrance that he identified since moving to college.

Ethan expected to be self-reliant upon moving to college. Experiences apart from family during childhood had prepared him to be “independent.” He had developed a sense of autonomy and responsibility in high school and expected them to continue into college.

I expected to be on my own. I had been away from my parents fairly periodically throughout my childhood. I had already gotten used to the whole independent thing.

It prepared me to be able to just go off, I guess. I expected college to be like high school, but with less people checking up on you. It’s your responsibility.

His expectations were realized – “I kind of expected that, and that is basically what it is.”

The one surprise Ethan experienced was how focused the IT program was.

When planning for this life transition, Ethan remembers feeling excitement and sadness. Anticipation for a new experience was balanced with the difficulty of separating from friends.

I was fairly confident and a bit of excitement; you know something new, something I hadn’t done before. I was also kind of sad in that a lot of good friends in high school, I wouldn’t really be seeing them all that much; kind of severing those ties – they are not really severed in most cases.

Because Ethan did not experience any surprises when going through this life transition, he could not identify any significant emotions which stood out for him. He felt “fairly neutral” about the transition at the time of the interview.

Ethan defined independence as “making my decisions without having to check with someone else.” He saw self-efficacy and prioritizing as critical to developing independence. “...it is up to me to do things and do them when I should do them, to do something not because someone told me to. It’s staying on top of things.”

Ethan identified a number of personal strengths that are needed to make this transition. First, he identified self-efficacy as a personal strength – “...the answer isn’t always going to come from somebody else, I can probably figure it out eventually.” The second strength was self-confidence – “...if you don’t believe in yourself, you are not going to be able to function independently of others.” The third strength was identity as an individual – “...you have to believe that your way of seeing things is a valid way of seeing things.”

Ethan acknowledged that while he was able to utilize these strengths, there were times when he relied on other people for help – balanced with interdependence. “I rely on myself most of the time, but there are things that I don’t get, then I rely on the people around me.”

Ethan would advise seniors in high school to be open-minded, start with a broad scope and narrow the focus down from there, and not be afraid to make mistakes.

...even if you know what you want to do, don’t jump right into that..., start with a more general approach,... look into completely random things that you might find fascinating. As far as living independently, realize that making a mistake is usually not that big a deal. Just try it; if you do it wrong, then you know that was not the way to do it. So, you are one step closer to knowing how to do it correctly.

Ethan encouraged asking for help and believed in the good-will of most people.

**MBTI Interpretation.** Ethan's MBTI personality profile indicates a preference toward Introversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judging – ISTJ personality type. He appears to prefer to focus his attention on his own inner world. He likely prefers to use his eyes, ears, and other senses to acquire information outside of himself. He also appears to make decisions by thinking objectively, and predicting the logical consequences. The profile indicates a preference for living in a planned, orderly way, wanting to regulate life and control it.

Ethan approached life and school in an objective and analytical manner – relying on organization skills and hard-work. He accepted the responsibilities of college and was committed to the goal.

When dealing with the challenge of moving from home to college, Ethan felt calm and composed. His reaction and behaviors were sound and sensible.

In addition, people with similar profiles are thorough and careful with details and procedures. They choose careers that require a technical approach, organization and accuracy. Appropriately, Ethan chose a career in engineering.

Ethan appeared satisfied with the results. Throughout the verbal report, he nodded his head in agreement and asked for a copy of the report and final thesis.

## Chapter V: Discussion

“You need to know that no matter how brilliant you are, a host of other factors like personality, interest, values, discipline, organization, commitment, and reading ability will influence your ability to learn.” (Harrison, 2008)

In this chapter I will explore the themes of this study. Although each participant had a unique experience, there are a number of themes that were common to all of the participants, with some present for two or three of the participants. When exploring the participants’ stories of transitioning from home to college, there were two categories that emerged – first, “themes for a balanced transition” in which the participants described experiences that produced an effective transition; and second, “themes counter-productive to a balanced transition” in which the participants described experiences that inhibited the transition. First, the themes for a balanced transition included hope, assimilation, identity formation, purpose, and self-efficacy. Second, the themes counter-productive to a balanced transition were dependence, unrealized expectations, thinking errors, distractions, and guilt/shame.

### **A Balanced Transition**

**Hope.** All of the participants expressed a sense of hope when describing their move from home to college. There were hopeful both socially and academically, that this transition would turn out for the best. All but one anticipated experiencing an expanded horizon with excitement. One participant, the only extrovert according to the MBTI, looked forward to exploring his new surroundings right away. He was truly excited, not only about a new setting, but about developing a new way to live. Another participant was more tentative, but when feeling comfortable, enjoyed the new college experience. New beginnings were

generally perceived with optimism, an opportunity to experience something different. New relationships were anticipated with excitement and a bit of nervousness, but still with hopefulness. They all expressed a sense of confidence due to their past successes in high school. They acknowledged that facing the academic challenges of college would be difficult but were confident that their level of intelligence, ability to work hard and critical thinking skills would serve them well. The hope of new beginnings popped up several times throughout all of the interviews.

**Assimilation.** All but one participant recognized the challenges of integrating into college. One participant spoke about his move to college as the process of becoming part of a new community, which required flexibility and the ability to acclimate to something unknown. He attributed his successful transition to an ability to adapt, by changing his life style to what it needed to be. He thought that ultimately, excelling came down to whether or not you can adapt. Another participant initially experienced anxiety about adjusting to a whole new experience, fear of making new friends and getting lost on campus. It was especially important for him to form new relationships and acquire a sense of fitting in more. That helped him settle down and focus on the educational piece of college. The third participant was surprised how well he handled the adjustment to college. He expected the transition to be more chaotic than it was. He identified the good friends that he made as a contributing factor to his smooth acclimation. The last participant was enrolled in a program which by design created a communal atmosphere. His greatest challenge was to integrate new knowledge with what was already known with regard to friendships and school achievements. His assimilation was enhanced by his expectations about college being

realized without any surprises. He was able to balance his focus between academics and socialization.

**Identity Formation.** All of the participants addressed becoming an individual, cultivating a sense of uniqueness from others, and forming new affiliations, while at the same time remaining connected to a support system. Each participant experienced a moment of separation from their support network – parents, family and established friends. One participant saw this as both positive and negative. It developed autonomy and provided freedom to make your own decisions, and make new encounters, both good and bad. He believed that autonomy meant an awareness of the things you do, the things you think about, and being able to say that this is who you are – simply learning who you are and acting upon it. He was interested in how to blend his past experiences with who he wanted to be in college. He then formulated who he wanted to be in college and stuck to it. Another participant thought that this identity formation process took place for him in high school, which helped him navigate the transition to college. The last two participants share a similar experience with regard to identity. They both recognized a need for self-awareness, and experienced freedom to grow and change during this transition. Another common factor was an appreciation for the new way of relating to family, particularly parents. They came to accept and value the interdependence of their support system.

**Purpose.** All of the participants had a purpose in mind to accomplish while attending college. Each one had an idea of a goal, something that was relevant, a focus. The focus was either primarily academic or social, or somewhere in between. The first participant was deliberate in seeking a new niche, utilizing his hard work ethic and determination to establish a social system in a novel environment. He had an expectation of freedom. He

acknowledged fully investing himself in a romantic attachment. He also expected to do well academically. The second participant was initially focused on his social surroundings. Once that was established, he turned his focus to an academic purpose, balanced with managing his social needs. The third participant had a similar experience as the second participant; he was attentive to his social setting, but intentionally shifted his vision onto an academic pursuit. These two participants shared identical MBTI types. The last participant glanced at his social circumstances and moved quickly to academics. It was helpful that the group that he was a part of were all focused students. He described a well-balanced atmosphere -- when they needed to study, they studied, but when they want to have fun, they had fun.

**Self-efficacy.** All of the participants indicated an increase in their own capacity to achieve their goals, including a successful transition to college. This theme appeared to be an important process. Independence was unanimously named a part of feeling competent. Competency manifested in a variety of forms, including choosing to be your own person, being responsible, and making decisions for yourself. The participants identified an ability to self-govern, and felt a sense of self-determination. Responsibility was another characteristic that each participant incorporated. One participant paired responsibility with maturity, viewing it as the freedom to do the things you are supposed to do. His advice to seniors in High School was to be responsible and go to class. Another participant identified his work ethic as the foundation of responsibility. He paired responsibility with thinking skills. He identified the long term benefits of making sure that things get done. The third participant applied various skills for being responsible: critical thinking, time management, problem solving, and organization. The last participant stressed the importance of character development: self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-discipline, along with time-



management and problem-solving skills. He also pointed out that mistakes happen to everyone; making room for errors is a vital part of growth and self-efficacy.

### **Counter-productive to Transition**

**Dependence.** All of the participants experienced some form of dependence on their support system during the transition from home to college. Three of the participants had a romantic attachment that was established in high school. The first participant perceived this attachment as his primary support system. When this relationship dissolved, he acknowledged feeling isolated and detached from any support. The last participant broke off his romantic attachment soon after starting college, and identified this as the hardest part of his transition. The second and third participants acknowledged feeling a fear of the unknown. The second participant remained enmeshed with his family until he felt comfortable in the new environment. He felt intimidated for the first few months and went home nearly every weekend. He depended on his family for encouragement in order to get through the transition. Two of the participants felt unprepared in certain situations to make it on their own, identifying a lack of skills, such as doing laundry, making the right decisions, and being prepared for the academic challenges. Two of the participants turned away from the support of parents, and did not want to accept it even when offered.

**Unrealized Expectations.** Two of the participants experience unrealized expectations. The first participant had an expectation of freedom to do what he wanted to do, which he did. The surprise came in the form of consequences for actions and disappointment that doing what he thought he'd wanted did not meet his expectations. He also expected to do well academically. He expected his romantic relationship to provide for social needs and support. It hurt when the relationship broke apart and he felt out-of-control. The second

participant stated that his expectations were different than his experiences. He thought college would be an enormous amount of work. In reality, he found that the work load was not as overwhelming as it was mentally challenging. The third participant actually expected the transition to be worse than it was – expected it to be more chaotic, expected crazy roommates. The last participant could not identify any surprises other than how focused his major was.

**Thinking Errors.** All of the participants experienced some form of thinking errors which were identified as a potential hindrance to an effective transition. The first participant had a lack of priority – he was inattentive to things that needed to get done, yet was not appropriately concerned. He thought that his success in high school would carry him through college. He pursued immediate gratification. He stated that knowing why he was doing something did not mean that it was the right thing to do. His essential priority was to have fun. The second participant stated he got lazy and did not work as hard as he should have. Initially, the third participant thought that he needed to detach from his family, but soon learned that this was his primary form of support. In the beginning, his focus was on having a fun experience, and he adopted a poor work ethic. He gave himself messages which encouraged procrastination. He thought that because he did not have to study much in high school that would be true of college as well. He struggled to prioritize all of the responsibilities. The last participant experienced procrastination as well and let things slide until the last minute. He was quick to state that as classes were getting more difficult, procrastination was not a good idea.

**Distractions.** Distractions are a common occurrence in college. All of the participants experienced multiple distractions. The biggest distraction that the first

participant identified was having freedom to do whatever he wanted to do. He spoke of ample opportunity for new experiences and bad decisions. His focus on the romantic attachment was a distraction. His complete focus on social needs and lack of balance with academic responsibilities was a distraction. He could find all kinds of distractions right at his computer. His inattentiveness to responsibilities and lack of self-discipline allowed the distractions to take priority. The second participant identified dorm life as a distraction, with lots of noises and people yelling in the hall. His distress about a new situation was a major distraction for him. He identified hectic emotions and swirling thoughts about school, living alone, self-care, and fulfilling responsibilities. The third participant also identified having fun as a distraction. As with the first participant, his biggest distraction was free will, the freedom to do anything else besides study. He struggled with a lack of structure and prioritizing time. His job took away time from studying, but was needed for living expenses. He felt stressed and worried about how the transition was going to go. He would fall asleep during class time due to an inability to plan ahead and then doing school work into the night. The last participant identified freedom as a distraction as well. He would choose not to go to bed in order to watch a number of movies. The freedom to waste time was a distraction.

**Guilt and Shame.** All of the participants identified feelings of guilt for a particular behavior. The first participant appeared to be critical of himself rather than of the behavior – creating shame. He labeled himself as analytical, with a tendency to over analyze things. He expressed disappointment in himself, in particular for doing whatever he wanted to do -- the exact thing that he expected from moving to college. He began to withdraw when circumstances got the hardest; a broken relationship and doing poorly academically. He stated how he had been groomed to be a successful young man, but did not use these

strengths to his advantage. The second participant expressed guilt for becoming lazy and not working as hard as he should have. He observed other students studying hard and doing the things they were supposed to be doing. This peer modeling was a positive influence for him. He was able to change the behavior and let go of the guilt. He seemed to regret some decisions, such as choosing to play Frisbee golf instead of doing homework, and then paying the price of staying up late to catch up. Both the third and last participants felt guilt for procrastinating. Since they had the ability to manage time, procrastination was perceived by the participants as a compromise to what was important to them, being responsible.

### **Comparison of MBTI Personality Types**

**Similarities.** Isaiah, David, and John share two preferences: Intuition for taking in information; and Perceiving for basic approach to life. David, John, and Ethan share two preferences: Introversion for focusing of attention; and Thinking for making decisions. David and John share all four preferences.

**Differences.** Isaiah has two preferences alone: Extraversion for focusing attention; and Feeling for making decisions. Ethan has two preferences alone: Sensing for taking in information; and Judging for basic approach to life. Isaiah and Ethan do not share any preferences.

## Chapter VI: Conclusions

“You need to know that if you keep remembering why you’re doing all of this, you’ll graduate.” (Harrison, 2008)

“You need to know that if you can find the balance between studying and fun, you’ll graduate.” (Harrison, 2008)

It is time to go full circle back to the original inquiry. What are the experiences of young adults when transitioning from home to college? It is so much more than simply a change of location. The interview was designed to get at the essence of the participants’ experiences. Indeed the results were rich and thick with thoughts and emotions. The central message is that each student used their strengths and internal resources to best navigate this life cycle change according to their individual needs and values. On the other hand, there are factors which inhibit the transition process. Themes that had an impact on the transition from home to college fell into two categories: formation of a balanced transition and counter-productive factors. The participants identified a variety of factors which helped their formation of a balanced transition, including hope, assimilation, identity formation, purpose, and self-efficacy. The factors cited as counter-productive include dependence, unrealized expectations, thinking errors, distractions, and guilt/shame.

It was evident throughout the interviews that all of the participants were hopeful -- they had a positive outlook combined with a feeling of readiness for change. The change each one had in common was experiencing the transition from home to college. Most of the participants were eager to embrace this new beginning. Each participant attested to the need to personally adapt in order to assimilate to the new environment. Freedom to be autonomous helped each participant formulate an individual identity and new affiliations.

The participants were focused on a purpose, either academic or social. Each participant believed in their own ability to be independent – self-efficacy.

Fear of the unknown was a common factor which fostered dependence on a support system. Another impediment to a smooth transition was unrealized expectations, such as an expectation of freedom and the anticipated effects. Thinking errors and distractions at times got in the way of attaining success. Feelings of guilt or shame were evident in each interview, but not throughout.

It appeared that each participant experienced these themes with varying intensity, particularly the counter-productive factors. All of the participants cited the themes for a balanced transition. The three participants who had the lower GPA tended to get stuck by the factors that inhibit the transition. The participant who had the higher GPA also experienced the counter-productive factors, but was able to shift back to a balanced transition quickly.

The process that each participant experienced when forming a balanced transition seemed to correlated to their individual MBTI personality typology. The one participant who had a social focus of attention was the only Extraversion type. He was the only one to make decisions based on Feelings. The participant who had the higher GPA was the only one to use Sensing for taking in information – gathered all the factors and pertinent information. He approached life from a sense of justice, right and wrong, and was the only Judging type. The other two had identical personality types and shared two different preferences with Isaiah and Ethan. It was uncanny how well the personality types fit each participant.

This transition from home to college can be one of the most exciting moments in a lifetime. It can also be fraught with challenges and fear. The stories of these young men can provide hope and direction for those seeking to guide the students preparing for such a

transition. I think that the internal processes that these participants utilized can potentially provide a framework for a model of strategies based on personality traits that address the multidimensional requisites for how to approach this life cycle change.

### **Self-of-the-Researcher**

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:21 (KJV)

What a journey this project has been. I have grown, not only as a novice researcher, but most notably from the courage these young men exhibited. By intentionally setting aside my biases about this topic, I was able to “wear their shoes,” as they say. What a gift it has been. My initial intention was to inform students looking toward this stage as to how to most successfully navigate the transition. My own learning was far broader and personal. I look at the themes: hope, assimilation, identity formation, purpose, and self-efficacy. All are constructs that would equip us for any number of life cycle changes. These participants modeled for me what is necessary for change to happen. One must have hope of a positive outcome to be motivated to change one’s circumstances. One needs tools and capacity to assimilate in the new culture. Change forces one to look at how it will impact the way we see ourselves, one’s self-identity. There must be a reason, purpose, for the change. One must perceive that change is possible – self-efficacy to change. I aspire to meet the challenge of possibilities from these references. Am I hopeful? Can I adapt? How do I perceive the change impacting my wellness? What is the benefit for change? Is change possible?

Are there obstacles to a smooth transition? Most definitely – each participant experienced some. Some of these obstacles were simply part of the normal transition from home to college, some originated from family norms, some were a result of choices made, and some were emotional responses. I found it remarkable how they processed these

hindrances. Not only could they name the obstacle, but they were also capable of identifying coping skills used to proceed through the challenges. This was often done without evaluating themselves as good or bad, without avoiding the obstacle, but by actually accepting it. As stated above, I have much to learn from them. If I were to put my parenting hat back on, I would say that these students are developing into thoughtful and articulate men who will contribute greatly to society. As a student myself, I hope to evaluate my own obstacles to success from a different vantage point, acceptance – “being comfortable with discomfort.” This is my new antidote for shame. I am grateful to these participants as well as my supervisor who so eloquently modeled this concept for me. As a researcher, this study peaks my interest in the links between hope and self-efficacy; how are hope and optimism, identity and self-concept, guilt and shame related to one another?

One last personal observation; there was a common thread underlying all of these participants – an intact and supportive family. Each participant perceived and utilized this support system differently, but in a way that fit with his own needs during this transition.

### **Future Research**

There are many possibilities for future research on this subject. As stated previously, it would be interesting to include females in this study. There are other ideas as well, to do a follow up interview one or two years later, to look at the long-term process of transitioning from home to college. It might be interesting to see how other unique factors might influence the transition, such as age at graduation, socioeconomic status of parents, or even birth order. Each of these participants expressed having a secure support system from their families; did that have an impact on the transition for the participant? Looking from the lens of the parents, what was their perception of the transition for their child as well as for



themselves? This life cycle transition has a ripple effect on many systems, and the ability to navigate well impacts the wellbeing of each person.

I found it fascinating that the personality traits of the participants in this study appeared to be an indicator of how effectively the participants transitioned. There is potential for looking further into this relationship. I would also recommend using an attachment perspective, social learning theory, and other developmental models to take a closer look at this transition. My hope is that this study contributes to future research, providing implications for how to that make the transition from home to college a little bit smoother and offering a model on how to effectively prepare for this life cycle change.

## References

- ACT Profile Report – National: Section II, Academic Achievement, Graduating Class 2007. Retrieved at <http://www.act.org/news/data/07/pdf/National2007.pdf>
- Bayne, R. (1997). *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: A critical review and practical guide*. London, UK: Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd.
- Blaine, G. B., Jr., & McArthur, C. C. (1971). Problems connected with studying. In G. Blaine, Jr. & C. McArthur (Eds.), *Emotional problems of the student* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 163-184). New York: Meredith Corporation.
- Bowler, M. (2009, August). Dropouts loom large for schools. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/articles/education/best-colleges/2009/08/19/>
- Calvin, A. (2000). Use of standardized tests in admissions in postsecondary institutions of higher education. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 6(1), 20-32.
- Clark, M. R. (2005). Negotiating the freshmen year: Challenges and strategies among first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development* 46(3), 296-316.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and Quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fox, M. J. (2010). *A funny thing happened on the way to the future...: Twists and turns and lessons learned*. New York: Hyperion.
- Harrison, H. H., Jr. (2008). *1001 things every college student needs to know (Like buying your books before exams start)*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc.

- Kelly, J. T., Kendrick, M. M., Newgent, R. A., & Lucas, C. J. (2007). Strategies for student transition to college: A proactive approach. *College Student Journal* 41(4), 1021-1035.
- Mattanah, J. F., Hancock, G. R., & Brand, B. L. (2004). Parental attachment, separation-individuation, and college student adjustment: A structural equation analysis of mediational effects. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 51(2), 213-225.
- Moon, S. M. & Trepper, T. S. (1996). Case study research. In D. Sprenkle & S. Moon (Eds.), *Research methods in family therapy* (pp. 393-410). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Myers, I. B. & McCaulley, M. H. (1988). *Manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Paul, E. L., & Brier, S. (2001). Friendsickness in the transition to college: Precollege predictors and college adjustment correlates. *Journal of Counseling & Development* 79(1), 77-89.
- Pritchard, M. E., Wilson, G. S., & Yamnitz, B. (2007). What predicts adjustment among college students? A longitudinal panel study. *Journal of American College Health* 56(1), 15-22.
- Quenk, N. L. (2000). *Essentials of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Rath, T. (2007). *Strengths finder 2.0*. New York: Gallup Press.
- Schultheiss, D. E. P., & Blustein, D. L. (1994). Role of adolescent-parent relationships in college student development and adjustment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 41(2), 248-255.

## Appendix A: Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

**Title:** Navigating the Life Transition from Home to College

<b>Investigator:</b>	<b>Research Sponsor:</b>	<b>IRB Administrator</b>
Anita Bont bonta@my.uwstout.edu	Dr. Terri Karis, Ph.D. HDFS <a href="mailto:karist@uwstout.edu">karist@uwstout.edu</a>	152 Vocational Rehab Bldg. University of WI - Stout Menomonie, WI 54751 715-232-2477

**Description:** You will participate in a face-to-face interview pertaining to your experiences during the transition from home to college; as well as complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The interview will consist of eight to ten questions asking you about your experience with this transition. The Myers-Briggs assessment indicates personal strengths and how people view others and the world.

**Risks and Benefits:** It is possible that you might experience some emotional discomfort when answering questions related to personal topics. The benefit of this information is to deepen understanding and increase awareness about your experiences of navigating the transition from home to college. This information will provide a basis for possible future study regarding this life cycle transition and help inform best practices in the counseling field.

**Time Commitment and Payment:** The interview and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator will take approximately one and a half hours. There is no payment for participation.

**Confidentiality:**

Your answers are strictly confidential. Your name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

**Statement of Consent:**

By answering the interview questions, you are agreeing to the conditions listed in the consent form for participating in the project entitled, *Navigating the Life Transition from Home to College*.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions

#### **Title: Navigating the Life Transition from Home to College**

1. How would you describe what it was like when you moved from home to college?
2. How do you think your high school experience affected this transition?
3. In what ways did you get involved in extracurricular activities on college campus? Why or why not? How does this level of involvement compare to your involvement in extracurricular activities during high school?
4. What kinds of support did you receive from your family during this transition? How important was the support from family and pre-college friends in your transition? How did the support or lack of support affect your transition? How do you think your relationships affected this transition?
5. What things have you encountered since moving to college that influenced you in a positive or helpful way? What things might have been considered a hindrance or a distraction to your success?
6. What were some of your expectations before moving to college? How have your experiences compared to these expectations?
7. When you were planning for this life transition, what emotions do you remember experiencing? When you were going through this life transition, what emotions do you remember experiencing? How do you feel about the transition now?
8. What does it mean to you to be independent?
9. What personal strengths do you possess that are needed to make this change successful overall? How well do you think you utilized these strengths? Are there things that got in the way of utilizing these strengths?
10. What skills did you bring that were helpful in your transition? If you were to advise seniors in High School about preparing for college, what would you say?