

AN EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS
ATTENDING A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE AND THEIR PARENTS

by

ALICIA DAWN CAUDILL COLBURN

(Under the Direction of Merrily Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. The study was conducted at a two-year institution in the Southeast. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight students and one of their parents.

Eight research questions guided this study:

1. How did students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How did the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?
3. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?

6. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?
7. Did qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Did qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

Findings provided information to add to the literature on college student and parent relationships at two-year colleges. Second-year students attending a two-year institution have close relationships with their parents. Parents and students communicate frequently. Parents wanted students to complete their degrees, and they worked to reduce stress in the students' lives to they could accomplish this goal. Parents were not as engaged in their students' personal decisions as they were in their academic decisions.

Student qualitative data findings supported the findings of student scores on the SDTLA. The majority of student scores fell in congruence with normative data for sophomore-level students. It appears the students were progressing developmentally as would be expected for sophomore level students. Students were better able to articulate their experiences in each of the investigated SDTLA areas than their parents were.

INDEX WORDS: College students, Parents, Two-year college, Community college, College student-parent relationships

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Jean Whitehead Linkmire. I know she would have been so proud.

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I imagined writing my acknowledgements on many drives to and from Athens, Georgia to attend classes. For me, this would be the pinnacle of my experience, my last official writing task as a doctoral student. Now that the time has come, it is hard to know exactly where to start. When we began our doctoral experience, we were told to remember that it is a very individual and personal experience, different for each student. That has been true for me. But, it is not an experience I could have successfully completed on my own. There are so many who have inspired, encouraged, and supported me. This is my meager attempt to offer my sincerest gratitude.

First, I must thank my committee members. Dr. Merrily Dunn, Dr. Diane Cooper, Dr. Pat Daugherty, and Dr. Richard Mullendore were all gracious enough to take this journey with me. They supported me in my change of topics and a longer process than perhaps they initially anticipated.

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I first met Dr. Richard Mullendore several years ago when we were on the same return flight from a NODA conference. During the layover, he was kind enough to invite me for a Coke and to talk with me about our profession. He is also a colleague to my mentor, Becky Smith. I am so grateful he was willing to serve on my committee as I have long admired the work he does for students and for the profession of student affairs.

In addition to the faculty at the University of Georgia, I have also had the fortunate opportunity to have my life shaped by many other wonderful teachers. I think often of my undergraduate composition and literature professor, Dr. Beth Daugherty, who taught me so much about writing, reading, and editing. I will never forget how painstaking it was to write my first five-page final paper for my freshman course. I could not dream at that time that I would be writing documents over 100 pages in length. She taught me how important it is to work with students individually and to encourage them always to learn to find their own voice. I am also grateful to my college professor, Dr. Paul Laughlin, who taught my non-western religion course. He truly showed me how to look at the world in a different perspective and this I always keep I mind when I am working with students.

It would not seem fitting to research students' relationships with their parents without also acknowledging my own parents, John and Pat Caudill. It is difficult to find words to express

my sincerest gratitude for their endless love, support, and encouragement. I am so grateful that they made attending College an unquestionable step in my life's path. They allowed me to choose the college I would attend and supported me in taking full advantage of all of the opportunities of being an undergraduate. In working with students, I know that this is not the case for many of them. I am thankful my parents support my choice of careers and understand that I will probably never leave college.

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In my ten years as a practitioner, I have been truly blessed to cross the paths of so many wonderful and talented students at the University of South Carolina, Florida Southern College, Mercer University, and Gainesville State College. Each student I have known has shaped me and taught me something about who I am and who I want to be as a professional. If the work I do makes it just a little easier for these students and those who follow to achieve their goals, this has all truly been worthwhile.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Operational Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts	6
Significance of the Study.....	7
Limitations of the Study	7
Organization of the Study	8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
Relationships Between College Students and their Parents	10
Chickering and Reisser’s Model of Student Development	22
The Role and Purpose of Two-Year Colleges in the United States	24
Summary	26
3 METHODOLOGY	27
Qualitative Research.....	28
Interpretative Approach	29
Subjectivity Statement	30

Sampling Techniques	32
Ethical Considerations.....	34
Data Collection Procedures	35
Data Collection	39
Data Analysis.....	40
Reliability and Validity	41
Campus Profile.....	42
Summary	44
4 FINDINGS.....	45
The Participants.....	47
Themes	53
Student Descriptions of their Relationships with their Parents	53
Parent Descriptions of Their Relationship with their Students	61
Student Perceptions of Parental Influence on their Academic Decisions	73
Parent Perceptions of their Influence on Student Academic Decisions	78
Student Perceptions of Parental Influence on Personal Decisions.....	85
Parental Perceptions of their Influence on Students' Personal Decisions.....	86
Do Qualitative Data Findings Reflect Quantitative Results Regarding Students' Development?	88
Summary	106
5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	109
Discussion.....	112

Implications for Student Development	120
Implications for Practice in Higher Education	124
Recommendations for Future Research	126
Summary	129
REFERENCES	131
APPENDICES	135
A RECRUITMENT FLIER.....	135
B RECRUITMENT LETTER TO FAMILIES	136
C INFORMED CONSENT FORM	137
D INTERVIEW GUIDE-STUDENT QUESTIONS.....	139
E INTERVIEW GUIDE-PARENT QUESTIONS.....	142
F ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BASED ON SDTLA RESULTS .	145

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Student Participant Demographics	50
Table 2: Parent Participant Demographics.....	52
Table 3: Summary of SDTLA Tasks and Subtasks.....	89
Table 4: Summary of Notable Scores on the SDTLA	91

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A wise student affairs practitioner and mentor once said to her young protégé, “Remember, students are the reason for your day, not the interruption.” Students are the focus of the profession of student affairs as we strive to challenge them and support them. Students seek our support but also rely on others for encouragement. Often, they look to their parents. For student affairs practitioners who take the above advice of the mentor to heart, it quickly becomes clear that without the parents of these college students, there would be no students to serve each day. As the first members of the Millennial generation graduated from high school and entered college in fall of 2000, numerous articles began to appear detailing a different type of involved parent. Articles citing anecdotes of tight parental connections to their students can be found in many forms of media from the *New York Times* to the *Farmer’s Almanac*. It seems everyone is trying to understand the changing relationship between parents and their college-aged children.

In *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, Howe and Strauss (2000) foreshadowed the increase of parental involvement in the lives of college students. Their work identified the generational characteristics of children born between 1982 and 2000. Howe and Strauss termed this generation the “Millennials.” Among many other traits, these students experienced protected childhoods in which safety and security was a primary focus. Upon entering college they maintain close relationships with their parents, who have protected them, traveled with them, and taken them to their workplaces (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Howe and Strauss hypothesized that parents of Millennials have been involved in their children's lives to make up for a lack of closeness with their own parents.

In 2003, the same authors further investigated the impact of the Millennials on college campus through their work, *"Millennials Go To College."* Howe and Strauss listed seven traits of this generation of students. They wrote, "Over the next few years, evidence will mount that Millennials are: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving" (pp. 51-52). They went on to describe the impact the parents of these students will have on college campuses. They wrote:

On freshman arrival day, college presidents give moms and dads the usual warm up speeches about 'up to now it's been your turn, now it is our turn.' But today a new twist is required. Not only must institutions of higher education pay more attention to parents in recruiting, they must also, like it or not, allow parents to be more engaged in campus life. (p. 70)

The parent-student relationship is changing the culture on college campuses. It is not uncommon in "student affairs circles" to hear stories about students walking into campus offices, and when faced with minor challenges such as needed signatures or fee payment, handing their cellular phones to faculty or staff and asking, "Can you speak to my mom?" This close connection of parents and students affects services and programs provided on campus. Current enrollment statistics, while indicating how many students colleges can expect to serve, cannot accurately indicate the number truly served. Faculty and staff now strive to not only meet the needs and demands of students but also those of their parents.

Read national listserves, attend student affairs conferences, and scan current magazines and newspapers, and it is clear that the parents of Millennials now bring their influence and close relationships with their children into the college arena. A *Wall Street Journal* article stated, “Helicopter parents are going to college....A new generation of overinvolved parents are flooding campus orientations, meddling in registration and interfering with students’ dealings with professors, administrators and roommates, school officials say” (Shellenbarger, 2005, July 28). Richard Mullendore, a University of Georgia professor and former vice president for student affairs was interviewed for the article. He described the cell phone as “the world’s longest umbilical cord” (Shellenbarger, 2005, July 28). A November 21, 2004, article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* highlighted the involvement of a mother of a Georgia Tech student. Simmons wrote, “When [the mother’s] not there, she’s calling or e-mailing her only child, reminding her of a homework deadline, an upcoming exam or class registration” (2004, November 21). Howe and Strauss (2003) wrote:

Many of today’s parents have so much invested, emotionally and financially, in their children’s well-being that they cannot quickly and entirely relinquish their role. This means colleges and universities must negotiate carefully with parents, manage their expectations, and understand that many of them may be experiencing their own rite of passage. (p. 70)

Current writing on this topic of parental involvement indicates that parents appear to be tightly connected to the lives of their college students. What is not yet known is the impact these relationships have on students’ abilities to develop during their college years. A *Time Magazine* article, “Grow Up? Not so Fast” highlighted the challenges of recent college

graduates to “grow up, get jobs, and pay bills” (Grossman, 2005, February 21, p. 44).

Commenting on the trends of transferring often from college to college and taking longer to graduate, Grossman wrote, “College is the institution most of us entrust to watch over the transition to adulthood, but somewhere along the line the transition has slowed to a crawl” (2005, February 21, p. 44). Making the impact of parental involvement on college students even less clear, Keppler, Mullendore and Carey (2005) stated, “While there is a plethora of research available on generational differences and today’s college student, most of the information about parents is anecdotal and generally found in magazines and newspapers” (p. xi). Clearly, there are many unanswered questions regarding the effects parents have on their college students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study investigated the influence parents have on students’ personal and academic decision making. Using a framework of expected student development as outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), this project sought to determine if students accomplished expected levels of development at the sophomore level and how their parents influenced this development.

The foundations for this study are supported by research on college student development in which many theories explain the expected positive psycho-social and cognitive-structural growth and development that should occur for students as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education. This study sought not only to define the impact that parents have on students’ decision making processes, but to also determine if parents exerted any

influence, positively or negatively, on the students' expected development during the first two years of college.

To explore this topic an interpretative, qualitative research design was utilized. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with students attending a two-year college in the Southeast and one of their parents. The interviews were evaluated to find themes which provided understanding about student and parent relationships.

Research Questions

To explore the parent-student relationship, this study looked specifically at the following questions:

1. How did students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How did the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?
3. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?
6. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?

7. Did qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Did qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

Operational Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

For clarity and consistency, the following are definitions of key terms and concepts that were utilized in this study.

College student is defined as a student enrolled in the two-year institution in this study. For the purposes of this study, college students were students who had completed at least two semesters of course work at the institution and were in their second year as a student.

Students in this study were also traditionally aged students between the ages of 18 and 22 years old. Earned credit was not a consideration in this study as many students attending two-year institutions take varying course loads in their first two semesters.

Parent is defined as the birth parent or other legal guardian with whom the student had a parent-child relationship.

Two-year college is defined as an institution whose primary purpose is to provide freshman and sophomore level courses. The courses at the institution are designed to prepare students for transfer to four-year baccalaureate-granting institutions. The two-year college offers a liberal arts foundation of course work. Often, two-year colleges are also referred to as

community colleges. The college in this study, however, does not provide the technical training programs often found in most community colleges.

Significance of the Study

As referenced above, little substantive research exists exploring relationships between Millennial college students and their parents. Even less research involves students attending two-year colleges. This qualitative study provides a foundation for further research and understanding.

Results of this study will help inform the work of college administrators, faculty, and staff as they provide programs and services for both students and parents. Additionally, it provides information that can be shared with parents of college students and help educate them on the most effective and educational ways to be involved with their students during their collegiate experience. Findings may also inform student development theory and its application to student growth. Learning how parents are influencing development may impact future interpretation of theory.

Ultimately, it is hoped this study will positively impact students. The results provide direction to both college personnel and parents as they strive to provide appropriate challenges and support mechanisms that encourage healthy decision-making processes and positive student growth and development.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are inherent in any research design. With so little research existing to explore the topic of current college student and parent relationships, the qualitative design allowed the flexibility for informative description to surface. However, the study included a small

number of participants attending one two-year college in the Southeast. Broad implications should be made cautiously.

This study was conducted at one two-year college in the Southeast. This college's key mission is to prepare students for transfer to four-year degree programs and focus on transfer to careers is secondary. Therefore, its mission is not exactly like that of a traditional "community college." When considering the findings of this study, it is important for readers to be mindful of the limitation that data were collected from only one institution with a mission that may be different from that of other similar colleges.

Student and parent participants were volunteers. This form of selection may have created a bias in their views. There may be qualities inherent in students and parents who volunteered that are not consistent with people who chose not to volunteer.

The interview participants self-reported their information. There was no certain way to determine if they were providing accurate, truthful stories. Participants may have altered their stories to avoid embarrassment or experiences they believe could have been perceived as negative.

Finally, the qualitative design of this study required the researcher to serve as the instrument. I am employed at the two-year institution and also work with parent orientation programs. There may be inherent bias due to my experiences at the institution.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion. The introduction section overviews the foundation for the study and its significance. It also outlines the purpose of the study and the research questions, defines

key terms, and states the study's limitations. The literature review explores current literature findings around the topics of Millennial college students and their relationships with their parents. Additionally, it provides a summary of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model for psychosocial development as well as a description of the role and purpose of two-year colleges. The methodology chapter explains qualitative research methodology, interpretative design, sample selection, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness and authenticity, ethical considerations, and a profile of the two-year institution in the study. The findings section includes profiles of the interview participants and descriptions of the themes that emerged from the interviews as they addressed the purpose of the study and research questions. Finally, the discussion chapter explores the findings in depth and provides direction for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study investigated the influence parents have on students' personal and academic decision making processes. Information found in current literature provides a backdrop for understanding today's students and their relationships with their parents. Additionally, it is important to explore the student development model underlying the research conducted in this study. The following literature review is organized into three main sections. The first section examines current research on the relationships between college students and their parents, with a focus on the characteristics of Millennial students. The second section provides an overview of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model of student development. The final section provides a profile of the role and purpose of two-year or community colleges in the United States.

Relationships Between College Students and Their Parents

When conducting a search under the broad topic of "college students and parents," many articles surface. However, upon closer examination one clear theme arises. Current literature focuses greatly on the increased involvement of parents in the lives of college students since the year 2000.

Attempting to define the role of parents in the life of a college is a challenge that has lasted almost as long as American colleges have existed. Until 1961, American colleges and universities operated under the guise of *in loco parentis*, literally meaning "in the place of the parents." "In placing the educational institution in the parents' shoes, the doctrine permitted

the institution to exert almost untrammelled authority over students' lives" (Kaplin & Lee, 1997, p. 6). This concept indicated that students, when they were in college, were not ready to function without the direction and discipline of parental figures. Therefore, while students were on campuses, the colleges acted in the role of a parent through discipline, decision-making, rules, and expectations. When the tumultuous 1960s arrived, students sought independence and wanted separation from their parents as well as from the institutions acting as parents. Kaplin and Lee (1997) wrote, "the loosening of the lockstep pattern of educational preparation that led students directly from high school to college to graduate work...all combined to make the *in loco parentis* relationship between the institution and student less and less tenable" (p. 8). Finally, *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961) "implicitly rejected the *in loco parentis* concept" (Kaplin & Lee, 1997, p. 137).

In 1974 students' individual rights and privacy were further protected when the Buckley Amendment, known as the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA), was enacted by Congress. This Amendment protects the privacy of official student educational records. Without expressed permission from students, colleges and universities are forbidden to share information about student records with parents or other constituents. As parents become more involved in the lives of their students, the stipulations of this amendment provide strict guidelines surrounding their interaction with college faculty and personnel. For parents accustomed to viewing their students' high school grades and performance on-line on a daily basis, the change to the college environment can be challenging. Ironically, the members of the generation of students who fought for the Buckley Amendment are now the parents of

current students who are seeking more information from colleges about individual student performance.

While federal law limits the information that can be shared with parents, it does not suppress their desire to be more aware of their students' experience. The organization College Parents of America illustrates this point. College Parents of America is a membership association that provides college information for parents of students as young as seventh grade. The organization seeks to advocate for parents of children who attend or will attend college. Additionally, it provides resource information on a variety of topics, including financing college, admissions processes, and academic success strategies. In March 2006, College Parents of America published results of a survey that shows strong parent-student connection in college preparation, search, and selection activities. The press release for the survey indicated, "The survey also reveals a very high expectation by parents of continued involvement in their children's lives as their [children] move on to college" (Retrieved July 20, 2006) from <http://collegeparents.org/cpa/about-press.html?n=1310>). The survey, administered on-line to 525 parent members of the association, showed 48.8 % of the participants plan to communicate with their son or daughter two to three times per week when their student is in college. High percentages of survey participants also indicated they are "most concerned" or "very concerned" about academics, finances, and health and safety. Of those surveyed, 5.3 % anticipated their student would attend a public two-year institution. While this survey is at best an anecdotal documentation of a small sampling of parents who belong to this organization, the fact that parents are joining this organization and are being questioned about their planned involvement in their students' collegiate experience is telling

of a changing relationship between students and their parents. Bers (2005) study supported this concept. She wrote, “For community colleges, parents are important not only because they may influence their students’ choice of the institution and may finance all or part of the costs of attendance. Parents are potential students at community colleges” (p. 414).

Howe & Strauss (2000) were among the first to provide a portrait of this generation of students and their connection to their parents. Most commonly termed “Millennials,” these students were born in 1982 or after and began graduating from high school in the year 2000. Howe & Strauss (2000) wrote, “As a group, Millennials are unlike any other youth generation living in memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse” (p. 4). Millennial children are wanted, protected, and worthy (Howe & Strauss, 2004). Their parents may have gone to great lengths to conceive them and then raised them in an era of safety and security. Howe & Strauss defined the connections between this generation of students and their parents by stating, “...today’s adults define themselves in terms of their children” (p. 110). Parents connect to other parents through their children, through a “child-derived social structure” (p. 110). Without the active socio-political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, such as feminism and civil rights, that require their energy, parents now find themselves focusing on their children (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

This strong connection between parents and children may not be all positive. Murano (2004), in an article titled, *A Nation of Wimps*, wrote, “Parents are going to ludicrous lengths to take the lumps and bumps out of life for their children. However well-intentioned, parental hyperconcern and microscrutiny have the net effect of making kids more fragile” (p. 58). Murano (2004) went on to describe the detriments of this close connection between

parents and students who have easy access to communication tools such as e-mail and cellular phones that provide almost constant contact. She then explained, “The perpetual access to parents infantilizes the young, keeping them in a permanent state of dependency. Whenever the slightest difficulty arises, they’re constantly referring to their parents for guidance (Murano, 2004, p. 61). White (2005) went further to point out that these close connections may prove challenging for universities. Frequent communication means parents have more knowledge about student life and therefore more expectations of college and universities to provide for their students. She stated, “In short, administrators have a difficult task when sorting out the complex and not always consistent obligations imposed on them by laws and court decisions defining the relationship between them and their students” (White, 2005, p. B16).

In 2000, Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, and Ward-Roof published a study summarizing what parents want from the college experience. To gather data in their research, the authors created an interactive website for parents. Their study found parents have the following primary goals for their first-year college students: Job preparation, quality education, maturity/independence, graduation, fun/enjoyment, academic success, friendships/networks” (p. 34). Based on the current climate of parental involvement, it can be assumed that parents are going to do all they can to be sure their students address these goals.

The literature also provided some suggestions as to why parents are so involved in their students’ experience. One aspect that may help define, in part, the involvement of parents is the rising cost to attend college – a bill that is often funded by parents (Keppler, Mullendore, & Carey, 2005). Hartigan (2003) wrote, “A lot of families these days feel as if they are facing

college costs without enough funds on the line. Salaries are flat, jobs are scarce, investments haven't fully recovered, and savings are tapped out" (p. 50). Keppler, Mullendore, and Carey (2005) clarified other reasons for parental involvement in the college experience. They indicated, "One answer may be that some parents do not have full confidence in their student's ability to resolve issues independently. The fear of making a costly mistake is great" (Keppler et al., 2005, p. 2). Additionally, these authors described parental guilt, hope that their involvement will change a situation, need for clearer information and receiving mixed messages as further reasons for involvement. They encouraged student affairs practitioners to understand parental motivations as they craft responses and programs (Keppler et al., 2005, p. 2-3).

Several research studies have been conducted to explore various aspects of parental involvement with college students. Most focus on pre-college relationships and the impact on students once they matriculate in college (eg. Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004; Renk, McKinney, Klein & Oliveros, 2006, Wiseman, Mayseless, Sharabany, 2006; Laible, Carlo & Roesch, 2004; Seibel & Johnson, 2001). Renk, McKinney, Klein, and Oliveros (2006) conducted a study to determine the connection between parenting styles and functioning in female college students. These authors defined four main styles of parenting: authoritarian, characterized by high discipline and low warmth; authoritative, characterized by high levels of discipline and high levels of warmth; indulgent, characterized by low discipline and high warmth; and neglectful, characterized by low discipline and low warmth. Their study indicated "children from different socio-cultural groups whose parents were authoritative (i.e. they provided firm discipline as well as warmth) tended to be well-adjusted and prosocial,

with low levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems” (p. 74). Conversely, they found that indulgent and neglectful parenting styles are least effective for producing college students who can adjust well to the college environment (p. 75). These authors concluded, “specific styles of discipline experienced by female college students as children and their current perceptions of their mothers and fathers were related significantly to the levels of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem that they experience” (p. 84). The current description of Millennial students and their parents’ engagement in their college process may indicate parents are utilizing an indulgent parenting style and this may cause problems for students during their adjustment and acculturation to the college environment.

Following the theme of the influence of parental styles on college student behavior, Seibel and Johnson (2001) wrote, “A wide range of research on parental control indicates that high parental control can adversely influence adolescent development” (p. 473). Their study of 202 undergraduate students explored the connection between parental control and students’ anxiety and life satisfaction. Not surprisingly, students who felt their parents were psychologically controlling indicated they had more anxiety and less satisfaction with life, based on their responses on various instruments. This again supported the concept that parents who use parenting styles with high discipline and low warmth may create college students who have higher anxiety and less satisfaction with life. These studies made it clear that regardless of engagement of parents in the lives of their college students, their relationships will have far-reaching impact on students’ success in college.

Mattanah, Brand and Hancock (2004) investigated the “effects of parental attachment, separation-individuation and college student adjustment” (p. 1). Their study found that “both

a secure attachment relationship to parents and a healthy level of separation-individuation are predictive of positive academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment to college” (p. 11). They also stated that their study demonstrates that “separation-individuation could actually mediate the effects of attachment on adjustment” (p. 11). This may indicate that secure relationships with parents facilitate students’ establishment of autonomous behaviors. Therefore, a strong connection to their parents that allows students to seek support and guidance from their parents appears to assist students in becoming more autonomous. These authors concluded, “individuation in late adolescence occurs in the context of ongoing relationship security, and that adolescents who feel isolated or cut off from supportive others are likely to flounder emotionally and have difficulty adjusting during important transitions” (p. 14). Thus, the role of appropriately supportive parents is key to a students’ success in college.

In a study of college students, Laible, Carlo & Roesch (2004) found, “Adolescents with secure attachment to parents reported higher levels of self-esteem than those reporting insecure attachments” (p. 711). Additionally, they wrote, “the relation between parent attachment and self-esteem was significantly stronger for males than for females” (p. 712). This study underlined the importance of parent-child relationships prior to a student’s arrival at college, perhaps suggesting that more work needs to be done with pre-college families to ensure students are best prepared for the college transition. Again, this study did not provide insight as to the most helpful types of relationships that should form between parents and students once the students are enrolled in college.

Ryan, Solberg, and Brown (1996) conducted a study looking at parental relationships and their impact on community college students. They looked specifically at how family dysfunction and parental attachment influenced students' career search skills. Family dysfunction involved "parent-child overinvolvement, parent-child role reversal, marital conflict, and perceived parental fear of separation" (p. 85). Positive attachment between students and their parents included an "enduring affective bond" (p. 85). The study found that students who have a secure, healthy attachment to their parents exhibit stronger career self-efficacy. Hence, students who can rely on their parents during a stressful time, such as during a job search, are more likely to feel confident in their career search skills. Family dysfunction had a negative impact on career self-efficacy (p. 87). Thus, it becomes clear that parenting relationships prior to the student's matriculation as well as during the time a student is in college are pivotal in students' future skills and abilities.

Parental education levels also impact the experience of students in community colleges. Lee, et al. (2004) looked at the relationship between varying parental educational levels and the experiences for their students in community colleges. Their results show that parental education level is connected to annual income (higher levels of education equate to higher levels of income). Additionally, "the greatest proportion of African American/Black students had parents with a community college level education; the greatest proportion of White, North Asian, Pacific Islander, and South Asian students had parents with a four-year college level of education" (p. 5). This study emphasized the importance of looking at parental education at various levels, not just higher education or no higher education.

In addition to literature that explored the impact of the pre-college parent and student relationships, research has also been conducted that looks specifically at students who attend community or two-year colleges once they matriculate. Currently, most research of these students involves the parental role in students' decisions regarding which college to attend (Bers, 2005; Bers & Galowich, 2002). Bers' (2005) study attempted to fill the gap in literature surrounding community college students and their parents. The purpose of this study was:

to address the lack of information about parents of community college students, to identify how they define "success" for their students, and to identify potential activities and messages community colleges might adopt to improve the recruitment of traditionally aged students, gain the confidence of parents whose children attend community college, and clarify to parents what the community college can and cannot provide. (p. 414)

Key findings from this study indicated that parents tend to over-estimate their students' academic ability prior to the start of their time in a community college. Bers (2005) found that parents believed their students were more prepared for college than the students actually were (p. 422). Parents tend to utilize a student's high school ranking as the only measure of academic preparation. This study also indicated that parents expected community colleges to prepare students for academic achievement, "including earning credits and GPAs that will transfer, improving academic skills, gaining a sense of direction, and improving self-confidence" (p. 424). Finally, parents were found to play a key role in a student's college choice process. Major factors influencing a family decision for students to attend a community college include opportunities for students to work while attending school, the option to live

with parents, affordability, chance to explore academic options, and reputation of the college (Bers, 2005).

Bers and Galowich (2002) also conducted a qualitative study focusing on parents' roles in students' choice to attend a community college. Major findings from this study indicated that most parents believe their students had always planned to attend college. Additionally, they found, "The participants had not engaged in extensive college search activities...It appeared from comments parents made about their sons and daughters that most of them (students) did not have strong academic skills or a focused interest in a particular major" (p. 72). Parents also felt a need to be involved in students' advisement and registration process. Bers and Galowich (2002) wrote, "Respondents were very vocal about their expectations that they, as parents, should be more involved in their sons' or daughters' advising and registration" (p. 73). Finally, parents expressed an interest in receiving more information from the college regarding their students' academic performance. (Bers & Galowich, 2002). Findings from this study may indicate that parents of students in community colleges see the transition to college as more fluid than that of students attending four-year institutions and living on campus. Parents appeared to feel a connection to their students' academic experience and wished to be more informed by the college on aspects of the college experience.

Strom and Strom (2005) studied parent and child relationships between students who live at home with their parents while attending college. Their research had a strong connection to the work of this study given most students attending two-year commuter institutions live at home with their parents. Strom and Strom conducted a qualitative study interviewing 166 students and 218 of their parents. Their study focused on the difficulties and benefits of living

at home for both the parents and the students. Difficulties for the students included lack of privacy, financial dependence on parents, more arguments, disagreement about household rules, and “differences in the biological clock” (p. 522). Students also indicated advantages to living at home. Most importantly they appreciated the “economic advantages” (p. 524). They also valued utilizing their parents for support and advice and the opportunity to spend more time with their families (pp. 526-27). Challenges parents indicated included extended need for financial support and concern that students were not becoming independent adults. However, parents indicated a benefit of living with the college students was the opportunity to know their students as adults and to encourage them in their educational endeavors (p. 527). This study provided a foundation for understanding the experience of students in two-year colleges who commute to campus. Such research is currently limited. However, the study findings are briefly reported and it is not clear of the qualitative rigor utilized to conduct the study.

Parental support is also important to students once they have matriculated at a community college. A study conducted by Valery and Connor (1997) asked traditionally-aged students in a two-year college, “Who Helps With Your Problems” (p. 323). Their study investigated instrumental and emotional support provided by parents. Findings indicated that the students “perceived the parents as supportive. Parents gave support almost every time they were asked; however, adolescents made few requests” (p. 333). Female students were more likely to request emotional support and more students sought support from their mothers than their fathers. The study left readers with the question, “If two-year college students do not request much help from parents, one might wonder to whom adolescents do turn when help is needed” (p. 334). Missing from this study is a perception from the parents. Do they concur

with the infrequency of requests for support? It could be that students seek more help from their parents than they report.

While much of the literature warns of the negative impacts of over-involved parents, it is also clear that parents are now an inevitable facet of campus life. Those working on college campuses must find ways to understand parents and students and to provide adequate programs and information that channel the energy of parents into developmentally helpful relationships with their students. What this research does not explore is how the relationship of parents and students should change during the college years to provide students optimal opportunities to develop appropriately.

Chickering and Reisser's Model of Student Development

In addition to the involvement parents have on their students' decision-making processes, this research project seeks to explore how parents influence the student's development during the first two years of college. Rodgers (1990) defined student development as, "the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education" (p. 27). While there are numerous models and theories that describe different types of growth and development that occur during a student's college experience, Chickering and Reisser (1993) provided a broad, foundational, psychosocial model that encompasses a range of increasingly complex developmental tasks. They described seven vectors of psychosocial development that are expected to be occurring during the college years (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The four vectors of development that students "work on" during their first years in college include: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, and

developing mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Developing competence involves becoming able to master increasingly difficult intellectual, physical, and interpersonal tasks. Chickering and Reisser (1993) wrote, “A sense of competence stems from the confidence that one can cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully” (p. 53). Managing emotions involves “first becoming more aware of feelings and then as learning flexible control and appropriate means of expression or integration” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 88). Moving through autonomy toward interdependence is a journey which involves becoming dependent on oneself and then learning to be a member of a greater community (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Healthy development in this vector generally includes making separation from parents. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained, “Some students go away to college but continue living at home psychologically. Other students live with parents but use the college environment to define personal goals and values that are truly their own” (p. 115). Finally, to develop mature interpersonal relationships, “students learn lessons about how to express and manage their feelings, how to rethink first impressions, how to share on a deeper level, how to resolve differences, and how to make meaningful commitments” (Chickering and Reisser, 1993 p. 145).

At the conclusion of their sophomore year, as students in two-year schools prepare to transfer, it would be expected that they had made significant progress in becoming more competent in each of the four vectors referenced above. Murano (2004) indicated that parental over-involvement may be impeding this expected development. She wrote, “College, it seems, is where the fragility factor is now making its greatest mark. It’s where intellectual and developmental tracks converge and the emotional training wheels come off. By all

accounts, psychological distress is rampant on college campuses”(Murano, 2004, p. 59). She went on to state, “Parents need to abandon the idea of perfection and give up some of the invasive control they’ve maintained over their children. The goal of parenting...is to raise an independent human being” (Murano, 2004, p. 57).

The Role and Purpose of Two-Year Institutions in the United States

Two-year institutions trace their roots to 1892 and the structure of the University of Chicago. In a new model of education under the direction of William Rainey Harper, the University of Chicago began as “a university which divided the traditional four collegiate years into two equal parts – the first to be known as the junior college or academic college, where the spirit would be collegiate and preparatory” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 351). Harper also founded the first “official” junior college, Joliet Junior College, in 1901 (Retrieved on July 6, 2006 from www.aac.nche.edu/Content/NavigationMenuAboutCommunityColleges/HistoricalInformation.htm). In the 1920s, junior colleges sprang up around the United States. Rudolph wrote, “In local communities everywhere...junior colleges responded to the desire for education beyond the high school, less expensive and more convenient than that provided by the great universities” (p. 463). After World War II, community colleges provided access to numerous students on the G.I Bill. Rudolph described this growth by writing, “The independent, liberal arts college...was now challenged on the one side by the great university complexes and on the other by new community colleges which everywhere were answering an insistent demand for the collegiate experience” (p. 487). Community colleges provided a foundation in American Higher Education to provide access to educational opportunities.

This is still true today. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2006), there are currently 1,186 community colleges in the United States (retrieved July 6, 2006 from www.aacc.nche.edu/Content/Navigation/AcoutCommunityColleges/Fast_Facts.htm). They enroll 11.6 million students, and 45 % of all U.S. undergraduates begin their college careers in a community college. Percentages of minority students starting their academics in community colleges are even greater. Forty-seven percent of black and 55% of Hispanic undergraduate students begin at community colleges.

Community colleges provide access, affordable courses, and convenient locations. Additionally, they offer majors that meet the needs of local communities. As resources directed toward higher education continue to decrease, it can be expected that the numbers students seeking a community college experience will increase. In his 2004 State of the Union speech, President George W. Bush stated, “I propose increasing our support for America’s fine community colleges...so they can train workers for industries that are creating the most new jobs” (Retrieved July 6, 2006 from www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html). If this is any indication, community colleges will continue to grow and students beginning their careers in this setting will continue to increase.

As is clear from this brief overview of two-year colleges in the United States, they play a critical role in the higher education system. However, there is little research available about students in two-year colleges, particularly as it relates to their relationships with their parents and the role their parents play in their education. This study seeks to fill in this gap in research.

Summary

A review of the literature indicates that college student-parent relationships are an inevitable aspect of today's campus cultures. Additionally, how parents interact with their children when they are young has far-reaching effects on students once they attend college. Parents play a key role in students' college choices to attend certain institutions. What is not clear is the role parents play throughout a students' college experience, particularly for students enrolled in two-year or community colleges.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. To explore the parent-student relationship, this study looked specifically at the following questions:

1. How did students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How did the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?
3. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?
6. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?
7. Did qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Did qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

Qualitative Research

To explore these questions, this study employed an interpretive, qualitative research design. This approach provided a research foundation for this topic on which little substantive research exists. Merriam (2002) wrote, "...qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective" (p. 6). She goes on to describe these key components of a qualitative design. Merriam (2002) stated, "All qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product" (p. 6). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) provided a description of qualitative research by stating, "The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied" (p. 5). Characteristics of qualitative research include using the researcher as instrument in a naturalistic setting, seeking descriptive data, showing concern with the complete research process, collecting inductive data, and seeking to understand meaning (Bogden & Biklen, 2003).

This study aimed to add to the body of knowledge and understanding surrounding the topic of college student and parent relationships. Utilizing qualitative research allowed for in-depth exploration of the research questions by looking through the lenses of the interview participants.

deMarrais (forthcoming) wrote, "Qualitative researchers are interested in trying to understand the meanings, constructs, and categories that people use to make sense of their world. In other

words, we seek to discover the meaning people make of their experiences rather than impose researcher constructs on them” (p. 10). The qualitative research approach to this study will allow me to create an engaging environment in which students and their parents can share their own experiences.

Interpretative Approach

Little previous research exists on the topic of two-year college students’ relationships with their parents. For that reason, an interpretative research design was utilized. This method provided flexibility to begin the process of adding to the body of knowledge around the research topic. Merriam (2002) explained, “A basic and interpretative qualitative study exemplifies all the characteristics of qualitative research...the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon” (p. 6). The defining characteristics of the interpretative method of qualitative inquiry make this approach one that yields rich, descriptive data.

Utilizing this qualitative approach also allowed me to serve as the instrument in data collection. Merriam (2002) wrote, “Since understanding is the goal of this research, the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data” (p. 5). The flexibility provided by my direct involvement in the collection of data allowed for responsiveness, depth, and further questioning to gather clear and meaningful information. The emergent nature and flexibility of an interpretative qualitative approach provided an understanding of the experiences of the students and parents interviewed.

Subjectivity Statement

deMarrais (forthcoming) wrote, “Since we cannot stop at the door to our offices or research sites and drop off everything we are or have been, what we are becomes intertwined with those we engage in our research process” (p. 27). She went on to explain, “Qualitative researchers, like all researchers, have predispositions, opinions, beliefs, and assumptions they bring to the research process. Some scholars refer to these as biases, others as subjectivities” (p. 31). Therefore, upon entering into a qualitative research project, it is normal and expected for the researcher to bring part of himself or herself into the project. In fact, the passions and interests of the researcher should play a fundamental role the process. However, in order to remain true to the perspectives presented by the participants, the researcher also has an obligation to clarify these subjectivities and to work to limit their influence on the outcomes of the study.

As the researcher for this study, I approached it with my own set of subjectivities and assumptions. First, I currently serve as the dean of students at a two-year institution. I engage with students on a daily basis and build close relationships with many of the students with whom I interact. Additionally, I direct the parents’ orientation program. I interact with parents on many occasions and have seen them speak for their students, ask questions for their students, and solve problems for their students. I believe this may create a dynamic in which students do not have an opportunity to develop as expected because they are not provided the experiences necessary to inspire growth.

Further, as the literature review above demonstrates, much writing about the role of parents on college campuses is anecdotal and often presented with a negative tone. Reading

such articles encourages practitioners to believe that parents are negatively impacting students. Initially, I was influenced by such writing and found myself experiencing feelings of general frustration around issues of “over-involved” parents. However, little literature acknowledges parents as an inevitable component of students’ lives, nor does it provide much direction as to how to work most effectively with the types of parents encountered on college campuses today. This study sought to provide direction and insight into how colleges can best work with students and family members.

Finally, I was a college student and during that time had to adjust to a changing relationship with my parents. While my parents were supportive, they were not involved in my daily life at college, nor did we communicate on a daily basis. This approach worked well for me, but I had to keep in mind that it is not the best for every college student, particularly today’s students.

The framework for this study is provided by the model of student development explained by Chickering and Reisser (1993). I believe that college environments can be intentionally shaped to encourage growth in each of the four vectors. Student affairs practitioners can intentionally design programs and conduct daily interactions that combine challenge for students to grow as well as the support needed to ensure their development occurs in a safe, healthy manner. Parents may need more information about the developmental goals of a college so that they can encourage appropriate growth for their students. Each of these assumptions influenced the lens through which the data in this study were collected. I was vigilantly aware of these subjectivities during each phase of the research study.

Sampling Techniques

Sample.

The sample in this study was eight students in their second year of attendance at a two-year college and one of their parents, yielding a total of 16 participants. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who could add the most breadth and depth to the study. Merriam (2002) wrote, “since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. This is called a purposive or purposeful sample” (p. 12). Patton (1990) referred to the process of purposeful sampling as that which provides information-rich cases for study. He stated, “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169).

This study sought to identify traditional-aged college students between the ages of 18 and 22 who enrolled in college soon after their graduation from high school. Data were collected in the spring of 2007, so students who attended the college at least two semesters prior to the spring were selected to interview. Earned credits hours were not utilized to determine standing, as students in two-year institutions take varying course loads in their first years. The focus of this study was to explore relationships between parents and students who had been attending college for two semesters, their hours earned were not as important as the length of time the students had been in college. Students at the two-year college in the study typically live with their parents while attending college. Therefore, participants in this study were students who were living with their parents and attending classes on the main campus of the college. These criteria were used to make sure the sample was homogeneous. Due to the small

size of the sample, similar living conditions and the campus on which students were attending classes provided an opportunity to ensure students were experiencing more similar influence and opportunities to interact with their parents.

Sample selection.

Both students and parents were contacted in efforts to recruit participants. Students were contacted via e-mail, electronic notice boards, and fliers placed on campus (Appendix A). Additionally, to attract a diverse sample of students, advisors of student organizations, including the Latino Student Association and the Black Student Association were contacted to request assistance in identifying minority students who might be willing to participate. Other faculty and staff who share an interest in the research topic were also contacted and asked to assist in potential participant recruitment. Finally, using access to mailing information, recruitment letters were sent to a sample of 60 parents of students eligible to participate in the study (Appendix B). The Office of Student Development and Enrollment Management and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Day State College granted permission for the letter to the parents to be sent out on official College letterhead. I purchased this letterhead.

Information sent to all potential participants included guidelines for participation and the anticipated time commitment. Additionally, incentives were offered to the students who participated in the study. The incentive was a \$50 gift certificate to the bookstore or a \$50 gasoline gift card. Students would receive the \$50 gift card or gift certificate if they completed both the SDTLA and the interview. If they completed only one or the other, they would have received a \$25 gift card or gift certificate. Students would receive the incentive regardless of if their parent completed the parent interview. All student participants completed both the

SDTLA and the interview. Six of the student participants chose gasoline gift cards and two chose bookstore gift certificates. One additional student completed the SDTLA and an interview; however, her parent was never able to complete an interview. Therefore, the student received a gasoline gift card, but none of her information was included in the study. These incentives appealed to the parents as useful to their students. Interested parent or student participants were asked to contact the researcher via phone or e-mail. It was imperative that both the student and one of his or her parents agree to participate in the study. The design of the study called for six to eight student participants and their parents. Therefore, the first eight pairs who responded and agreed to participate were included. To avoid a conflict of interest because I work at the college utilized in the study, all of those selected for this study were students and parents whom I had never met.

The most effective recruitment strategy proved to be the letter to the parents. Seven of the eight final participant pairs came from initial contact by the parent in response to the letter. One student was recruited through communication with student clubs and organizations. Parents indicated that the gas card or gift certificate were a strong incentive that encouraged their participation.

Ethical Considerations

As with any study involving human participants, careful attention had to be paid to their ethical treatment. The participants in this study shared a personal story about their experience, and they were treated with high regard and respect. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) wrote, "Two issues dominate traditional official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of the subjects from harm" (p. 43). As the

students and parents were informed about the study, every effort was made to help them understand the nature of the study and the role they would play. Additionally, it was clearly explained to potential participants that they could choose at any point before, during, or after the interview to remove themselves as a participant in the study and all records of their involvement would be destroyed. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected. Sensitivity was evidenced in the presentation of the findings so the participants are not embarrassed or otherwise harmed. All efforts were made to conceal their personal identity and pseudonyms were utilized. Finally, the researcher sought to present the truth in the findings as they related to the purpose of this study, so as to honor the participants, their stories, and their participation in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures for this study primarily involved conducting individual interviews with students and one of their parents. In addition, in order to ascertain students' levels of development on developmental tasks as defined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), each student was asked to complete the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999). Prior to the collection of any data, approval was granted by the Institutional Review Boards at the institution I attend and at the two-year college the students attend. Each participant reviewed and signed an informed consent form, as well (Appendix C).

Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment.

Winston, Miller, and Cooper's (1999) Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA) "represents a sample of behavior and reports about feelings and attitudes

that are indicative of students who have satisfactorily achieved certain developmental tasks common to young adult college students between the ages of 17 and 25” (p. 10). The SDTLA instrument includes 153 items that measure students’ accomplishments or achievements in three main “developmental tasks.” These tasks include Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing Autonomy, and Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999). Winston, Miller and Cooper define developmental tasks as “an interrelated set of behaviors and attitudes that the culture specifies should be exhibited at approximately the same time by a given age cohort in a designated context (for the SDTLA, that is the context of higher education)” (1999, p. 10). Each of these three developmental tasks is delineated by several “subtasks” which describe a “more specific component or part of a larger developmental task” (1999, p. 10). Additionally, the SDTLA includes two scales which measure “salubrious lifestyle” (1999, p. 12) as well as response bias. The latter scale provides an opportunity for the researcher to determine if students are representing themselves accurately on the instrument.

The instrument measures students’ behavior in the tasks and subtasks and indicates their levels of competence in each area. Utilizing this instrument in this study allowed me to determine students’ achievements on these tasks and subtasks and to make comparisons to normative data for students at similar levels in their academic careers. The normative sample for the SDTLA included summarized data from over “1800 students from 31 different colleges and universities in the United States and Canada” (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999, p. 13). Using individual student results will allowed me to structure the interview sessions to further investigate the influence parents may be having on students’ development in these areas.

Efforts were made to determine if students were at the normative levels of development, when compared to national data, and to determine if or how parents influenced their development.

The 1999 version of the SDTLA utilized in this study was designed primarily to be administered with large groups of students for “program evaluations, research on psychosocial development, and outcomes assessments” (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999, p. 19). Results are generally reported in the aggregate. In this study, however, it was administered individually to the small number of students. The instruments were hand-scored and individual results were utilized to tailor interview questions specific to each student and his or her parent. Student scores on the SDTLA were not shared with the parents or the students.

Participant interviews.

deMarrais (forthcoming) explored the use of qualitative interviews by writing,

Using interview questions and follow-up questions or probes based on what the participant has described, our goal is to construct as complete a picture as possible from the words and experiences of the participant. This can only be accomplished when the qualitative interview is open-ended enough for the participant to provide us with the depth of knowledge we are seeking. (p. 66)

In this study, the interviews were semi-structured. This type of interviewing fell between the rigidity of structured interviews and the complete flexibility of open interviews. Semi-structured interviews utilized an interview guide to provide a framework for the interview sessions and to provide a level of consistency between interviews (Appendices D and E). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher flexibility in the order the questions were presented as well as the opportunity to add probing questions during the interview. The

primary focus of the interview was to gather as much information related to the purpose of the study and the research questions as possible. The interview guides (Appendices D and E) included the opportunity to collect basic demographic data which allowed for more description in the findings section as well as many open-ended questions. Based on previous research with second-year college students, Colburn (2006) found that students needed the opportunity to “warm up” with some basic introductory questions. She also found that students, perhaps because of their lack of experience participating in research interviews, needed encouragement through multiple questions to elaborate further. Therefore, the interview guide included many questions that could be used to solicit student responses. Additionally, the parents of these students were not experienced in participating in these types of interviews. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to have more questions available to ask if necessary and to not ask for too much information in any one question.

The questions on the interview guides began with basic questions and then led participants to provide more details. The questions for students and parents mirrored each other with the purpose of determining how much information students and parents are sharing as well as the accuracy of their perceptions of this communication. The student interview questions were structured to explore students’ psychosocial development. They included probes into how students handled challenges, made decisions, and sought support. Parent questions sought to probe into how they were involved in students’ decision-making processes as well as what changes they had seen in their students.

Data Collection

After student and parent participants were selected and agreed to take part in the study, students were asked to have an individual, initial meeting with the researcher. During this meeting, the purpose of the study was reviewed and students were asked to review and sign their informed consent forms. Students then completed the SDTLA. Before the interviews began, the researcher scored the SDTLA and created notes for each student that were utilized to supplement the interview guides. These added individual questions focused on students' individual results as they compared to the normative, national data. If student scores were one or more standard deviations above or below normative levels, questions were targeted to students and parents that sought to understand why students' development did not match national data. Were parents influencing student development, as reflected in the SDTLA, in positive or negative ways? Did students' interview responses corroborate their results on the SDTLA? Using these additional questions based on the results of the SDTLA I sought to address research questions seven and eight.

Next, students and one of their parents were contacted to schedule individual interviews. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The location of the interviews was determined based on convenience and comfort of the participant. Students and parents had the opportunity to participate in interviews on or off campus. All interviews took place on campus except for one. For an interview with one parent, I traveled to her workplace. Interviews with students and their parents were conducted individually and separately. They were conducted in a manner that prevented the student from hearing his or her parent's interview and the parent from hearing his or her student's interview. This format was created

to provide a more comfortable, inviting setting that encouraged honest disclosure. The order in which the student and parent were interviewed evolved based on the availability of each participant. Therefore, some interviews were conducted with the parent before the student and some were conducted with the student before the parent. Chapter Four indicates the order in which each pair was interviewed.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Data collected in the research process were aimed at addressing this purpose. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim by the researcher following the interview.

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method was utilized to analyze the data collected in the interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) defined analysis as "the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings" (p. 147). The nature of qualitative research calls for data analysis to occur simultaneously with data collection, via the researcher as instrument. So, as interviews are being conducted, the researcher analyzes their meaning as they relate to the purpose of the study. Bogdan and Biklen described this method by stating, "The constant comparative method is a research design for multi-data sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection" (p. 66). Throughout the data collection process the researcher was attentive to key issues, events, or themes that ran concurrent through the data. Categories that addressed the research questions of this study were sought.

After transcription of the interviews they were coded for themes. Each incident of relevant data had a category under which it was coded. This allowed for the emergence of themes to address the research questions. Additionally, the flexibility of this research design allowed for additional themes to surface that provided research information not directly related to the research questions. Therefore, the questions were revised if the data dictated. The goal of the interviews was to reach saturation in which no additional themes appeared in the interviews as they progressed.

Reliability and Validity

Bogden and Biklen (2003) described reliability in qualitative studies as “a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (p. 36). Thus, to establish reliability in this study the researcher made every effort to ensure that the findings accurately represented the perspectives of students and parents interviewed. Merriam (2002) went further to state, “reliability lies in others’ concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable” (p. 27).

In this study, I utilized multiple strategies to ensure reliability. First, I was attentive to my subjectivities, described above. Through attention to these lenses, I strived to keep them from influencing the interpretation of the data. Secondly, an audit trail was utilized. Merriam (2002) defined an audit trail as, “A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (p. 31). I utilized a journal to make notes regarding the interviews, participants, observations, and experiences throughout the study. Finally, I made an effort to recruit a diverse sample of participants. This included seeking students from various ethnic,

racial, and socio-economic backgrounds. Merriam (2002) stated that this “maximum variation” in sample selection allows “for a greater range of application of findings by consumers of the research” (p. 31).

Ensuring validity is another concern in a qualitative research design. Merriam (2002) wrote, “Internal validity asks the question, How congruent are one’s findings with reality?” (p. 25). With the researcher as instrument, a qualitative design involves the researcher interpreting the participants’ perspectives (Merriam, 2002). Strategies to ensure this study represented the reality of the participants were utilized. First, I provided rich, thick description to offer readers a clear picture of the participants’ experiences. This allows readers to better determine the usefulness of the findings. Secondly, member checks were utilized. After interviews had been transcribed, participants were asked to review either the verbatim transcripts or the themes identified by the researcher. All participants requested to review the themes and not the verbatim transcripts. Students and parents were asked to provide feedback as to the accuracy of their theme interpretations. Finally, peer review was employed. I shared the themes of the study with two administrators in the student development division at the college. Both work with parents and students and were very familiar with the topic and format of the study.

Campus Profile

A profile of the campus the students in the study attend provides a foundation for understanding the environment in which the participants were experiencing college. Day State College is an institution in the Southeast that provides primarily Associate’s degrees. A limited number of niche four-year degrees are offered by the institution, but the primary

mission of the college is to provide a liberal arts foundation that prepares students to transfer to four-year institutions. Day State enrolls approximately 6,000 students. Approximately, four thousand students attend the main campus and 2,000 students attend a satellite campus, located approximately 50 miles from the main campus. The average age of students on the main campus is 23.1 years and the average age of students on the satellite campus is 20.5 years. Approximately 53.5% of the students are female and 46.5% are male. Seventy-five percent of students are full-time students, enrolled in twelve semester hours or more. 87.1% of students attending the college are white. Approximately 4% of students are Black and 4.8% are Hispanic.

Day State does not provide on-campus housing. Most students who attend the main campus live at home with their parents. Many students who attend the satellite campus live with their parents, but many also live in apartments in a town about fifteen miles from the campus. This town houses a large, public four-year institution. Students on the main campus generally live within the county of the campus or in the seven contiguous counties. Students on the satellite campus come from areas all around the state, in addition to the county and contiguous counties in which the campus is located.

The “typical” Day State College second-year student is a Caucasian, 19 or 20-year-old who works part-time while taking 12-15 semester hours of credit through daytime classes. This student would live at home with his or her parents and commutes to campus each day for classes. Most “typical” students plan to complete either an Associate’s Degree or enough credit hours to transfer to four-year state institutions, generally within a one-hour drive from the Day State Campus.

Summary

This study utilized an interpretative qualitative research design to understand the relationships between second year students at a two-year college and their parents. Utilizing the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment to provide a framework for understanding students' developmental accomplishments, the study incorporated interviews with students and parents to address the eight research questions of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Shakespeare writes, “All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts” (retrieved May 4, 2006 from <http://www.artofeurope.com/shakespeare/sha9.htm>). Jacques, the character who presents these lines, goes on to describe the life cycle people experience as they move through life from infancy to death. In this journey, our lives embody many experiences, opportunities, and roles. College students and their parents demonstrate the meaning of this quote as they both learn to navigate the environment of higher education. As the students grow and learn during college, their roles, experiences, and maturity levels change. Parents of these students also must navigate the changing relationship that occurs with their children as these students adjust to their developing roles in life while they are in college.

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study investigated the influence parents have on students’ academic and personal decision making as well as their student development. In order to explore the roles of students and parents, I conducted an interpretative qualitative study. Interviews were conducted with eight second-year student and parent pairs for a total of sixteen interviews. Additionally, the students completed the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (SDTLA). Interview questions for each student and his or her parent were tailored to investigate if the results of the SDTLA were supported through qualitative research.

The following chapter will present the findings from this qualitative study. The chapter begins with an introduction of each participant and then continues with an exploration of the themes that arose to address each of the eight research questions. To examine the parent-student relationship, this study looked specifically at the following research questions:

1. How did students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How did the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?
3. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?
6. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?
7. Did qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Did qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

The Participants

Each student participant was a second-year student at Day State College. Students had completed at least two semesters at the College and were currently enrolled during the 2007 Spring semester. Students were between the ages of 18 and 22 years old and lived at home with at least one of their parents. One of these parents was also interviewed as part of the study. During the interview process, all participants were asked to select their own pseudonym. This is the name by which they were referred throughout this study. Following is description of each pair of participants along with a summary of demographic information that was solicited at the start of each interview. All participants in the study were Caucasian.

Jade and Paul.

Jade is a 22- year-old female. She is an international student who was born in England and moved to the United States to attend Day State College. Day State College is the only college she has attended and she plans to major in marketing and fashion merchandising. Jade grew up with her mother, father, and younger sister.

Her father is Paul. Paul is a 42-year-old who currently works in the United States as an environmental engineer. Paul completed a Bachelor's degree in physics and a doctorate in energy engineering. Paul's education was completed in England.

Christina and Ann.

A female early childhood education major, Christina is a 19-year-old student who grew up a few miles from Day State College. Day State is the only college she has attended. Christina grew up with her mother, father, and brother who is eight years younger than she.

Ann, her mother, also attended Day State College. Ann is a 45-year-old who works as an “English as a Second Language” teacher in an elementary school. She has earned a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s degree and is currently pursuing an Education Doctorate.

Superstar and Lainey D.

Superstar is a female Theatre major who grew up in the city where Day State College is located. She is 19 years old. Superstar grew up with her mother, father, and four older siblings.

Lainey D. is Superstar’s mother. Lainey D. is 49 years old and currently works as an office manager at a car dealership. Lainey D. earned some college credit but has not completed a degree.

Sleepy and Jen.

Sleepy is a 22-year-old male student. He also grew up in the city where Day State College is located. He plans to major in Business Management and has only attended Day State. Sleepy’s parents divorced when he was 10 and he grew up living with his mother and younger brother.

His mother, Jen, also attended Day State College. Jen is a registered staff nurse who has earned a Bachelor of Arts in Nursing. She is 48 years old.

Amber and Buckeye.

A female, 18-year-old, student, Amber grew up in the city where Day State College is located. She plans to major in Physical Education and has only attended college at Day State. Amber grew up with her mother, father, older brother, and older sister. Amber’s siblings also attended Day State College.

Amber's mother is Buckeye. Buckeye is 45 years old and completed one year of college. She defines her current occupation as "domestic engineering." She is a stay-at-home mother.

Jerry and Superteam.

Jerry is the second male student in the study. He is a 20-year-old who plans to major in Biology. He lives in a town approximately 25 miles from Day State and it is the only college he has attended. Jerry grew up with his mother, father, and three older siblings.

Superteam is Jerry's mother. She is a 52-year-old marketing director for an investment company. She completed some college courses and is also a licensed financial representative.

Renee and Rebecca.

Renee is a 19-year-old female who plans to major in Early Childhood Education. She currently lives in a town approximately 35 miles from the Day State campus. Day State is the only college she has attended. Renee's parents divorced when she was young and she grew up living with her mother, Rebecca. Rebecca is 37 years old and works as a secretary. She completed high school through 11th grade.

Crystal and Dawn.

The final participant in the study was Crystal. Crystal is a 20-year-old female who recently changed her major from Pre-Medicine to Business. She grew up several hours away from Day State College but currently lives with her mother, stepfather, and younger sister in a town approximately 25 miles from the campus. She has only attended Day State College. Crystal's parents divorced when she was in sixth grade and until her mother recently remarried, Crystal lived with her mother and younger sister.

Crystal's mother is Dawn. Dawn is 45 years old and currently works as a career placement director at a technical college. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a Master's of Science Administration degree.

The following tables highlight the demographics of the students and the parents.

Table 4.1:

Student Participant Demographics

Student participant number	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Sex	Major	Attended previous colleges?	Lived with growing up	Interviewed first or second
2	Jade	22	Caucasian	F	Marketing/Fashion merchandising	No	Mom, Dad, Sister	1st
3	Christina	19	Caucasian	F	Early Childhood Education	No	Mom, Dad and younger brother	1st
4	Superstar	19	Caucasian	F	Theatre	No	Mom, Dad and 4 older siblings	2nd
5	Sleepy	22	Caucasian	M	Business Management	No	Mother and younger	2 nd

							brother	
6	Amber	18	Caucasian	F	Physical Education	No	Mom, Dad, older brother and older sister	1st
7	Jerry	20	Caucasian	M	Biology	No	Mom, Dad, 2 older brothers, 2 older sisters	1 st
8	Renee	19	Caucasian	F	Early Childhood Education	No	Mom	1st
9	Crystal	20	Caucasian	F	Business	No	Mom and younger sister	1st

Table 4.2:

Parent Participant Demographics

Parent participant number	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Educational level/major	Current occupation	Interviewed first or second
2	Paul	42	Caucasian	Ph.D./Engineering	Engineer	2 nd
3	Ann	45	Caucasian	Ed.D.(in progress)/Early Childhood Education	ESOL Teacher (elementary school)	2 nd
4	Lainey D.	49	Caucasian	Some College	Office Personnel Staff (car dealer)	1 st
5	Jen	48	Caucasian	B.A./Nursing	Staff Nurse/Intensive Care	1 st
6	Buckeye	45	Caucasian	1 year of college	“Domestic Engineer”	2 nd
7	Superteam	52	Caucasian	Some College/Licensed Financial Representative	Marketing	2 nd
8	Rebecca	37	Caucasian	11 th grade	Secretary	2 nd
9	Dawn	45	Caucasian	Master’s Degree	Career Placement	2 nd

Themes

This qualitative design explored eight research questions to address the purpose of the study. The first six questions were addressed through themes which arose from the interviews conducted with the students and parents. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed for themes using the constant comparative method outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Themes will be presented from both the students' perspective and the parents' perspective. For a theme to be established, I looked for it to appear in at least six student or parent interviews. Most themes addressed arose in every interview.

The final two research questions were addressed based on the student results on the SDTLA in combination with interview questions for both the student and parent tailored to address the SDTLA results. (Appendix F) For purposes of this study, those SDTLA scores which were significantly (more than one standard deviation) above or below the normative data scores are explored. Areas on the SDTLA which reflected the normative data are not explored in-depth.

Student Descriptions of Their Relationships with Their Parents

Not unexpectedly, each student participant described a unique relationship with his or her parent. However, numerous themes arose in the student descriptions that paint pictures of some common ties in each of the student's explanation of how he or she related to and with his or her parents.

Sense of a close relationship.

One clear aspect of these relationships that arose was students' description of a "close" relationship with their parents. Even if students suggested ways their relationship could be

improved or sighted challenges they faced when dealing with their parents, their language focused on a close relationship. Students often indicated this beginning when they were young. It appeared very important to the students that their relationships with their parents be perceived as close.

Christina described this closeness by stating, “[My relationship with my parents] is good. They were there for me. They sacrificed their time for me.”

Superstar stated, “I like living at home. And, I like my parents, you know? I like hanging out with them, hanging out with my family.” She later stated, “I’ve always had a good relationship with them.”

During a two year marriage that began when he was 18 years old, Sleepy described being distant from his family. However, after separating from his wife, he talked about how his relationship with his parents is becoming close again. He explained:

[My relationship with my mom] is still pretty much the same as it was when I was young. Umm, one of the things I missed during the two years my wife and I were together...we’re working on trying to get a divorce now...was, ahhh, one of the things was the fact that I didn’t get much contact with them during my marriage. So, because of that, I’m still kind of trying to rebuild ties. Everybody’s pretty much forgiven me because they see I am turning around. They see I’m waking up. But, it’s still kind of having, I’m making sure I’m keeping in contact a little more.

Amber talked about the closeness along with her desire to become more independent. She said,

Well, ummm, I think [our relationship] is still good. Um, I'm starting to branch out more and trying to get out on my own more and they don't like that because I'm the baby of the family. They want to keep me in there, so they're having a little trouble with the letting go part. It's pretty much still good and we pretty much spend time with each other.

More simply stated, Jerry described his closeness with his family by saying, "Umm, extremely loving relationship. Do anything for each other. There's no question." Renee talks about her closeness with her mom by explaining, "[Our relationship] is still really good. She helps me out...We spend time together, go out to eat, and watch TV together. I can talk to her about pretty much anything, I guess. Like, I can talk to her more than I can talk to anyone else, any of my friends or anything."

Crystal, who expressed her challenges in adjusting to life with her new stepfather, still wanted to define her relationship with her mother as close. She stated:

I think my mom pretty well understands me for the most part. I don't think she doesn't know anything about me. I've pretty much told her everything, I mean that I go through. So, she knows me pretty good.

Later, Crystal said, "I wish we were closer like we used to be. Even when, ummm, like before I started driving." She concluded her interview by stating, "Even like, if I said something bad, I still love them. Let's get that down."

While students expressed some struggles for independence or some frustrations with family situations, they wanted their relationships to be perceived as close. Their words indicate they believe they are close, but the underlying tone may indicate that they are struggling to maintain this closeness as they mature.

Frequency of communication.

A second clear theme that emerged was the students' perception of and desire for frequent communication with their parents. Interview questions addressed students' casual and usually daily contact with their parents. Additionally, probes were used to determine how often students perceived they had more "in-depth" conversations about important decisions and life issues. The students described their communication with their parents in the following ways.

Jade's mother lives in England, so Jade spoke more frequently with her father who lives in the United States. She said, "My mom not so much just because it is so expensive to call. And, my dad, I mean, I'll call him. Neither of them really call me. I talk with my dad on a daily basis, even if it is just small talk and that sort of thing. You know, 'Hi, how are you?'"

Christina described how often she communicated with her parents by indicating, "Every day. My mama leaves me messages and I call her back. Just to let her know. 'Yeah, mom, we're okay.' So, yeah, we communicate every day, definitely."

Superstar indicated she communicated with her parents as often as she could. "I don't see them every day, but sometimes, I'll call my mom up. So, I'll call her just to say, so I just want to tell you I got this on my history test and this is where we're going and this is what we're doing. And, then, you know, 'How was your day and yada, yada, yada.'"

Sleepy talked about the practicality of regular communication. He said, "I usually [communicate] with adults in general better than people my own age. It's always been easy for me to communicate with adults. As far as my parents are concerned, I can usually keep pretty good communication and let them know what's going on."

Amber said, “Umm, I see them every day and I probably communicate with them, probably in-depth at least once a week. Maybe. Yeah. Probably once a week or something. But, I don’t know, it just kind of depends on what’s going on.”

Jerry describes similar daily communication, even if he doesn’t see his parents. “Umm, but generally if we’re home and we’re all conscious, we’ll communicate one way or the other.” Later he talked about the importance of good communication. He stated, “This all goes back to the communication thing. I mean, we communicate. I mean there’s no holding back. If I feel something, I’ll let them know.”

Renee’s description of her communication with her mom fits well with the perceptions of Millennial students’ being tightly connected to their parents:

Um, we talk a lot, like throughout the day when I’m at school. Like I call her when I get to school in the morning and we talk. After I get out of school on the way home. And, when I get home I talk to her on the computer and then when she gets home from work. So, I talk to her a good bit throughout the day.

She also said,

Umm, pretty much we talk about daily things, sometimes we’ll go more in-depth, like, if something happens I’ll call her and if there’s a question I have we’ll talk about that on the phone for a good bit. Most of the time when we talk on the computer, we talk about in-depth things. Because I’d rather type than talk sometimes.

Finally, Crystal indicates she communicates with her mom but describes that they lack having in-depth discussions. She stated, “But, I don’t know. I don’t remember when was the last time we had a good one-on-one good conversation. Me calling her up, usually, I call her up and we

have a discussion instead of talking at home.” While it appears Crystal may not talk as much with her mother as other students, her words seemed to indicate she wished for more communication, particularly more in-depth conversations.

Close relationships with mothers.

When reflecting on their relationships, students indicated closer relationships with their mothers than their fathers.

Jade discussed a close relationship with her mother, which she felt was inappropriate because her mother became more like a friend to her than a mother. She explained, “My dad left to come here. And, I think at the time when I needed support and encouragement to maybe better myself, my mom was more into partying with me. It wasn’t a bad relationship, but it wasn’t really productive. It was probably more destructive.”

The other students saw this close relationship with their mother’s as more positive. Christina stated:

But, I probably go to my mom [for support]. She’s so always asking me questions and calling me, so she knows the situation. So, if I go to Dad, he’s like, “What, what are you talking about?” And, I don’t have the patience to go through all that right now. So, I’ll usually talk to Mom and then Dad, and Mom tells dad everything, so she can repeat it all to him.

Superstar explained,

And, my mom is still my best friend. We get along so well. I love that about my parents. And, my dad, he is usually gone during the week...So, my relationship with my dad hasn’t been quite as extensive as it has with my mom because I’ve seen my mom so much more.

Jerry talked about his dad's travel keeping him away from the family, too.

I would want to have them be with me more. I mean, I think that they're, we're so separated. I mean, my dad's travel, he spends a greater part of the year away from home. But, I mean it's good because he loves his job...But, I mean it would be nice if I could provide something that would allow him to be home more.

Since Renee grew up living with only her mother, it is not surprising she describes their relationship as closer than the one she has with her father. She explained,

So, we had a really good relationship for me growing up with just me and her. And, we had a lot of fun. She always used to take me places. Pretty much a normal relationship, like mother-daughter. But, a lot better than what some people talk about theirs. And, my dad, I really, I only talk to him maybe once every three or four months, so there's, there's a lot of stuff he should know. 'Cause he doesn't, sometimes he doesn't even know how old I am.

For most students in the study, even those who lived with both their mother and father, they indicated a sense of feeling closer with their mothers than their fathers. Some cited their father's work schedules as obstacles to building those closer relationships and others, whose parents were divorced, lived with their mothers, making contact with their fathers less frequent. Clearly, however, mothers played a key role in the lives of the students.

Open and transparent relationships.

A final theme which arose in the students' descriptions of their relationships with their parents was that of an open and transparent relationship. The students did not keep information about their lives, personal or academic, from their parents.

Jade perhaps struggled the most to have a productive relationship with her parents. However, she indicated they did know many details about her life. She stated, "I don't know. There's some things I wish they didn't know. I don't know, I think I would just like them to have, to be, I guess more interested, umm, I guess in where I am in general."

Christina described her transparency with her parents in the following way:

I don't have anything significant that they should know or shouldn't know or anything. Sometimes they know me better than I know myself. And, they'll say, "Christina we know you better than you think." And, it turns out they're right and I'm like, "Oh, whatever." And sometimes, I'm gonna say something or do something or mess up, but there's not really anything about me that they don't know, I don't think. (pause) No.

Superstar said:

I can't think of anything. I don't think my parents don't know anything. I mean they pretty much know everything. I don't hide. I don't hide stuff from my parents. I don't have anything *to* [emphasis] hide. So, when I talk to them, it's just open. And, they know who I am and I know who they are. And, there's nothing, I don't have to get defensive about anything.

When asked if there was anything he wished her parents knew about him that they didn't know, Jerry said, "Oh, wow, that's a deep one there. I can't think of anything they wouldn't

know. I mean, they know.” Crystal said, “I think my mom pretty well understands me for the most part. I don’t think she doesn’t know anything about me. I’ve pretty much told her everything, I mean that I go through. So, she knows me pretty good.”

Students indicated a transparent relationship with their parents in which they were open and honest about the many aspects of their lives.

In summary, four themes arose to explain how students described their relationships with their parents. Participants indicated they want their relationships with their parents to be perceived as close. Additionally, students maintain frequent communication with their parents. They describe closer relationships with their mothers than their fathers and they are open and transparent about their lives.

Parent Descriptions of Relationships with Their Students

Four themes arose as parents described their relationships with their students. Two were similar to the student themes. These include the sense of closeness between parents and students as well as the frequency of communication. Additionally, parents explored the challenges faced when trying to determine when to help students and when to encourage independence. Parents also perceived their role with their college students as that of trying to relieve stress in their lives so students could focus on their academics. Following are parent descriptions that support each of these themes.

Close relationships.

Like the students, parents tended to describe close connections to their students. Paul said of his relationship with Jade:

Ahh, I'd say it's very close. We support each other. She helps me out when I'm having problems. Ahh, we're good friends. She, she has concerns about me and how much, how I run my life at the moment, which are sensible, justifiable. We probably spend ahh, you know, due to the way her life's going and my life's going, we don't have much time to get together, but we do once a week spend some time. I'd say we're a lot closer now than we were in her teen years. I'd say we're good friends.

Superstar's mother, Lainey D, said:

Oh, my. We've always been really close. I've never had a kid in all of my children that was so mommy – well not really mommy oriented – but she was a very personal person...Plus, she's a very interesting person to be around, so you want to get to know her. And, I've never, she's just a joy. She's the joy of my life as mama.

When describing her relationship with Sleepy, Jen said:

I think it's a little bit closer. I think he's finally realizing what being parents means. I mean, especially now that he's got his own [child]. I think he appreciates more what we're doing to help him out with things...We've always been close, but I think it's gotten a little bit closer and he is understanding more.

Buckeye talked about her close relationship with Amber.

She's my baby. So, she and I have always been really close. Umm, you know, I worked at the school where she went to school and I was able to keep any eye on her and her brother and sister. And, we've always had a special relationship, of course, because she's the baby. And, so, we've always been able to talk. Still are able to talk. And, she's just real special...Umm, we're good friends. We do things together...And, ahhh, she was away for 1

10 weeks this summer, which was very, very hard. Very hard on me. So, it was just, I never knew that it would be so devastating. But, it was, it was very, very difficult.

Jerry is also the youngest child in the family. His mother, Superteam, described their relationship in the following words:

Umm, my God, he was such a trip. Umm, his relationship. I've got four children and he's the baby. And, the relationship was very, very close...The other children were in school, so we were close. He either went to part-time daycare or he went with me...We've stayed close. You know, he'd talk about things that were going on, if he felt like it. If he didn't, you know, he growled at me. But, you know, just real close. Not to say we didn't fight and he didn't want to run away from home. But, just a close, a real close relationship. I still think it's the same. I believe it's the same. I'm really, I'm good and very in tune to his moodiness. Like if he doesn't want to talk I can usually tell. And I don't talk to him. Not like his dad. I'm like, "When are you going to learn? He's 20 years old. Leave him be." He's just a good kid. Umm, he's a joy to be around.

More simply stated, Rebecca described her closeness with Renee by saying, "And, then, we've had, we've always had a good relationship."

Dawn talked about her connection to Crystal in the following words:

We've always been close. Her going to high school up here [in a more northern town] has kind of divided it a little bit. But, umm, we still have a pretty good relationship as far as that goes. It's a little tough at times...But, then, when she needs me, she needs me, you know?

Consistently, parents described close connections to their students. Even if relationships faced challenges, the parents felt they knew their students well and could understand them.

Frequency of communication.

Like the students, parents described frequent communication as a cornerstone in the relationship. However, daughters seemed to tell their parents more details about their college experiences than sons did. Excerpts of their explanations are presented below.

Paul talked regularly with Jade. He explained:

She seems to tell me about everything. If she's having problems. If she has tests coming up. She kind of keeps me informed of her daily activities. That's, I guess I didn't mention our contact. But, we pretty much talk at least once a day on the phone. When she feels like she excelled at something, she'll pretty much tell me straightaway. She's, you know, umm, I guess just kind of continuous communication. You know as far as her relationship stuff, she won't really tell me much about. She might tell me if she's met somebody new or if she's made new friends.

Ann also talked about frequently communicating with Christina:

We're very, you know, we communicate all the time. And, we eat dinner together and we'll talk about what's happened during the day...What's happened in her classes, the teachers, who she's met, the class, where she's parked. Everything. Maybe too much....Just our openness. Being able to tell it like it is. We're open, very open in our house.

Lainey D. said of Superstar:

I try to talk to her every day. I don't, not always person to person, but I call her at times when I

know she's not working. But, sometimes she'll call during the day and she'll say, "Mom, I'm just thinking about you." Or when she has something she wants me to know about....I think she's told me a lot of the good and the bad [about her college experience]. The people that she's met, fellow students that she's made friends with in her classrooms. Some of her professors, the good and the bad. The funny stuff that happens and the good class times she has...And, then, you know, she tells me about the things she struggles with.

When asked about how often she communicated with Amber, Buckeye said:

Oh, every day. In the car on the way home. Which isn't a long ride, but we talk about different things. And, I didn't ask anything about her interview with you. I wanted to, but I thought, "No, I'm not going to do it." She tells me about the kids she knows. She tells me about the different students in the different classes. The things, the quirky things she does, that they all find funny. She tells me the little anecdotes about what goes on in class....Or, if the teacher's done something that she doesn't like, or was unfair, you know, not inappropriate, but just didn't seem right. Then, she'll share that with me as well.

Rebecca also indicated she spoke with Renee every day. She believed Renee told her a lot about her daily life as a student. Rebecca said:

Umm, she'll tell me, well, of course, we talk about that guys that are in her class that she thinks are cute. And, she'll tell me about her teachers. Always when she starts the semester she'll tell, umm, about, umm, what they are learning. And, she'll tell me what she's having problems with and what she's never heard of before, and what she's doing good in. And, she's told me about the College and where different places are located and how she was to walk from this part of campus to the other side with that heavy book bag...Umm, and she

gave me her password and all so that I can log on[to her student account]. So, I go in there and look at it all the time...And, nighttime is usually, if I can get her to stay off the phone long enough to talk to me, that's when we do our talking.

Dawn also talks with Crystal every day and knows about her college experience. She explained this communication by saying, "Uhhh. (laughs) OK, I talk with her every single day....but it's not as intimate as it could be. Simply because of the fact that I'm sharing my time with her [and her time spent talking to her boyfriend]."

Dawn indicated Crystal shared information about her life as a college student, as well.

Um, mainly frustrations over teachers or how her speeches went well and things like that. If she gets, you know, a pat on the back. She loves that. And, she's an excellent student...But, I mean she's really, she never really struggles, but she's happy when she gets a pat on the back. And, the other thing is, the difficulty in the classes. Like I said, Chemistry and things like that really bothered her.

The mothers of sons in the study indicated they communicated frequently with the sons, but the information shared about their college experience was much less in-depth than the daughters detailed above.

Jen described talking with Sleepy frequently. She said, "I talk to him pretty much every day. Pretty much, yeah. Well, we're usually calling each other." However, in terms of what Sleepy shared about his daily experiences as a college students, Jen said of Sleepy:

He doesn't tell me a whole lot [about his college experience]. He doesn't, ahhh, that part of things he doesn't tell me a whole lot. But, I think he pretty much comes to his classes and

goes. He doesn't hang around school as much. And, ummm, I think that's kind of why [he doesn't tell me much].

Superteam also described talking every day with Jerry, but indicated he did not share much regarding his experiences in college. She said of their frequency of communication, "I, I see him every day, talk to him every day. Whether it's on the phone or when I get home or when he gets home. It's every day." However, when asked what Jerry shared about his experiences in college, she said, "Umm, not enough. He really doesn't talk about it. Doesn't talk about professors or students. He really doesn't say a lot."

A sub-theme of communication between the parents and students was parental indications that arguments with their students were resolved by talking.

When asked how she resolved arguments with Christina, Ann said, "I'm just blunt. I'm sorry. If I say it, I mean it, no questions." Paul explained, "We get out of each other's space. Then, we apologize and go on from there. But, it doesn't go on. If we have an argument, it's usually resolved within an hour." Buckeye indicated it was rare for her and Amber to argue; however, if they did, they worked toward a resolution. Buckeye said, "Usually it comes to some conclusion through discussion and then we both say we're sorry if anything we said was inappropriate or hurtful." Rebecca also communicated with Renee to resolve arguments. She explained, "I would try to talk to her first."

To summarize, as the students explained, parents also communicate frequently with their daughters or sons. Daughters shared more details about their daily college experience than sons.

Parents' struggles to determine when to encourage independence and when to offer assistance.

A third theme that arose as an aspect of the parents' descriptions of their relationship with their students was their struggle to determine when to encourage student independence and when to step in and assist their children.

Ann described this struggle in the following words:

There's just a line where children, where kids they want to be your friend, but you just have to mentally know when it's going against their best interest. So, I'm willing to listen, but if she's not thinking rationally - because she's 19 years old and she doesn't know everything - but I've done it. Well, not everything, but I can look back on some mistakes I've made and then I can tell her, "Well, this is what I think." I don't know, it's just, there's a point there when the mom steps in, and I don't know. I've forgotten the word. I'm trying to think of the word. Instinct. It's instinct...It's difficult. And, it's probably been harder for me because even though I've let go a little bit at a time, she's still in our house and we still have rules.

Lainey D. said:

I think the hardest part for me as a mom is watching her, you know, they talk about cutting those apron strings, is trying to let her go and still keep hold of her. Because, I mean, there's a delicate balance there. When is it time, as a mom, to say, "OK, Superstar, we need to think about this" or whatever? And, other times letting her make the mistakes so she learns. You know?

When probed to explore how she decided when to help Superstar or when to let her make mistakes, Lainey D. said:

I don't really know, I think so much of that is just, gut feeling. You know this has gone far enough. It's time to take action. Sometimes you end up stepping in too soon. And, they react. And, then you just kinda pull back...You know, sometimes you just got to stick your neck out there, is the way I look at it. Be willing to take the hits because later on they'll understand.

Jen described letting Sleepy explore his independence in the following way:

I try not to lecture too much, but I want him to reflect on what he's doing and tell him that, umm, well, I don't really appreciate or I don't agree with what he's doing. But, he needs to think about it for himself and I let him finish doing what he needs to do... I try to umm, I try to go by how it hits me at the time, I guess. I tell him what I am thinking, but at the same time he's got to make...I sort of tell him what I think and where I think it's appropriate or not. And, then, let him go from there. Because, I still think he needs to make the ultimate decisions. He is 22 years old now. Umm, and my thought, my feeling is he needs to become independent, whether I think he's old enough or not...That's what we're supposed to do as parents, I think, is make them, make our kids functional and independent.

Rebecca realized Renee had become more independent. She said, "She's become independent now. Even though she still lives with me, she's independent. She tries to do her own things, now."

Dawn also described the struggles she faced to let go of Crystal. She said:

Because she's old enough. She can leave, she can do what she wants. She can leave tomorrow, but that's not what I want for her. I keep stressing that education is

important...And, but as far as some of it, I just have to let her do what she wants. I mean, it's hard letting go and those mistakes she'll make now, she'll regret later, but there's nothing you can do about it. And, that's the hard part, is seeing her make mistakes, you know, and not being able to get her to see it.

When probed as to how she figured out how to balance letting Crystal go with trying to help her avoid mistakes, Dawn could not provide any clear strategies. She said:

You know, there are things that have happened, you know, and I think, "God, I never would have thought." And, now, we're facing it. So, what do you do? You know? I could go off the deep end...But, I have to keep myself pretty together. And, it's difficult. Believe me, it is.

Paul provided the following advice to guide parent relationships with students:

Always stand back and allow the children to sort it out. To go just a little bit past where they're comfortable with figuring something out. But, where you're able to step in and help, be ready. But stand back as much as possible. Keep communicating. But, stand back on the advice some of the time. Because, they don't want advice all the time, they want support. But, they don't want to be controlled.

Reducing stress for students.

Finally, parents indicated they believed a key role in their relationship with their students was to reduce the stress on college-age students and allowed them to focus on their academics. They felt having their students live at home was one factor in reducing the stress.

Paul said of Jade's need for a safe place to go when she is stressed, "She wants somebody where, if the world falls apart for a day, she can go to them." He felt he played that role for her.

Ann explained the following of Christina's life at home:

We've removed, there's no car payment, no insurance. We've removed all the stressors.

There's nothing for her to worry about. And, sometimes I think it's good and sometimes I think it's not because she has that sense of responsibility and sometimes it's too easy for her. But, I know sometimes she gets anxious when she has too much stress on her. She just gets a little anxiety and so I don't want her to have to deal with that when she doesn't have to.

Lainey D. indicated she felt having Superstar lived at home allowed Superstar to get support she may not have gotten if she moved out and lived with other college students.

Lainey D. said:

There are so many times when I am glad she is there. If not, she would, because I've seen some of the things she would come to me and talk to me about. And, I felt she may be floundering in a decision. And, I feel like just her talking to me helps... You know, just telling, verbalizing it to somebody other than a friend.

Superteam also described their relationship of having Jerry live at home. Her older children had lived on campus at other universities and she felt that had been a mistake. She described the value of students living at home while in college in the following way:

Jerry, just having him at home, ahhh, I prefer it that way. I think they're too young to go and live away from home...I know where my son is. I know he is studying and he's not out partying. And, that's a real comfort level for me and my husband.

Rebecca also felt having Renee lived with her reduced the stress in her daughter's life. She said:

Well, with her living with me, of course, I can help her out with school and go over the things that probably a roommate wouldn't want to do, wouldn't have time to do. And, then, sometimes roommates influence you to not go to school or to do something different. And, I stay on her about staying in school. So, that's the advantage.

Dawn also sees having Crystal live at home as an advantage in their relationship. She said: The good thing is I know where she's at and I know we're still in each other's lives as long as she can be. And, I know that she knows she has a safe haven around her...I really don't want her out there struggling on her own.

In summary, four themes arose to address how parents described their relationships with their second-year college students. Like the students, parents indicated they had close relationships with their children. Communication was also a key relationship ingredient for the parents. Additionally, parents reflected on the important aspect of providing the right balance between challenging their students to become more independent while also providing the support the students needed. Finally, parents saw value in having their students living at home as ways to reduce personal stress on the student and to provide an environment that allowed the students to focus on their academic work.

Student Perceptions of Parental Influence on Their Academic Decisions

The third research question of this study asked “What type and amount of influence do students perceive their parents have on their academic decisions?” During the interviews, examples of academic decisions that were provided for the students included making decisions about what college to attend, what classes to take, when to consider withdrawing from a course, and to which college students might transfer to finish their four-year degrees. Three themes arose which described students’ perceptions of their parents’ involvement in academic-related decisions. Students stated they often sought academic assistance from their parents. Student also indicated they kept their parents informed of their academic performance, including the grades they earned. Students also shared that their parents were influencing the students’ decisions to transfer. The following statements from students indicated that parents are informed of the academic experiences of the students.

Parental assistance with academic work.

Students indicated they often asked their parents for assistance with their academic work. Christina talked about the different roles her parents played when helping her with her studies:

Umm, my mom helps me by re-proofing my papers. Because, I’m used to MLA and my mom knows APA from her doctorate. And, I have Dr. Jones and he’s like, “Well, articles need to be APA.” So, I’ll call mom and ask about references for me. And, then, my dad had geology the year before I did and I had it last summer. And, this spring I have it at the next level. And, he wants to help. I’ll ask him, “Do you remember this? Do you have your notes?” That helps me out. And, like mom and her Power Points. I’ll be like “Do you have

any information on this for like social science class?” So, I definitely rely on them if I need any new ideas or I need re-proofing or something.

Superstar’s mother also helped her with proofing papers, but was not as helpful with her math work:

And, she proofreads my papers because she’s an English freak...But, no, she proofreads my papers and we’re both horrible with math. So, there’s no way she’s helping me with my math homework. We did that, we tried that once...And, we just got each other more confused.

According to Renee, her mother was very engaged in helping her with her school work.

She explained:

She helps me with my school work. She helps me study because I have biology tests a lot and they’re like eight pages long. So, she helps me study a lot. And, umm, she’ll come in my room and we go through note cards together. And, she just helps me out a lot.

Considering if I was in college compared to if I lived alone. I probably wouldn’t make it because I would never have any initiative...So, having her there really helps me out a lot compared to if I wasn’t, like if I was by myself.

While Dawn may have be less involved in her daughter’s school work than other parents, she still offered assistance. Crystal still described Dawn’s involvement by stating:

She tries to be a little involved and help me with my school work, if she can, or whatever.

You know, like, she’ll read my paper if I’m writing for school. And, she’ll be like, you know, “This is what you could do if you want to say it better” or something. She’s pretty good.

Sharing information about grades.

Students indicated they commonly sought academic assistance from their parents. Additionally, another academic theme that arose through the student interviews was their sharing of information with their parents regarding grades they were earning. Some examples of student explanations of sharing this information with their parents are outlined below.

Superstar explained:

Usually [my mom] asks me more about my grades...And, last week I made an A on a French exam and I called my mom and I was like, "Mom, I made an A on my French exam." And she was like, "Woohhoo." And, I called my dad and he was like, "Well, alright, Pooh Bear." That's what he calls me, Pooh Bear.

Sleepy, while more reserved, also shared grade information with his parents. He said, "Umm, they know about the grades I'm making now. I share grades when the instructors let us know what they are. I think I'm doing OK because now they [the professors] aren't really giving us updates."

When asked what type of academic information she shared with her parents, Amber said, "Well, grades. They're pretty into that." Additionally, Crystal, while sharing grade information with her mom, indicated if her grades were not as good as she wished that she might not share that information as willingly. She explained:

If I'm making a C, sometimes I try not to [share]. I've made a C like three times and I used to be a straight A student from like second grade all the way up. So, like a C really bothers me. So, I don't, I'll tell her, but I won't tell my dad. I'm really more afraid of what my dad says than what she says. She's more like, "Do your best."

Crystal did enjoy sharing grades when she did well. She described this by saying, “I usually get really excited. Like the other day, I called her and was like, ‘Hey Mom, I made the highest grade on the test in Economics.’”

Jade, while not sharing grade information with her mother and father, did share that information with a couple with whom she had built a relationship. She spent a lot of time at this couple’s home, which was close to Day State College. She discussed sharing grade information with them. She explained:

They ask how I’m doing in school and I’ll say, well I only made an 84 on such and such. And, they’ll say, “Well, what have you been doing this past month.” And, I’ll say, “Well I’ve been to a few parties and maybe I’ve been to the city, or whatnot.” And, you know, we talk about it. And, they’ll say, “You would do better if you studied a little more.” And, you know, it’s completely true.

Making decisions to transfer to four-year institutions.

When considering students’ perceptions of parental involvement in the academic decision-making, students indicate that they appreciate parental assistance with assignments and they also keep them informed of their performance by sharing their grades. Additionally, students explored the role they believe their parents played as the students made decisions to transfer to other institutions to earn their four-year degrees.

Superstar shared information about an in-depth conversation she had with her parents about her decision to transfer to a university about five hours away from her home. She explained:

When, I decided about, when I was thinking about [the four-year university], which is kind of decided now, that I'd really like to go, we had an extensive night. We just sat down and talked for like two and one-half hours about the ifs and whens and just everything that goes along with it. We were talking about where you would get, how you would pay for it. Like, with student loans or whatever. And, then, like where I would live, dorms. Because my mom was like, "You are not living in a coed dorm." And, just talking you know, probably, from what I've heard the rules of dorms...Just like everything you can think about, we pretty much talked about.

Interestingly, when I spoke with Superstar's mother, Lainey D., she indicated she believed Superstar would be transferring to a private college located in the same city as Day State College. It appears in Superstar's mind the decision has been made for her to attend the university; however, this did not appear to be the same conclusion her mother had made.

Amber and her parents have also discussed her plans to transfer to a four-year institution located about an hour away from her home. She indicated her parents are not in favor of her decision to move away, but she thinks she will eventually convince them to let her go. She explained:

I pretty much, like, I kinda always had an idea of what I wanted to do. So, I'll like, with this next step of transferring, I'm thinking about going to [four-year institution]. So, I've been pretty much looking it up on the internet and what you need to do to get into it. What is required and stuff like that.

However, she has not shared her decision with her parents, yet:

I haven't quite got to that part, yet [telling her parents]. They know I'm thinking about going there, but it's still the kind of, "Oh, no, she's leaving" kind of thing. Well, it's more like they are not going to like it. So, I don't want to disappoint them or something. But, I still want to do it anyways...I think I'm probably going to get my way [and be able to attend the four-year institution] and hope that [my dad's] OK with it eventually.

Jerry looked to his parents for support and sought their input about his decision to transfer. He felt he could make his own decision. However, it appeared important that his parents agreed with his decision. He explained:

I mean, I have the decision to move out. I have the decision to buy a new car. I have the decision to go to school somewhere else. And, they support all those, but they make sure that I make the right one. And, they help me look into what's really going on...Like, with looking up going to a new school, for example, which I have been doing some research. Mostly just so I can be prepared and know what I need to transfer...They really play a supportive role. They give me the bottom line.

In summary, students felt their parents were involved in their academic lives and their decision-making related to their academics. Students indicated parents helped them with assignments, were informed of their grades and were playing an influential role in their decisions to transfer.

Parent Perceptions of Their Influence on Student Academic Decisions

Parents were also asked to explore the role they believed they played in students' academic decisions. Through the interviews, three themes arose which demonstrated parental influence

on academic-related aspects of students' lives in college. First, parents directed students' choices of which college to attend. Secondly, parents saw their role in students' academic lives as that of supporter or encourager. Finally, parents expressed a desire for their children to complete their higher education.

Parental influence on college choice.

Day State College was the first and only college attended by each student in the study. Their parents indicated they had played a key role in their students' decisions to enroll at this college. Conversely, the students, who sometimes casually mentioned the role of their parents in their choice to attend Day State College, did not appear to express that their parents had influenced their decision as much as the parents indicated they had. Students referred more often to the affordability of the College as a factor for attendance.

Each parent was asked to share why his or her son or daughter chose to attend Day State College. Following are their responses which indicated their influential role in this decision. For comparison purposes, following each parent quotation is the student's explanation of why he or she attended Day State College.

Paul indicated his place of residence in the United States influenced Jade's choice of college. He explained:

Umm, I think, Jade wanted to pursue her education here. She was interested in traveling and stuff. I had come here a couple years before and started work. So, you know, there was a bit of a support mechanism there. And, Day State was geographically a good option based on where I was living, so I encouraged her to come here.

Jade indicated her reasons for choosing Day State College by stating:

Umm, well, I had family that lived here. So, I was looking, like I was looking around the area. And, my two choices were Day State College and [another two-year college]. And, I chose this college because, just because the people here were a lot more friendly and a lot more helpful. And, I just generally came away with a much better feeling about this place.

Ann explained of Christina's college choice:

Well, because we recommended the school. My husband and I both went to school there and we think it's a good school. And, it was close. And, I used to teach high school and so many children go off and just the maturity level – they're not ready to go off on their own. And, they end up either dropping out or failing and they have to go back home. So, I just wanted her to not have the stress of moving off and having worried. She likes it, though.

Christina said of her decision to attend Day State College, "Cause it was close to home and it was cheap, or cheaper than any other school and it offered what I wanted to do my major in. So, it was very beneficial to me and my family."

Lainey D. expressed similar concerns that Superstar was not mature enough to move away from home for college. She also referenced the financial implications. She said:

Well, I think, the basic was because she wasn't ready to go off to school yet. And, she thought this would be the best of both worlds. She's, you know, ten minutes from home this way and yet, she can still work, you know, and stay at home without having to be...And, we weren't ready financially for her to go off at that point in time. So, this became the best for her and for us.

Superstar addressed her decision by indicating:

Well, it's closest to my house. And, for a community college to get your basics down, it's not very expensive. So, since I don't pay for it myself and my parents are helping me, it's a little easier on them.

Like Ann, Jen was also an alumna of the College and used her experience to influence Sleepy to attend. She said, "Well, I was a student here and I've had a couple of brothers that were students here. And convenience. So, I thought it would be a great place for Sleepy."

Sleepy had a longer explanation of his decision to attend Day State College:

It was somewhere really close I could get into fairly easy. And, with money, if something were to happen and I didn't have [my scholarship], then it wouldn't be too terribly expensive for me to come here. And, plus, like I heard a little while ago about the computer science program.

Buckeye's words clearly indicate strong parental influence in Amber's decision to enroll at Day State College. She said:

Umm, really it was mainly her father and I's decision as to where she was going to go to college. Her brother and sister had gone here and graduated. We liked the atmosphere. We liked the small class sizes. Amber met many of the teachers her brother and sister had, like in the Honors Program and things like that. They enjoyed it. And, we only live three minutes from the school, which was another reason we had her come over here. This was the only [choice for Amber]. This was what was gonna happen and so, Amber was OK with it and that was the plan.

Amber understood her parents' influence on her decision to attend Day State College. She said simply:

Well, umm, pretty much that's what my parents wanted me to do. And, I have no money. So, [my scholarship] paid for this. And, it was kinda like a getting started place. So, that was about it. It's close and they don't want me to go off somewhere. So, my brother and sister went here, and it's what they know.

Superteam indicated Jerry was not ready to go away to college because she felt he had not prepared himself academically in high school. She said:

Umm, he originally wanted to go to, ahh, [a university in the Western United States]. But during his high school years he didn't prepare himself for that. So, we told him he had to go to a local college for his first two years. So, he didn't have a choice.

Jerry indicated he felt he did have a choice. When talking about his decision to attend Day State, Jerry said:

[I attended] mostly because of convenience. Ahh, just being close to home. I mean, it's about 30 minutes away, but being able to live at home and work. Ahh, I had the choice of going to a big school, umm, and kinda veered away from that. I talked to some people who went to school here and they said it was great.

Rebecca also influenced Renee's decision to attend Day State. She explained:

She probably chose it because I talked to her about it and tried to talk her into going here. One of my friends from high school went to Day State College and when she got out and she talked to me about it and how much she liked it and how good it was. And, then, I talked to Renee and talked her into going there.

Renee's perspective on her decision differs slightly, but still references her mother's influence:

Umm, I have some friends that went there and they told me that it was a really good college and they have a really good education program. So, I talked to my mom about it and we decided I would come here and then I would transfer. But, now, there's a four-year degree program in education, so we decided I would just stay here instead of transferring to another school. So, I think it's a good school and I like going here...I'm used to going here, so I don't want to go anywhere else.

Dawn also influenced Crystal's decision. She said:

Well, honestly it was because I didn't want her to wander off to [a four-year university four hours away], which is where she really, really wanted to go. I'm here on a campus [across the street from Day State College] and I thought it would be nice to have her close by. I don't think she really wanted [to attend Day State College], but then she understood that we really could not afford to send her down there for right now. So, I decided it would be better if she stayed up here. At least for two years. And, then, we could see about switching.

Crystal explained her decision in the following way:

Well, actually, I was planning to go to [a four-year university four hours away]. But, my mom didn't want me to move. And, my parents both didn't like that idea. So, at the last minute, my mom's kinda like, "What do you think about Day State? You'd be right across the street from me." And, so I was like, "Fine." And, so I did it. And, that's how I ended up here.

Parents clearly indicated they felt they influenced their students' decision to attend Day State College. While students alluded to their parents' role in these decisions, students also expressed that other factors played into the decision for them.

Parental role as supporter and encourager.

Once the students matriculated at Day State College, parents saw their primary role in students' academic life as that of supporter or encourager. This created the second theme that arose when exploring how parents influenced students' academic decisions. Some examples of parental expression of this role are outlined below.

Ann explained, "Well, I try to help her. So, umm, just try to support her. I just think she needs to understand that it's frustrating sometimes, but you have to keep going." Lainey D. stated, "I would call myself an encourager. I support her. We support her in anything that we can. So, that's basically the way I look at it. I'm her cheering squad." Similarly, Jen said, "Umm, I just pretty much try to encourage him to take what he likes and think about what he's taking. I don't think I've really directed him too much." Buckeye was also an encourager. She said, "I try to encourage her as much as possible, to let her know I am behind her, and to give her encouragement. I try to coach her, to let her know, 'you can do this'." Dawn sees her main role as "only encouraging." Interestingly, Superteam did not use the terms encourager or supporter to describe her role in Jerry's academic life, but Jerry did. He said simply, "[They play] umm, a supporting role. Definitely a supporting role."

Parental desire for students to complete their education.

Another academic theme which arose in the parent interviews was their desire for their children to complete their higher education. They described this wish with the following

explanations. Paul stated, "I want her to see her education through and benefit from it." Ann wished for Christina, "That she gets through college. I would really like to see her finish college and go on and get her Master's." Superteam wanted Jerry to finish a degree. She said, "Absolutely a degree. Absolutely." Rebecca said she wanted Renee to "go as many years of college that she can. And, then, umm, she wants to be a teacher. So, do whatever she can do and go up the highest she can go as far as being a teacher." Dawn explained, "I hope she finishes her Associate's and then goes for her Bachelor's and then goes further with it from there."

In summary, in addition to parental influence on the students' choice to attend Day State College, parents also felt they played an important role as the supporters or encouragers for students' academic pursuits. Finally, parents wished for their students to earn higher education degrees.

Student Perceptions of Parental Influence on Personal Decisions

Research question five looked at students' perceptions of the amount and type of influence their parents had on the personal decisions. During the interviews, examples of personal decisions that were shared with the students included decisions involving finances, dating relationships and friendships. Converse to the students' perceptions of their parents' influence on their academic decisions, no clear themes arose with the students regarding their personal decision-making process or their parents' role in it. Some students were able to broadly define the process they used to make decisions while others had not ever thought about it. Some students indicated taking a thoughtful, measured approach, while others felt they made spontaneous decisions. Some students felt their religious values guided their decisions. One

student perceived he did not have to make any serious personal decisions. Some students ran decisions by their parents for approval while others felt they made personal decisions completely on their own without input from their parents. What may potentially be learned from this is that during the second-year of college parents and students are much more jointly invested in students' academic decisions than their personal decisions.

Parental Perceptions of Their Influence on Students' Personal Decisions

No clear themes emerged regarding parental perception of the type and amount of influence they had on their students' personal decision-making process. Similar to the variety in student explanations, parents also expressed diverse perspectives as to how their children approached personal decisions. Parents indicated students made such decisions on their own, by thinking them through, by relying on their religious values, or they were unclear of the process.

One sub-theme that did arise in parents' discussion of students' personal decisions involved parental interest in who their students chose to date. While parent perception of students' relationships varied from disagreeing with whom the students chose to date to favoring whom students chose to date, each parent referenced a dating relationship. Parents did not, however, indicate they felt they had influence in students' decisions about whom they would date. Following are some parental references to the dating relationships of their students.

Ann, Jen, Rebecca, and Renee did not agree with the types of people their children chose to date. Ann explained of Christina:

She's not had good luck with boys. But, I mean, and you see it coming on and you tell her, "I don't really care for him or I don't think this is going to be a good relationship just from

what I see or what I know.” But, she has to make her own decisions...And, I don’t make all her decisions, you know. The only thing I can hope is that everything we’ve done leads her to make good decisions.

Similarly, Jen was not pleased with Sleepy’s decision to get married. She said:

Now, with this marriage business, we all got together and let him know [we did not approve]. Umm, we even had people in the church trying to work with him. Umm, he didn’t listen, obviously, or he wouldn’t have gotten married...But, umm, he is now, more taking our advice. At least thinking about our advice.

Rebecca feels Renee dates men who are too young for her. She explained:

And, then as far as guys goes, she picks younger guys and I don’t think she should pick them that much younger. Because, guys are further, in my opinion, further behind than women, you know, when it comes to maturity. And, she picks guys that are usually about three years younger than her and they already act silly. And, I tell her, she’s not getting anywhere...but I try not to say anything much about it, about her dating somebody that young. But, at the same time, I try to make her realize that he’s so much younger in maturity than she is.

Dawn feels that Crystal’s boyfriend is too old for her and too much the focus of her life. She stated:

Ahh, my God. The biggest thing I think is her boyfriend. And, we can’t resolve that. So, there is no resolve, except that I accept it. I come home and she’s on the phone and has been on the phone for three hours. And, I know it’s difficult with a long distance

relationship, but she's on the phone for three hours...I just express that first of all I'm tired of her doing that. And, then, how do we resolve it?

Lainey D. and Superteam also talked about their children's dating relationships, but they approved of their significant others. Lainey D. discussed the close communication she and Superstar had when Superstar first started dating her boyfriend:

But, umm, finally, when she, and she was doing a lot of communicating even during that time. She'd say, "You know, mom, I'm beginning to think I really like this guy more than a friend." We love him. He's become part of our family.

Superteam also expressed her support of the woman Jerry has been dating and explained how Jerry had become part of her (the girlfriend's) family. She said, "He'll talk to his girlfriend [about personal decisions]. He's got a great relationship with his girlfriend's dad. I mean fabulous relationship. A good relationship with the mom, too, but a really good one with her dad."

While no clear themes emerged to determine how parents felt they were influencing their students' personal decisions, it is clear that parents are very interested in the dating relationship aspect of their students' lives. However, parents did not appear to feel they had much, if any, influence over these decisions.

Do Qualitative Data Findings Reflect Quantitative Results Regarding Students' Development?

The final two research questions in the study investigated if qualitative data findings supported the quantitative results of student responses on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller, Cooper, 1999). The SDTLA looks at student development in three developmental tasks that each includes subtasks, along with a salubrious

lifestyle scale. The three tasks are listed across the top of the following table with their related subtasks listed below.

Table 4.3:

Summary of SDTLA Tasks and Subtasks

Tasks	Establishing and clarifying purpose	Developing autonomy	Mature interpersonal relationships
	Educational Involvement Subtask	Emotional Autonomy Subtask	Peer Relationships Subtask
	Career Planning Subtask	Interdependence Subtask	Tolerance Subtask
	Lifestyle Subtask	Academic Autonomy Subtask	
	Cultural Participation Subtask	Instrumental Autonomy Subtask	

To begin the process for collecting data in this research study, students first completed the SDTLA instrument, Form 1.99. I then hand-scored each student's responses using the SDTLA score key. The SDTLA is a normalized instrument with a mean set at 50 and a standard deviation of 10 (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999). After student instruments were scored, I compared their results on the tasks and subtasks to the normative data provided in the *Preliminary Technical Manual for the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Assessment* (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999). Normative data scores are provided for males and females in each year of college, freshman through senior years. For the purpose of this study, I

focused on the individual student mean scores which were one or more standard deviations above or below the normative data for sophomore-level students. These scores may not be exceptions for students because of the small sample size in this study. If large numbers of students were surveyed, they may also have scored in the same percentages above or below the means. However, in order to address the research questions in this study, these scores were identified as those to explore further through qualitative methods. After identifying the areas that would be further investigated, I created a few questions for each student and his or her parent to include in each interview designed to more fully explore the results of the student's SDTLA from both the student's perspective and his or her parent's perspective. (Appendix F)

In reference to the student-parent relationship, Chickering and Reisser (1993) discussed specifically student separation from parents as a key component in students' movement through autonomy toward interdependence. This move toward independence is a key start on students' developmental journey during college. Chickering and Reisser wrote, "The road to emotional independence begins with disengagement from parents, proceeds through reliance on peers and role models, and moves toward a balance of comfort with one's own company and openness to others, without the need to cling" (p. 122). This movement to establish autonomy so that one may become independent can be seen through the interviews conducted with the students in the study. This movement begins with their separation from their parents. While the examples discussed below explore students' development in several of the tasks and subtasks, the over-riding theme is that of students' learning to establish their independence and sense of their own selves.

The following table lists each student participant and the task(s) or subtask(s) in which he or she was approximately one or more standard deviations above or below the normative data means. Six students had scores that were above or below normative means. For two students, Sleepy and Amber, all of their scores were within one standard deviation of the normative means.

Table 4.4:

Summary of Notable Student Scores on the SDTLA

Participant	Task/subtask	Student mean	Normative data mean	Standard deviation
Jade	Lifestyle planning	60.380	50.00	10
Christina	Tolerance	62.62	50.00	10
	Academic Autonomy	64.40	50.00	10
	Peer Relationships	70.88	50.00	10
Superstar	Peer Relationships	62.373	50.00	10
	Interdependence	33.69	50.00	10

Sleepy	N/A			
				10
Amber	Instrumental Autonomy	60.559	50.00	10
Jerry	Lifestyle Planning	69.663	50.00	10
	Instrumental Autonomy	64.845	50.00	10
	Interdependence	72.151	50.00	10
Renee	N/A			
Crystal	Career Planning	30.971	50.00	10

Definitions of each task and subtask.

To understand the meaning of each task and subtask listed in the table above, following are summaries of the definitions as they are explained in the *Preliminary Technical Manual for the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Assessment* (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999).

- *Instrumental Autonomy* is “an ability [of students] to structure their lives and to manipulate their environment in ways that allow them to satisfy daily needs and meet

responsibilities without extensive direction or support from others...They are independent, goal-oriented, directed, resourceful, and self-sufficient persons” (pp. 11-12).

- Students who have achieved high levels in the *Tolerance Subtask* show “respect for and acceptance of those of different backgrounds, beliefs, cultures, races, lifestyles, and appearances. They respond to people as individuals” (p. 12)
- *The Career Planning Subtask* indicates “an awareness of the world of work, an accurate understanding of one’s abilities and limitations, a knowledge of requirements for various occupations, and an understanding of the emotional and educational demands of different kinds of jobs” (p. 11).
- *Lifestyle Planning* “includes establishing a personal direction and orientation in one’s life that takes into account personal, ethical, and religious values, future relationships/family plans, and vocational and educational objectives” (p. 11).
- *Academic Autonomy* indicates students “have the capacity to deal well with ambiguity and to monitor and control their behavior in ways that allow them to attain personal goals and fulfill responsibilities” (p. 11)
- *Interdependence* evaluates student recognition of “the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the individual and his/her community. They fulfill their citizenship responsibilities” (p. 11).
- The *Peer Relationships Subtask* evaluates how well “students describe their relationships with peers as shifting toward greater trust, independence, frankness, and individuality

and as feeling less need to conform to the standards of friends or to conceal shortcomings or disagreements” (p. 12)

Findings to address research questions seven and eight are presented in the following section. Each student’s results were individual, so each of the areas indicated in the table above are explored by the individual student and his or her parent. Quotations provided in the interviews are used to support the conclusions made regarding whether the student’s quantitative scores were reflected qualitatively by the student and his or her parent. To conclude this section, a summary is provided analyzing the overall findings from the comparison of the qualitative and quantitative data.

Jade and Paul.

Jade scored above the normative mean on the Lifestyle Planning Subtask. In her interview, she expressed a clear sense of her plan for her life.

Well, I would like to double major in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising. And, then ideally and when I transfer, I’d like to transfer to [a four-year university] and finish up and get my double Master’s. I would like to get an internship somewhere and work with them. And, then hopefully, after I have, after I’ve obtained my Bachelor’s degrees, I would like to possibly have them sponsor me or find a company that would be willing to sponsor me so that I would be able to stay here. And, then I’d like to go back in get my Master’s probably in marketing, I guess it would be. And, I haven’t really gotten past that. And, I would like to travel. That would be important to me.

Her father also shared his knowledge of Jade’s future plans. Paul explained:

She's become very self-reliant. Very, ahh, she researches stuff. Information she needs, she'll find what she can about it. She's become very self-dependent. But, she has ideas beyond her education. They are only concepts. She wants to start her own business. She wants to travel. Personally, I think she should combine the two. But, I think she wants to be a tourist. But, she has some ideas for the future. Which, four years ago she didn't have. Now, she has a direction. She has a goal. She also has some options in there. She knows if some things don't happen, she has alternatives.

Christina and Ann.

As indicated above, Christina scored above the normative means on tolerance, academic autonomy, and interdependence. Her interview responses indicated she did have a strong sense of herself in these areas. In relation to tolerance, Christina spoke of both her understanding of the role of women and her experiences doing elementary school observations in a classroom that was predominately Hispanic. She explained:

You know, especially down here in the South, guys are like, "The women can't be making more money or the woman needs to be at home or the woman can't go out and do that."

Well, that's what I've heard. And, I don't agree with that at all. I would never marry anyone who put me down or told me I can't do this or I can't do that.

She also talked about her experience in the classroom in the following words:

I didn't realize how joyful it is to be around people of other races or ethnicities because you learn so much from them. And, I've been doing my observations in an elementary school. It's like 94% Hispanic. And, I'm like, 'This is better than teaching white kids.'

We're snobs. And, I think to never take anything for granted. I see that people who have a lot or who are given a lot don't really appreciate it.

When asked to comment on Christina's appreciation of others, Ann stated, "She's friendly, she's responsible, and she's well-rounded." Here comments did not as closely support Christina's development in this area as Christina's did.

Christina also appears to have become more academically autonomous. When she started college, she struggled to figure out how to be successful in the classroom. However, as a second-year student, she was able to reflect on how she changed her habits to become more successful. She said:

Definitely my priorities and values switched around. I really need to get my work done first. And, as soon as I get this all done, it's going to pay off. I had to change the amount of time I set aside to study. I had to get more organized. I had to research stuff like tutoring. And, I looked to my teachers to help me.

Christina also indicated she relied on her own research and advice of employees of the College when she was making academic-related decisions. She said, "I think of what's going to benefit me in the future. And, then, I work in the library, and, my employers, their opinions matter to me because they are pretty smart. And, I'll say, 'Here's my decision. What do you think?'"

Ann did believe the Christina still relied on her as she made her academic decisions. Ann said, "Well, initially, I try to help her and advise her...And, I try to help her, but let her make the choices." So, it appears Ann may not have felt that Christina is as academically autonomous as Christina's answers indicated.

Christina also discussed her struggle to establish her own identity and be herself, even if it met being different than her friends. This may indicate she was working to establish mature peer relationships. She explained:

Family or friends' thoughts or decisions won't affect mine, in a way. I know what's right or wrong or what's good or beneficial to me...It's my life and if it's not going to work out, I'm going to learn from it. And, it's something I gotta go through.

She also described her experience separating herself from the friends she had in high school. She said:

And, I'm one of those people, I think your friends reflect who you are. So, when I graduated high school I didn't really want to be friends with the same people I was in high school. Because they affected me and I wasn't who I wanted to be. And, I wanted to live my life. It's like, I'd rather have a handful of best friends than tenfold of so-so friends.

Ann also discussed Christina's relationships with her friends. She could not provide much detail other than the fact that Christina did not have many friends. She commented, "I'm sure she does argue with her one friend (laughs)." Again, Ann's perceptions of Christina's development do not match Christina's scores or her qualitative explanations.

Superstar and Lainey D.

Superstar scored above the normative mean on peer relationships and below the normative mean on interdependence. When asked to discuss her relationships with her friends, Superstar shared the following:

I don't like being around people who are down in the dumps. Umm, mostly people that I am friends with are a lot like me. They're pretty energetic. They like a lot of the things I

do. Most of my friends I have come from my church. Just 'cause there's that circle of friends that I see the most...I don't know, I guess you look for friends that are kinda like you.

This quote indicated that Superstar has not yet fully defined her own sense of herself and she is greatly influenced by others in her friendships. She has not made the separation to be friends with others who are not like her and she does not appear to be willing to branch out and expand her friendships. Therefore, in this case, the qualitative data do not appear to support her quantitative score.

Her mother, Lainey D., when asked about Superstar's friends, spoke of her boyfriend. She said:

You know, that's the whole point of having a significant other that they actually improve your life. They make you better. And, that's what she has. I tell [her boyfriend] all the time. I say, "Thank you so much for helping her be organized."

When pressed to say more about Superstar's friends, Lainey D. could not provide more information. Again, these qualitative findings do not appear to accurately support Superstar's score on the SDTLA.

Superstar scored almost two standard deviations below the normative mean on the subtask of Interdependence. She talked about her perceptions of her role in her greater community in the following words:

I'd like to do more in the community than I do. I remember at my old church we used to do service two or three times a month. And, just the smiles on people's faces and they would smile at you and they loved that you would plant a flower or paint or clean...And,

I'd like to do more of that than I do. The more you want to do the more it seems you have to do and you can't do all you want. But, there's only 24-hours in a day and you can only do so much.

So, it appears Superstar understands the value of contributing to her community and her connection to others. In fact, she is involved in her church each week. However, she has not taken steps to be active in this way while she has been in college. This may explain why her scores are below the normative mean.

Lainey D. also referenced Superstar's engagement in her church. However, she could not think of any current community involvement. She did talk about her hopes that Superstar would maintain her faith and always look for good in people. She said:

I've instilled so much in her. I think faith is the first thing. I want her to always look for the good in people. And, umm, that's not necessarily a moral, but a value we've tried to instill in her. I guess, look beyond the surface and look for the good in people because, you know, people that look undesirable on the outside are the most beautiful on the inside.

It appears the foundation has been laid by her family for Superstar to consider the lives of others and how they might intersect with her life, but perhaps she has not fully developed her ability to do so yet.

Amber and Buckeye.

Amber scored approximately one standard deviation above the mean in the subtask of Instrumental Autonomy. Her interview responses appear to support the sense that she has control of her environment to meet her daily needs and that she relies primarily on herself to direct her life. She describes her sense of controlling her own destiny in the following ways:

Umm, I want to go out and see things and do things and kinda get out and see how things are in the world. I'm a big travel kind of person. I like to go places. Not my family. They are not that big into going out and seeing things, so it's a little different.

When making decisions, Amber likes to make them on her own. She said, "I pretty much, like, I kinda always had an idea of what I wanted to do. I kind of try to make the decisions on my own." She also talks about how she sees the world differently from her family. She explained, "I don't know, I guess I see other people in a different view and I've gotten a little bit more mature since coming [to Day State College]."

Amber's comments indicated that she was in fact controlling her environment to the best of her ability, even if it meant going against the wishes of her parents if she felt the decisions were best for her.

That Amber scored above the normative mean in the Instrumental Autonomy subtask is interesting, given that in the interview with Buckeye, it became clear that Buckeye exerted a lot of control in Amber's life. For example, Buckeye explained that she and her husband had not allowed any of the children, ages 23, 21 and Amber at 19, to get their driver's licenses. She did speak of Amber becoming more vocal and confident in her own decisions. Buckeye said:

I see that she has become more vocal. And, she, you know, is very studious, and I think that's just helped to make her who she is...She has matured a lot. Umm, in some ways I would say she is not quite as giggly. In other ways, I would say she is just a chatter box and just a lot different. But, she, I think she's a little more determined. And, she knows what she wants to do.

While it appeared Buckeye had exerted a great deal of influence on Amber's life, the above comments indicate she realized that Amber is exerting control over her own decisions and that she has matured while in college. As Amber makes her decision to transfer and to potentially move out of her home, her skills in this area will probably be further tested.

Jerry and Superteam.

Jerry scored above the normative data means on Lifestyle Planning, Instrumental Autonomy, and Interdependence. Jerry appeared to have a strong sense of both the Lifestyle Planning and Instrumental Autonomy Subtasks. However, his level of understanding of his interdependence did not appear to place him significantly above what should be expected for sophomore-level students.

Jerry had a clear sense of his plan for his life. While still needing to work out details, he did express his desired direction for his life and it appeared he had given it thought. He explained:

Yes, umm. Definitely want to do a Master's. Umm, married. I don't know about any kids, yet. I mean, I'm not saying I don't want kids. But, it's just going to kind of be how it happens. If I have a child, then we are definitely going to prepare for him. Umm, probably living in this area. I'd like to see more of my family living here in ten years. I want to keep riding my bike. That's what's cool about it, it's a lifelong sport. And, travel. I hope to travel a bit more.

Superteam indicated that Jerry had not shared with her his plans for his future. However, she stated that she hoped for him:

I want to keep the kind of relationship we have now. As he matures, goes on with life and graduates from college and gets a job, and gets married and has babies. And, just keep that

very close sense of family with him. My hope for him is that he be productive and that he's just happy in what he's doing and that he feels a sense of success in what he's doing. So, while she had not really discussed this topic with Jerry, her hopes for him are very similar to his own goals for his life.

Jerry also indicated he had control of his life and his decision-making process, indicating his progress toward developing instrumental autonomy. When asked if he would do something he felt was right even if his parents disagreed, Jerry said:

I wouldn't just do it immediately, that's the wrong way to go about things like that. It's going to be an important decision. I would hate to think they would disagree with something I truly believed. But, if I truly believed it then, you know, if I actually thought about it long enough and I felt like it was the right decision, then they just don't have my perspective. Then, I think I would go ahead with it.

Jerry also referenced his love for learning that he developed while in college. He said:

In high school, I was the kind of kid who was really smart, but didn't do anything. I am really disappointed in myself. But, now, ahh, I love learning. I love coming to school. I love every discipline, too, from English to science to math. I love it all. And, I really enjoy just being in class and learning. Whereas before I would just rather sleep.

Jerry's comments indicated he has strongly developed in his areas of the Instrumental Autonomy Subtask.

Superteam also spoke of the change in Jerry from his poor attitude as a high school student to his love for learning in college. She said:

He's just matured a lot. His excitement for learning is so incredible. So incredible. I mean it just, it gives me goosebumps to see him happy with learning... You know, it's just, it's pretty exciting to see your kids do that.

She also explained that Jerry's academic habits had changed, indicating his sense of controlling his own experiences. She said:

Him getting up without me ever having to get him up. Or ask him where he's going, or umm, have you done your papers, etc. etc. I, I, we never have to do that. We used to. We used to have to remind him to turn in his work because he'd forgotten to turn it in.

Superteam also indicated she would allow Jerry to make decisions, even if she didn't agree with them. She said:

OK, it's hard to say this as a parent, but if he were to do something he would struggle with even if I didn't agree, I would let him do it. If it were coming out of our pocket, I would say to him that he needed to pay. But, ultimately, I would leave it up to him to decide.

Superteam's perceptions of Jerry indicated that she too felt he had developed strengths in instrumental autonomy.

Finally, Jerry scored high on the subtask of Interdependence. On this task his qualitative responses indicated he understood the value of knowing more about the world and serving others, but was not actively involved in service. He explained his understanding of the world and the value of serving others in the following words:

The world's a big place. And, if you're only involved with your little niche and your fifty mile radius, I mean what are you, how are you gonna affect the rest of the world? Umm, I'm very interested in worldly things. I hate that as an American I'm so closed into my

little world that I don't see what's happening in Darfur. It's very sad. I mean, I don't have a million dollars to give, but if I raise awareness, maybe something, somebody will see and that will affect another person.

When asked if he were involved in any service, he said, "Unfortunately, I can't. I have so much to do I can't hang around campus and find out all that stuff." He did discuss that as part of his work he built bicycle trails for kids and families, but it was part of what he was paid to do.

When asked about Jerry's understanding of the value of service to others, Superteam said: I do see that in him. He hasn't done a lot with that thought. Umm, he was really heavily involved with Young Life. But, since he's been in school and working, he doesn't have a lot of free time. But, I think it is really in his heart.

Again, her responses indicated that she understood Jerry's sense of interdependence, however, as Jerry said, as well, he has not taken action to put into action his desire to serve.

Crystal and Dawn.

Crystal scored below the normative mean on the Career Planning Subtask. Her struggles to determine her major and future career direction were interwoven throughout the interview. She had recently changed her major from Chemistry on a Pre-Medical track to Business. However, she was still not certain she had any clear direction for her future. Crystal explained how difficult her Chemistry classes were, which made her question her choice of major. She explained:

Oh, my gosh, it was more like, I was getting depressed. I was working every day on homework. I don't know if it was just the Chemistry that was killing me. Maybe I could

have stuck it out and I would still be pre-med. But, it was like the day[I had to register for classes] and I needed to decide if I would take the second Chemistry or a different class.

And, I didn't want it and I had to decide. I decided on Business, but I question it. I don't know if it's what I want.

When further exploring her reason for choosing business, Crystal said, "I have no idea what I want to be. It's like I used to know, but now I don't. I don't know, I was thinking about going into banking, finance, kind of stuff. But, I don't know. I'm not sure. I mean, I'm decent with math." I probed Crystal to see what steps she would take to find out if Business is the right major for her. She said:

I definitely should do some research. Isn't there a website? I met with the Career Counselor one day and he told me about that website. I should go on that website because I am curious about what it will say.

Dawn was also aware of Crystal's struggles. Dawn also serves as a career counselor at a technical college, so she explained she had tried to help Crystal. She said:

And, I've actually given her a career test and she didn't like the results of it. Recently she was pre-med and changed to business simply because she was struggling in Chemistry.

And, it wasn't just the subject, she hated the teacher. And, so [changing the major] changed everything for her. She came home crying. She said, "Mama, I'm really, really, really depressed and I don't know what to do." And, I was like, "Let's think through this, we can get through it." So, we talked and things like that and worked through that problem. And, then she switched her semester to business and she seems happier.

While Dawn appeared to know about Crystal's struggles, she indicated she thought Crystal was pleased with her decision to change her major. Crystal's comments indicated she was still struggling with her decision and perhaps in the midst of making more decisions.

In summary, in general students' and parents' qualitative data findings supported the quantitative results from the SDTLA that were explored in the study. In most cases, parental comments supported those of the students when exploring the subtasks that presented as above or below the normative data means. However, parents could not articulate examples of student progress as clearly as students could.

Summary

In addressing the eight research questions of the study, several themes emerged to address the purpose of the study. The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents.

Themes which addressed the question of students' descriptions of their relationships with their parents included a) sense of a close relationship, b) frequent communication, c) closer relationships with mothers than fathers, and d) sense of an open and transparent relationship.

Four themes and one sub-theme emerged to address parent descriptions of their relationships with their students. These themes were a) sense of closeness, b) frequency of communication with a sub-theme of resolving conflicts through discussion, c) challenges faced when trying to determine when to help students and when to encourage independence, and d) their perceived role of trying to relieve stress in the lives of their students so they could focus on their academics.

When exploring student perceptions of amount and type of influence their parents had on their academic decisions, three themes surfaced. These included a) students sought academic assistance from their parents, b) students kept their parents informed of their academic performance, including the grades they earned, and c) students felt their parents were influencing their decisions to transfer to four-year institutions.

To explore parent perceptions of the amount and type of influence they had on students' academic decisions, three themes appeared. These included a) parental influence on the students' choice of which college to attend, b) parental role as supporter or encourager in students' academic lives, and c) parental desire for students to complete their higher education.

No consistent themes arose to address student perceptions of the amount and type of influence parents had on students' personal decision-making process. Themes which specifically addressed parental perceptions of their role in students' personal decision-making processes did not appear. However, a theme did arise which indicated parental interest in students' dating relationships.

Finally, data from the SDTLA were examined to determine if quantitative findings from the instrument were validated by qualitative information provided in the interview process. For purposes of this study, only student scores that were one or more standard deviations above or below the normalized data means in the SDTLA tasks and subtasks were analyzed. Generally, qualitative data from both parents and students supported the quantitative results on the SDTLA.

The findings in this study provide many implications for better understanding the parent-college student relationship as well as investigating implications for practice in higher education. These aspects are explored in-depth in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study investigated the influence parents have on students' personal and academic decision-making. Using a framework of expected student development as outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993), this project sought to determine if qualitative data provided through student and parent interviews supported students' quantitative developmental findings.

The study focused on four main areas in an attempt to better understand how parents' and students attending a two-year institution interact. The first area included an investigation of how both students and parents' described their relationship. Secondly, the study explored the influence parents felt they had on students' academic lives as well as how the students perceived their parents influence. Thirdly, the study sought to understand how parents influenced students' personal lives as well as how students perceived their parents influence in this area. Finally, the study looked at student scores on the Student Development Task and Lifestyle Assessment, and through questions posed to both students and parents, sought to better understand if the quantitative data from the survey were corroborated through the qualitative responses.

Several themes arose to address each of these research areas. Those which addressed the question of students' descriptions of their relationships with their parents included a) sense of a close relationship, b) frequent communication, c) closer relationships with mothers than fathers, and d) sense of an open and transparent relationship.

Four themes and one sub-theme emerged to address parent descriptions of their relationships with their students. These theme were a) sense of closeness, b) frequency of communication with a sub-theme of resolving conflicts through discussion, c) challenges faced when trying to determine when to help students and when to encourage independence, and d)their perceived role of trying to relieve stress in lives of their students so they could focus on their academics.

When exploring student perceptions of amount and type of influence their parents had on their academic decisions, three themes surfaced. These included a) students sought academic assistance from their parents, b) students kept their parents informed of their academic performance, including the grades they earned, and c) students indicated their parents were influencing their decisions to transfer to four-year institutions.

To explore parent perceptions of the amount and type of influence they had on students' academic decisions, three themes appeared. These included a) parental influence on the students' choice of which college to attend, b) parental role of supporter or encourager in students' academic lives, and c) parental desire for students to complete their higher education.

No consistent themes arose to address student perceptions of the amount and type of influence parents had on students' personal decision-making process. Neither did themes appear which specifically addressed parental perceptions of their role in students' personal decision-making processes. However, a theme did arise which indicated parental interest in students' dating relationships.

Finally, data from the SDTLA were examined to determine if quantitative findings from the instrument were validated by qualitative information provided in the interview process.

For purposes of this study, only student scores that were one or more standard deviations above or below the normalized data means in the SDTLA tasks and subtasks were analyzed. Generally, qualitative data from both parents and students supported the quantitative results on the SDTLA.

The themes in this study derived from interviews conducted with students enrolled in their second year at a two-year college and one of their parents. Sixteen total participants ($n = 16$), including eight students and eight parents, provided the interpretative, qualitative data outlined in the study. While this sample is small, the data are rich and there are numerous implications that provide the foundation for better understanding the relationships between second-year students attending a two-year institution and their parents. However, broad generalizations should be made carefully.

In this study, interviews were scheduled in an order that was most convenient for the participants. Six students were interviewed first and their parents interviewed second, leaving two interviews in which the parents were interviewed before their students. It was not possible to determine if the order in which the interviews conducted impacted any participant answers. Therefore, readers should keep this under consideration when reviewing the findings of the study.

To explore the parent-student relationship, this study looked specifically at the following questions:

1. How did students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How did the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?

3. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence did students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?
6. What type and amount of influence did parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?
7. Did qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Did qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

This chapter discusses the meanings of the themes which arose in the study. Additionally, potential implications for practice in higher education are explored. Finally, recommendations are provided for future research.

Discussion

Several themes supported by the words of the students and parents created the foundation of the findings of this study. After reviewing these themes, I must ask, "So, what does all of this mean?" Much of what was found in this study supports the previous research outlined in chapter two. Most of this current research has been conducted with students attending four-

year institutions. Therefore, the findings in this study show that experiences are similar for students attending a two-year institution. Following is an investigation of the themes in the study and their relationship to previous literature and ideas.

Parent and student descriptions of their relationships with each other.

The sense of closeness expressed by both students and parents supports the previous research findings by Mattanah, Brand and Hancock (2004). They found that secure relationships between students and parents could positively influence student autonomy. Like the students in their study, the students in this study also felt comfortable and confident seeking support from their parents. Both parents and students indicated they felt their relationships were “close.” Even if challenges were reported in the relationship, this sense of closeness was still important. This mirrors the information posited by Howe and Strauss (2003), who indicated that today’s students are different from students of previous generations. Howe and Strauss wrote, “Quite unlike the Gen Xers who preceded them, today’s Millennial collegians perceive that they’re a special group of young people” (p. 69). These same authors also explained that these children were sheltered, pressured by their parents, and focused on being high- achieving. All of these became clear through this study. Parents and students both indicated they communicate frequently, often several times each day. This communication often is in-person, but is also done through e-mail, cell phone calls and text messages. While White (2005) found that there may be challenges for colleges and universities because of this close connection, I suggest it is a reality of the students and parents in today’s college environment. And, in their opinions, this daily communication is necessary, wanted, and beneficial. However, they are not often having lengthy conversations or

discussing significant personal issues. Most students and parents talked about the frequent communication as a means of just discussing daily matters. Therefore, the increase of frequency of conversations may not be much different than what students in the past had with their parents.

Colleges must learn to work differently with today's students based on this knowledge that parents and students value close relationships and they are communicating frequently, at least about daily information. These students are different from students of the past and the reality that students and parents have close relationships needs to be embraced and used to the advantage of higher education's work with these students. Suggestions for doing so are provided in the section below which explores implications for practice.

Additionally, students indicated they had closer relationships with their mothers than their fathers. The closeness of female students to their mothers was also supported by research conducted by Nielson (2007). In a study conducted with college women over a 15 year period, she found:

Regardless of whether parents are still married, throughout their lifetimes daughters and fathers generally do not communicate as comfortably, spend as much time with each other, feel as close to each other emotionally, or get to know one another as well or talk about as many personal things as mothers and daughters. (Nielson, 2007, p. 115)

Nielson also indicated that this less close relationship between fathers and daughters could be a detriment to the daughter's development. A daughter may lack "ability to trust, enjoy, and relate well to males in her life" (p. 115). Colleges may use this information to target mothers and fathers with education. First, colleges can understand that mothers are more closely

involved with their children, but further, colleges could encourage more involvement from fathers.

Parental influence on students' academic lives.

Parents and students are not only managing close relationships, but it is evident that parents are closely involved in the academic lives of their students. This study shows that parents influenced where their students chose to attend college, helped them with their assignments, showed awareness of the grades they earned, wanted to remove stressors from their lives, and were invested in students' attainment of their degrees. Parents are clearly closely intertwined with the academic lives of their students. They have an intimate understanding of the work the students are doing in the classroom and how well they are performing. The fact that parents want to remove life stressors so students can concentrate on academics and that parents see the value of students earning their degrees explains why parents become involved in many aspects of the students' college experience. Any component of college life that may create an obstacle for the student, parents want to remove, both to relieve stress and to ensure students are not deterred from the goal of earning their degree. This may include wanting to remove obstacles that colleges perceive as necessary, such as policies for registration, admissions requirements, etc. This can create a disconnect between parents and faculty and staff who work in institutions of higher education.

Parents also may not understand the culture of college campuses and therefore may step in because they lack information regarding how to navigate the system appropriately. While not a focus of the questions in the interviews, some parents in their explanations presented inaccuracies in their understanding of the college environment. However, if parents' modes of

operating are to reduce stressors for their students, it would be expected they would see obstacles such as issues with registering for courses or securing financial aid as stressful and see it as their responsibility to step in and help.

There did not appear to be any consistency between parental level of education and the amount of involvement they indicated having on their students' academic lives. Paul, Ann, Jen, and Dawn all completed at least Bachelor's degrees. Ann was very aware of Christina's performance in college and spoke specifically of an incident in which she felt she had misdirected Christina by asking her not to withdraw from a course. She explained:

She wanted to drop a course and I wouldn't let her because I was afraid from past experience that she might get the idea she could drop when it got tough...I pushed her through it. It dropped her GPA. I wish I would have listened to her more.

However, Paul, Jen, and Dawn all expressed wanting their students to become independent and that they listened to their students, but perhaps were not as involved in their everyday academic lives.

Rebecca, who completed her education through eleventh grade, was perhaps the parent most involved in her student's academic work. She spoke at length of helping Renee study for tests as well as frequently checking her student record on-line. Rebecca was the only parent who indicated she knew her student's password which allowed access to all of her academic records. Renee was also her only child, therefore the only child she had who had attended college. Perhaps her lack of any experience in a higher education setting drove her to be even more involved in Renee's academic life.

Superteam, Lainey D., and Buckeye all had some college experience but had not completed degrees. Superteam indicated she was not very involved in Jerry's academic work. However, Lainey D. and Buckeye both explained they helped their daughters with proofing papers and other assignments. Superteam and Buckeye had both had other children attend college. While Superstar, Lainey D.'s daughter, was the youngest of five children, she was the first to attend college. In this study, parental level of education did not appear to be a strong indicator for amount of parental involvement in students' academic lives.

Findings in this study did support those in Bers' (2005) study. Parents clearly influenced their students' college choice and therefore were invested in the students' attendance at this particular institution. Parents had a vision of how they felt the college would serve their student. Therefore, parents had expectations of the college. Again, if those expectations, whether realistic or not, are not met, parents may step in to assist their students. There were numerous reasons parents and students indicated they chose Day State College. They included affordability, location, and academic reputation. During the interviews, parents and students all indicated they were pleased with the experiences they had had with the college. However, this may be a limitation of the study as the positive experience may have been a motivation for participation.

One reason parents may be so involved in students' academic life may come from messages presented to both students and parents when students were in high school. FERPA regulations do not guide information that can be shared with parents of students in elementary, middle, or high school. Therefore, until students reach college, parents have been invited and encouraged to be actively aware of their students' academic performance. High

schools make assignments, grades, and attendance records available on-line. Parents can access them at any time.

The No Child Left Behind Act enacted in 2002 encouraged parental involvement in students' lives. The website for No Child Left Behind describes the purpose of this act in the following words: "The law helps schools improve by focusing on accountability for results, freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and choices for parents" (retrieved May 18, 2007 from <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>). This Act encourages parents to be strongly engaged in their students' education. Advice for parents on the website includes such tips as encouraging students to understand the importance of math and science, advising children to take more advanced placement tests, and getting involved in improving schools (retrieved May 18, 2007 from <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/prepared.html>).

With the strong focus on No Child Left Behind in the past five years, it is understandable that parents would expect the same type of involvement once their students enroll in college. Historically, however, colleges have not invited such involvement from parents. Higher Education practitioners, however, must keep in mind this extreme transition parents face as their children move to post-secondary education. We must provide resources to help parents understand the differences between high school and college in terms of their role as well as the information colleges can make available to them. We also may need to adjust some of our practices to make this transition from the high school environment in which information is easily accessible to the college environment in which information is more protected.

The No Child Left Behind Act does not currently address students in colleges and universities. However, public demand for more affordable higher education and demonstrated proof that students are being educated may mean that similar initiatives to No Child Left Behind will be introduced in higher education. Parents may then become even more involved in their students' higher education experiences. Higher education practitioners must prepare for this.

Parents in this study also spoke of their desire for their students to attain their degrees. However, this was not a theme for the students. There was not a direct question to address this with the students, but in the course of conversation some of the students spoke of finishing a college degree, while others did not mention this as a goal. Perhaps attaining this goal was more important to parents than to students. Students were more concerned, at the time of the study, with their decisions to transfer to four-year institutions.

Parental influence on students' personal lives.

While much of the recent research-based literature, as well as the anecdotal reports, related to parental influence on college students indicated parents are tightly entwined in all aspects of students' lives (Howe and Strauss, 2000, Murano, 2005, White 2005), this study indicated that parents are not as connected to students' personal decisions as they are to their academic decisions. Parents expressed that they wanted their students to make their own personal decisions and felt they were mature enough to do so. Parents perceived that their involvement was not needed by the students. Understanding this puts even more emphasis on the fact that parents are so involved in students' academic lives. Clearly, parents feel students need this involvement and that something is different in the academic life than their personal life.

Parents appear to believe that students can make mistakes in their personal lives and that this would lead to learning. They did not want them to make mistakes in their academic lives.

However, parents indicated a struggle to determine when to step in and when to encourage their students to be independent. This shows parental awareness that students need to be independent in college in order to learn and grow. While they may be involved in some of their decision-making, they also struggle to know the best approach to take. This expressed conflict from the parents also supports the findings from Mattanah, Brand, and Hancock (2004). They found that a healthy relationship between students and parents in combination with parents' willingness to allow students to become individuals appears to assist students in becoming more autonomous.

Implications for Student Development

This study also sought to understand if student and parent qualitative data from the interviews supported the quantitative scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999). Students' scores on the SDTLA generally fell within the boundaries of the normative data means, indicating students in college were developing at expected levels when compared with a national cohort of second-year students at many different types of institutions. The national cohort consisted of students in the "sophomore year" regardless of their age. Therefore, though some students in this study were older than the "traditional" age of a sophomore, their ages fell within the same parameters as those in the normative data. In this study, students attended a two-year institution and lived at home with at least one of their parents. However, this did not appear to significantly affect their scores on the SDTLA indicators. In fact, the students whose scores were outside the

normative means were generally above the expected means. This may indicate that the lack of students with junior and senior status within the institution challenges students to develop and take on college responsibilities such as student leadership positions, and research and lab assistant positions, and tutoring, at an earlier point in their college career than they may do at a four-year institution. Additionally, it may indicate that the support students receive from the combination of the college environment as well as their home environment is also encouraging their developmental process.

While student qualitative data generally supported the findings on the SDTLA, parents were often not as aware of their students' developmental levels. Parents had a more difficult time articulating specific examples of the areas in which their students were above or below the normative means.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) discussed moving through autonomy toward interdependence as a vector explored by many students in their sophomore year. Much of this movement involves students' making separation from their families and establishing their own identity before understanding how their lives are interconnected with others. They explained, "The first step toward emotional independence involves some level of separation from parents, increased reliance on peers, authorities, and institutional support systems, and growing confidence in one's own self-sufficiency" (p. 117). While students spoke of using their parents for academic support, many of them also discussed using resources at the college, including seeking out academic advisors and talking with other college employees. When making personal decisions, students often referred to making decisions on their own or seeking advice from friends. This indicates these students are making these emotional

separations. Therefore, it is not surprising there were no clear themes relating to parental influence on students' personal decisions. As the students develop in an expected way, they should be making these types of decisions separate from their parents, regardless of the fact that they live with their parents.

Chickering and Reisser also wrote:

While separation involves a physical distancing, individualization means becoming one's own person and taking increasing responsibility for self-support. It is possible to do one without the other. Some students go away to college but continue to live at home psychologically. Other students live with parents but use the college environment to define personal goals and values that are truly their own. (p. 115)

Developmentally, students in the study, while living at home with their parents, are figuring out how to make this separation and figure out who they are. This was particularly clear in Amber's case where she spoke of a desire to transfer and to become more independent but was afraid of disappointing her parents. Jerry also talked about learning who he was while still living at home. Some concern may rise that parents struggle to determine when to step in and when to let their students struggle. If they continue to step in and help students instead of allowing them to struggle, students' search for autonomy may be hindered. This was not apparent in the SDTLA results, however.

Students' and parents' indications that they resolved arguments through communication also have developmental implications. This ability to voice concerns and come to terms with them shows students are learning to manage their emotions. Chickering and Reisser write, "By improving communication and observation skills, students in close relationships can

minimize misinterpretations of the behaviors of others by explicitly checking out ambiguous signals” (p. 103). Parents and students spoke of using conversation to resolve arguments. They appeared to understand that arguments are normal components of relationships. Amber provides an example of her ability to manage her emotions when she discussed her desire to transfer and her plans to do so even if her parents did not agree. However, she planned to have further conversations with her parents in hopes of coming to a shared resolution.

In some instances, student scores on the SDTLA were below the normative data means. Crystal was low on the subtask of career planning. She was also unhappy about her new stepfather and indicated that she was not as close with her mother as she had been. Her experience supports the findings from Ryan, Solberg, and Brown (1996) in which they found that factors such as “parent-child over-involvement, parent-child role reversal, marital conflict, and perceived parental fear of separation” (p. 85) could negatively impact career self-efficacy. This conflict Crystal felt regarding her mother’s new marriage to her stepfather could be playing into her struggles to determine her future career path. While Crystal didn’t directly connect her career confusion to her family situation, she spoke directly of her dislike for her stepfather. She said, “Even if I like, said something bad, I still love them. Except my stepfather. I don’t like him and I disagree with him.” She also explained, “I try to almost avoid him, really.” Crystal lives at home with her mother and stepfather in an environment that produced stress for her. This stress could be adding to her confusion about choosing a major and a career.

Implications for Practice in Higher Education

While it is important to note again that this study looked at a limited number of participants in one two-year institution in the Southeast, there are numerous implications that could inform practice in institutions of higher education.

First, parents need to be proactively provided with accurate information about college resources and processes. Parents need information that helps them understand how to navigate the college environment. They also need to be taught which obstacles are “normal” in a higher education setting so that they do not step in to reduce perceived stressors for their students that are actually designed to help students learn and grow. For example, parents may be less likely to try and intervene with their student’s first semester registration process if they understand the future value of the students’ learning to navigate this process on their own and if they understand the reality of the challenges of registration for first-time students. Additionally, information should be shared with parents on an on-going basis as students continue to grow and develop in college. Simply providing information only at Orientation is not enough.

Resources provided for families, including orientations and parents associations, must take into account the reality of student-parent relationships and provide honest programming that seriously considers their characteristics. Clearly, parents are involved in students’ academic lives. Colleges and universities should use this as an advantage and direct parents and students to appropriate resources that also enhance students’ academic experiences.

The close parent-student relationships may also have implications for student retention. Parents of students who are commuting from their homes to attend classes will most likely be

the first people to know if their students are struggling in college. If parents know how to direct their students to the appropriate resources for support and feel comfortable and confident in doing so, parents could be key partners in identifying students who are at risk for attrition. Colleges need to work to provide a welcoming atmosphere for parents, encouraging them to intervene appropriately and effectively in their students' lives. Additionally, students go to their parents for advice and direction, so parents armed with accurate information can direct their students to the resources they need.

Parents indicated a struggle to determine the line between allowing their children to make mistakes and stepping in to help them. Student affairs practitioners can provide information to help parents clarify this line. By providing parents with information regarding student development as well as the value of the concept of challenge and support as it relates to student success, practitioners may help parents better know how to work with their students in a manner that promotes growth.

Parents also clearly influenced students' choices to attend a two-year college. This information could prove useful to college admissions offices. Targeting information and publicity specifically to parents may help with recruitment strategies. This information should be designed to begin helping parents become the most effective partners in the education process.

Another aspect of this study that arose in some student and parent interviews was their misconceptions regarding life at four-year residential colleges. A couple of students and some parents alluded to "dorms with strict rules for opposite sex visitation." While this may be true at some colleges, it is not a general policy at the institutions to which the students were

planning to transfer. Many two-year colleges may provide programs to help students navigate the academic components of transferring, but additionally they should be providing programs that help students socially prepare for transfer to four-year institutions. Helpful topics for these sessions would include: how to get involved at larger institutions, strategies for success in larger classes, and how to prepare to live successfully away from home (whether in apartments or residence halls). Offering similar workshops about transferring may also be helpful for parents. Topics that parental workshops might cover would include financing the education, differences between types of institutions, academic credit transfer processes, and the importance of student choice of institution to attend.

The results of this study provide information that can direct practice in higher education institutions. This is especially important given the limited research related to students at two-year colleges. While there is a growing body of literature regarding parents and their role and impact in higher education, little, if any, is directly related to parents of students at two-year institutions. Since these colleges are approximately 45% of higher education institutions in this country, this is a population worthy of study. Additionally, the study indicated many future research topics.

Recommendations for Future Research

Numerous recommendations for future research can be gleaned from this study. As is its purpose, the qualitative method provided in-depth understanding of a small sample of student-parent relationships. Minimal research-based information exists to explore the relationships between today's millennial generation of students and their parents. Broadly, more research needs to be conducted to look at many aspects of college students and their parents. Even less

research exists looking at students in two-year or community colleges and their relationships with their parents. This study begins the look at this population of higher education constituents.

One aspect of future research would be to replicate a study similar to this one at different types of higher education institutions. Do similar themes arise with parents and resident students at four-year institutions or at institutions in different parts of the county? Are parents as intimately involved in students' choice of college if the students attend institutions that are not access institutions? Do parents assist students with their academic work? Are students as transparent in their relationships if they are not living at home with their parents? Asking similar questions to students and parents at different types of institutions would provide additional depth into understanding more broadly the college student-parent relationship. This study could also be replicated by interviewing both parents of a student and exploring different roles each parent may play in the student's life.

All of the students and parents in this study were Caucasian. Replicating the study with students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds would also provide helpful insight as to how students from different backgrounds may interact with their parents. A comparative study of families from different backgrounds would provide further direction for work in various areas of student affairs.

More work could also be completed using the SDTLA. Complete studies could be conducted to verify if qualitative data matched quantitative data on all aspects of the SDTLA. In this study, only those scores that were one or more standard deviations above or below the

normative means were analyzed as reviewing all of the information provided by the SDTLA would have proven to be a very large study in itself.

Additionally, studies should be conducted to look at the parent-student relationship when students are at different points in their college experience. A longitudinal study which tracks changes in these relationships from freshman to senior years would provide helpful information that looks at changing relationships as students develop and grow during college.

Another aspect for future research may involve looking at different types of parent-student relationships outside of those of traditional-aged students. While recruiting for this study, I was contacted by several non-traditional aged students who had moved back home to live with their parents while attending college. Gaining deeper understanding of the needs of these students as well as their parents may provide direction for providing better services and information for non-traditional students as they navigate the college environment and a relationship with their parents.

Several students in this study were also the youngest of several children in a family. This creates questions regarding birth order and students' relationships with their parents. Parents indicated they had "learned" lessons for sending older students away to college and watching them struggle. Does birth order affect the type of relationship students and parents have once students arrive in college? Does it impact the student's developmental process while in college?

Some students in this study came from family situations in which their parents had divorced. While no themes arose indicating significant differences in the relationships with the parent who participated in the interviews, results may have been different if the parent with

whom the student did not live were interviewed. Therefore, research into implications of divorced parents versus married parents and the impact on relationships with students is also recommended.

Cost or affordability of attending the two-year institution was not a primary focus of the discussion in the interviews in this study. However, several participants did list affordability in a list of reasons they chose to attend Day State College. Another avenue for future research would be investigating parental and student relationships based on differing socioeconomic statuses.

Some students in this study also talked about their connection to their church. Questions arise about whether students who live at home with their parents during college and continue the church involvement they began while children differ from students who move away to college and perhaps change their church or spirituality habits. What role does religion play in the lives of different types of students? How do parents affect students' practices of religion while in college? Is it different for students who live at home?

Summary

The findings in the study supported previous research findings and added to the body of literature by focusing on students who attend two-year colleges. Second-year students attending a two-year institution have close relationships with their parents. Parents and students communicate frequently. Colleges must understand this close connection and provide programs and services which guide students and parents toward productive relationship that encourage students to become independent.

Parents are also engaged in their students' academic lives. Parental educational level was not an indicator as to how involved parents were. In reference to students' academic lives, parents desired for students to complete their degrees, and they worked to reduce stress in the students' lives to they could accomplish this goal. Parents, however, were not as strongly engaged in their students' personal decisions as they were in their academic decisions. This may indicate that parents understand the importance of allowing students to establish autonomy.

Finally, student qualitative data findings supported the findings of student scores on the SDTLA. The majority of student scores fell in congruence with normative data for sophomore-level students. Therefore, in this study it appears the students were progressing developmentally as would be expected for second-year students. Students were better able to articulate their experiences in each of the investigated SDTLA tasks or subtasks than their parents were, indicating further that students are moving toward becoming more autonomous.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Flier

YOUR STORIES ARE IMPORTANT!**Are you a Second-Year Student?**

**Would you like to share information about
your experiences as a student?**

**Would you like to be part of a research
project that may make a difference to
students?**

If you answered “YES” to these questions, you may qualify to participate in a study exploring the relationship between second-year students and their parents.

The study consists of spending about one hour to fill out an instrument and then participating in a 45 to 70 minute interview (two separate meetings).

Participants who complete both components of the study will receive a \$50 gift card for gasoline or the College Bookstore. (If you complete the instrument only, you will receive a \$20 gift card.)

If you are interested in learning more about the study and being considered to participate, please call or e-mail

Alicia Caudill at 770 365 3388 or aliciac@uga.edu

By Friday, February 16, 2007

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter to Family Members

February 8, 2007

Parent Name

Address

Address

Dear Parent Name,

I am writing you in regards to a wonderful opportunity for you and your student to participate in an exciting research project associated with Gainesville State College. Currently, I serve as the Associate Vice President and Dean of Students at the College. I am also working on my doctorate at the University of Georgia. **I am conducting a research project exploring the relationship between second year students at the College and their parents.**

I am seeking students and one of their parents to participate in this research project. The students will complete a short instrument and an interview. One of their parents will participate in an interview that will last approximately one-hour. The student and parent interviews will be conducted separately. I am happy to meet with parents at a convenient location, either on one of our campuses or in another place. The interviews will take place during the months of February and March 2007.

The interview with the parent will be relatively informal and will explore your relationship with your student and your understanding of his or her college experience. You will not be pressured to share any information you do not feel comfortable expressing.

As an incentive to participate, families (student and one parent) who complete the interview process will receive one \$50 gift card for gasoline or the College Bookstore (your choice.) The gift card will be given to the student. If a student completes the instrument and then you or the student choose not to participate in the interview, the student will receive a \$20 gift card. Most importantly, you will be contributing to the knowledge available about student and parent relationships. Currently, there is very little information about parents and students who attend two-year colleges. This study will inform the work we do at Gainesville State College in the future and will hopefully impact work at other colleges as well.

I hope you and your student will consider giving your time to assist with this study. If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please contact me at (678) 717-3465 or aliciac@uga.edu by February 20, 2007.

I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Alicia Caudill Colburn

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

I agree to take part in a research study titled “An Exploration of the Relationships between College Students Attending a Two-Year College and their Parents” which is being conducted by Alicia Caudill Colburn from the Department of Counseling and Human Development at the University of Georgia (770-962-5620). The research is under the direction of Dr. Merrily Dunn, Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, University of Georgia, who may be reached at 706-542-3927 or via email at merrily@uga.edu.

The purpose of this research study is to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study will investigate the influence parents have on students’ personal and academic decision making as well as their student development.

I do not have to take part in this study. I can stop at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. This means if I am a student, my grades or relationship with the College will not be affected whether I decide to participate or not, or withdraw from the student after I give my consent.

I will not benefit directly from this research. However, my participation in this study may advance the available literature that will allow institutions of higher education to better understand relationships between parents and students attending a two-year college.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. I will read and sign this consent form by March 1, 2007. (Be sure to ask any questions if you have any.)
2. I will participate in a 45 to 70 minute interview with the researcher to be arranged at a mutually convenient time. I understand the interview will be tape recorded by the researcher.
3. If I am a student, I will complete the SDTLA (Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment) survey. This will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. I understand I do not have to respond to any questions on this assessment that make me feel uncomfortable.
4. I understand I may elect not to answer any question during the interview without having to explain why.
5. I understand I will have the opportunity to review either the complete transcript of my interview or to review the themes (summary of key ideas) that arise from my interview for correct information and accurate interpretation. I will have the opportunity to tell the researcher if I wish to review the entire transcript or a summary of the themes.

6. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. My real name will not be associated with any of the responses. I will choose my own pseudonym (not a real name) and this will be used in all data collection. If I am a student, the information I provide will not be shared with my parent. If I am a parent, the information I provide will not be shared with my student. Audio tapes will be destroyed immediately following the completion of transcriptions and member checks. The tapes will be destroyed by May 1, 2007.

Minimal risks are expected in this study. I understand I can elect not to answer any question without explanation or penalty. Though deemed quite unlikely, any discomforts, stresses, or other negative reactions from this study are to be referred to the researcher, Alicia Caudill Colburn, at the telephone number or e-mail listed below. The results of this participation will be confidential.

As incentive for participation in this study, I understand that the student will receive a \$50 gift card for the Gainesville State College Bookstore or for gasoline, if the student completes both the SDTLA and the interview. If the student completes only the STDLA, he or she will receive a \$20 gift card for the Bookstore or for gasoline. The student will receive this incentive regardless of whether his or her parent completes an interview.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 770-962-5620.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I will be given a copy of this form.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher: Alicia Caudill Colburn
Email: aliciac@uga.edu

Telephone: 770-962-5620

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to IRB Chairperson, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; e-mail address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide – Student Questions

The purpose of this research study is to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study will investigate the influence parents have on students' personal and academic decision making.

To explore the parent-student relationship, this study will look specifically at the following questions:

To explore the parent-student relationship, this study looked specifically at the following questions:

1. How do students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How do the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?
3. What type and amount of influence do students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence do parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence do students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?
6. What type and amount of influence do parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?
7. Do qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Do qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

Demographics:

Age:

Major:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Number of Hours Earned:

Attended any previous colleges?

Hometown:

Current Residence:

Lived with whom growing up:

Chosen Pseudonym:

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you choose to attend Day State College?
2. Tell me about your college experience so far. What have been the highlights for you?
3. What challenges have you faced as a student?
4. Describe for me the relationship you had with your parents when you were a child?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your parents now?
6. What role do you believe your parents play in your life as a college student?
7. What do you tell your parents about your college experience?
8. When you have to make a big decision about something related to your academics, how do you go about making it?
9. Can you give me a examples of challenging academic decisions you have had to make?
10. When you have to make a big decision about something personal, how do you go about making it?
11. Can you give me examples of challenging personal decisions you have made?
12. Describe for me your current living situation? What are the benefits of your current situation?
13. What are the challenges of your current living situation?
14. How often do you communicate with your parents?
15. Who do you go to when you need support?
16. How do you think you have changed since beginning college?
17. If I were to ask you parents to describe you, what would they say about you?
18. What do you wish your parents knew about you that they do not?
19. If you could change your relationship with your parents, what would you change?

20. What aspects of your relationship with your parents would you not change?
21. Questions based on results of SDTLA:
22. Is there anything about your relationship with you parents I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX E

Interview Guide – Parent Questions

The purpose of this research study is to understand the relationships between second-year college students attending a two-year institution and their parents. Specifically, this study will investigate the influence parents have on students' personal and academic decision making.

To explore the parent-student relationship, this study will look specifically at the following questions:

1. How do students describe their current relationships with their parents?
2. How do the parents of these students describe their current relationships with their students?
3. What type and amount of influence do students perceive their parents had on their academic decisions?
4. What type and amount of influence do parents perceive they had on their students' academic decisions?
5. What type and amount of influence do students perceive their parents had on their personal decisions?
6. What type and amount of influence do parents perceive they had on their students' personal decisions?
7. Do qualitative data findings from the parents of the students reflect the student development results as indicated by student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?
8. Do qualitative data findings regarding the students' development reflect the results of their individual student scores on the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Assessment (Winston, Miller & Cooper, 1999)?

Demographics:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Educational Level:

Major/if applicable

Current Occupation:

Current Residence:

Chosen Pseudonym:

Interview Questions:

1. Why did your son/daughter choose to attend Day State College?

2. Tell me about his or her college experience so far. What have been the highlights for you?
3. What challenges has your student faced?
4. Describe for me the relationship you had with your child when he/she was young.
5. How would you describe your relationship you have with your child now?
6. What role do you play in your student's life?
7. How would you describe your discipline style with your student when he/she was child?
8. How would you describe your discipline style with your student now?
9. What does your student tell you about his or her experiences in college?
10. When your student has to make a big academic decision how does he or she go about making it?
11. Can you give me a examples of challenging academic decisions you he or she has made?
12. When your student has to make a big decision about something personal, how does he or she go about making it?
13. Can you give me examples of challenging personal decisions he/she has made?
14. Describe for me your current living situation? What are the benefits of your current situation?
15. What are the challenges of your current living situation?
16. How often do you communicate with your student?
17. To whom does your student go when he or she needs support?
18. How do you think your student has changed since beginning college?

19. How would you describe your son or daughter?
20. What do you wish your student knew about you that he/she does not?
21. If you could change your relationship with your student, what would you change?
22. What aspects of your relationship with your student would you not change?
23. What are your hopes for your student?
24. Questions based on results of SDTLA:
25. Is there anything about your relationship with your student I did not ask about that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX F

Additional Interview Questions Based on SDTLA Results

Jade

1. What are your goals for the next five years of your life? Next 10?
2. How will you go about achieving these goals?
3. What values or morals do you believe you have gotten from your parents?

Paul

1. What are Jade's goals for the next five years in her life? Next 10?
2. Talk about how you think Jade will go about achieving these goals?
3. What values or morals to you hope you have passed on to Jade?

Christina

1. Have you ever had the opportunity to interact with people who are different from you? Talk about those experiences and what you believe you learned from them?
2. You mentioned you worked in a classroom with a high percentage of Hispanic students, tell me more about that experience.
3. What are the most important lessons you think you have learned about academic success while being a student?
4. What advice would you give new students about how to be successful academically?
5. If someone were to ask you to describe your friends and the role they play in your life, how would you explain that?
6. What values or morals to you believe you have learned from your parents?

Ann

1. What values or morals do you hope you have passed on to Christina?
2. What changes have you seen in Christina's academic performance since she started college?
3. Tell me a little about Christina's friends and the role they play in her life.
4. You talked about how Christina had matured since being in College. Can you give me some examples of how you've seen her mature?

Superstar

1. If someone were to ask you to describe your friends and the role they play in your life, how would you explain that?
2. Tell me a little about your involvement with community service projects. Talk about the value of serving one's community. What do you believe should be your role in serving the community?
3. What values or morals do you believe you have learned from your parents?

Lainey D.

1. How would you describe Superstar's friends and the role they play in her life?
2. What values or morals do you hope you have passed on to her?
3. Talk about the role community service plays in Superstar's life.

Amber

1. What are your goals for yourself in the next five years? Next 10?
2. What steps will you take to meet those goals?
3. What values or morals do you believe you have learned from your parents?

Buckeye

1. Can you talk about the goals Amber has set for herself in the next five years? 10 years?
2. Talk about Amber's ability to accomplish her goals.
3. What values or morals do you hope you have passed on to Amber?

Jerry

1. What are your goals for yourself in the next five years? 10 years?
2. How will you go about achieving these goals?
3. What is your role in your greater community? What do you believe should be your role?
4. What values or morals do you believe you have learned from your parents?

Superteam

1. Talk about the goals Jerry has for himself in the next several years?
2. Talk a little about the process he might follow to achieve his goals.
3. What type of community service does Jerry do currently? What role does service to others play in his life?
4. What values or morals do you hope you have passed on to Jerry?

Crystal

1. Talk about your career goals you have set for yourself?
2. How would you go about achieving these goals?
3. How will you gather more information to help you determine your future career path?

Dawn

1. Talk about Crystal's current career goals.
2. How will she go about achieving these goals?
3. What role do you think you play in Crystal's career decision making process?