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A Grounded Theory Study: Transition Experiences of
First Year College Students with Pessimistic Explanatory Styles

Hannah Rushe Piechowski

Bellarmino University

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The Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education of Bellarmine University certifies that Hannah Rushe Piechowski has successfully defended their dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education and Social Change as of March 26, 2018. This is the final and approved form of the dissertation.

A Grounded Theory Study: Transition Experiences of
First Year College Students with Pessimistic Explanatory Styles

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Abstract

Depression has increased as a presenting concern among college students seeking counseling services, reaching 41.23% in 2016 (Reetz, Bershad, LeViness, & Whitlock, 2016). A Pessimistic Explanatory Style has been found to be related to depression, poor academic success, and GPA (Chang & Sanna, 2007; Dweck, 2008; Ramirez, Maldonado, & Martos, 1992; Seligman, 2011; Stipek, 1988). Further, undergraduate enrollment has decreased nationally by six percent between 2010 and 2015 (NCES, 2018). These factors support the need to explore overlooked aspects that can support a student's transition into college (Hutson & He, 2011). This grounded theory study explored the transition experiences of first year, full time, traditionally aged college students with a pessimistic explanatory style, supported by the theories of Learned Helplessness, Symbolic Interactionism, and Transition (Blumer, 1989; Schlossberg, 1981; Seligman, 1970). Three assertions compose the resulting theory as students with a pessimistic explanatory style: (a) filter their transition experiences through a keen awareness of a dynamic reality; (b) employ a comparative lens to prepare for and make sense of their transition to college; and (c) experience their transition through a two-phase process that begins with a focus on relationships and personal development, then shifts toward academic and diversity engagement. A fourth unanticipated assertion identified that students with a pessimistic explanatory style showed a positive change in attributional style. Recommendations include increased support to students through holistic mentoring, implementation of broad mental health models, and consideration for the dynamic reality perceived by students and the impact that has on current student perceptions.

Keywords: college, depression, pessimistic explanatory style, student, transition

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Chapter One: Introduction

The mission of higher education was originally twofold: training the intellect and developing character (Bok, 2009). Both the aspects of mental discipline and moral development were emphasized and embraced (Reuben, 1996). With the end of World War II and the introduction of the first GI Bill providing access to higher education for veterans, the number of students enrolled in college increased dramatically. Institutions developed a more narrow focus on the preparation of students to fill professional and managerial positions and the education of scientific knowledge, rather than on moral or character development (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Gardner, 2005).

In the 1980s, student-centeredness moved toward a consumer mentality as higher education became more market driven and viewed as a commodity (Arum & Roksa, 2011). This created a dual view, focused on the bottom line as well as the demands and desires of students (Gardner, 2005). Rather than academics, business people assumed senior leadership positions within the institutions (Zemsky, 2009). Institutional economic difficulties resulted in two-tiered systems of full-time and part-time faculty who were pressured and rewarded more for research than teaching (Arum & Roksa, 2011). All the while, college education was perceived as a right, or a guarantee of a good job and middle-class lifestyle (Wadsworth, 2005). Further, more diverse students began entering college at the time where higher education has been experiencing serious revenue shortfalls, less committed and less teaching-oriented faculty, and a greater societal emphasis on career and the income-enhancing commodity of college education that should be affordable (Kerr, 2001).

According to the Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards produced by the American College Personnel Association - College Student Educators International (ACPA) (2017), student

development is an essential purpose of higher education. Support of this process is a major responsibility of the student affairs profession. Development is complex and includes cognitive, physical, moral, social, emotional, career, spiritual, personal, and intellectual dimensions. In the Professional Competencies produced by ACPA with the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) (2017), professionals in higher education are called to demonstrate advanced ability in regards to wellness and healthy living by being aware of others' wellness and support their efforts to be well. Explicitly, professionals are called to promote self-care and personal wellness as part of the college culture (ACPA, 2017).

Statement of Problem

Mental health concerns are rising among college students. According to the National Director's Survey from the Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors (Reetz et al., 2016), depression has increased in prevalence. In 2007, when the survey's data was first represented, depression was a presenting concern in 39.4% of the student body that sought counseling (Rando & Barr, 2008). At that time, the national percentage of students who were seeking counseling was 10%. As shown in Table 1, depression has remained a presenting concern.

Table 1.

Percent of Counseling Center Students with Depression as Presenting Concern

Year	Percent
2008	37.01%
2009	37.45%
2010	38%
2011	37.18%
2012	36.4%
2013	36.4%
2014	39.77%
2015	40.13%
2016	41.23%

(Barr, Krylowicz, Reetz, Mistler, & Rando, 2011; Barr, Rando, Krylowicz, & Reetz, 2010; Barr, Rando, Krylowicz, & Winfield, 2009; Mistler, Reetz, Krylowicz, & Barr, 2012; Rando & Barr, 2008; Reetz, Barr, & Krylowicz, 2013; Reetz et al., 2016; Reetz, Krylowicz, & Mistler, 2014; Reetz, Krylowicz, Lawrence, & Mistler, 2015)

In 2016, depression reached a high during the life of the same survey at 41.23% while the percentage of students seeking counseling had also increased to 12.06% nationally.

While counseling usage and the presenting concerns of depression have increased, the number of students who are enrolling college is decreasing (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2017). From 2010 to 2015, the numbers of students who have enrolled in college in the United States has decreased from 13,087,182 to 12,290,829 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). This is a difference of 796,353 students, or by 6.08%. In the state of Kentucky, this number fell from 68,654 to 45,384 between the same time span (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017). At the site of study, enrollment has decreased by 14.98% since 2005 (R. Conyers, personal communication, February 20, 2018). Nationally,

retention rates among cohorts have stayed within two percentage points between 2009 to 2014, while leave of absence from college due to psychological reasons has remained high (Reetz et al., 2016). It can then be inferred that depression has significantly increased for college students.

Explanatory style is a psychological attribute that allows people to explain why they experience an event, either positively or negatively (Seligman, 1998). Optimistic thinking has been found to support academic performance, persistence and coping mechanisms and is related to lower levels of psychological stress, loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2011; Nelson & Vetter, 2012; Scheier & Carver, 1992; Segerstrom, Taylor, Kemeny, & Fahey, 1998; Stewart, Betson, Lam, Marshall, Lee, & Wong, C. 1997). An optimistic explanatory style has been found to predict GPA and to be tied to intelligence and optimism related goals (Eppler, Carsen-Plentl, & Harju, 2000; Gibb, Zhu, Alloy & Abramson, 2002; Gordon, 2008; Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004; Peterson & Barrett, 1987). Conversely, a pessimistic explanatory style has been found to be related to depression (Chang & Sanna, 2007; Ramirez, Maldonado, & Martos, 1992; Seligman, 2011; Stipek, 1988). Additionally, a pessimistic explanatory style has been found to be a significant predictor of poor academic success in college in terms of retention and GPA (Dweck, 2008; Seligman, 2011).

Given the prevalence of depression among college students nationally, and the research linking depression to pessimistic explanatory style, an opportunity exists to investigate this phenomenon in college. Further, a need exists to explore overlooked aspects that can support a student's transition into college (Hutson & He, 2011). Researchers and theorists have touted the importance of the first few weeks of a student's transitional experience into college by recognizing the impact on motivation, aspirations of intellectual development, relationships with the institution, and development of psychological resources (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Levitz &

Noel, 1989; Lewis, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1992; Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). In the theory of transition, Schlossberg (1981) identified that one of the major resources that influences one's ability to cope with transition is psychological resources. Through subsequent research, it was determined that psychological resources includes an optimistic outlook (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Research has been conducted on the transition experiences of students with mental health concerns, such as bipolar disorder and depression, as well as on sub-populations such as veterans, latino/as, conditionally admitted, and international students (DeVilbiss, 2014; Jimenez, 2011; Potvin-Boucher, Szumilas, Sheikh, & Kutcher, 2010; Reed, 2009; Whitley & Tschudi, 2014). Coping strategies in regards to mental health have also been explored. However, no research was found that explores explanatory style in a student's transition experience.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research is to understand the transition experiences of traditional aged, first time, full time college students who possess a pessimistic explanatory style and attend a small private and liberal arts institution in the East Central region of the United States, referred to as East Central University, or ECU. Through this research, practitioners in higher education will be able to make informed decisions about policies, practices, and support available for students who possess pessimistic explanatory styles, and may be able to address broader transition issues related to depression and counseling services.

Theoretical Foundation

Three theories were used to form the theoretical base by which the participants were sampled and the data was interpreted. The first is Learned Helplessness as developed by Seligman (1970), the second is Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory, and the third is the sociological theory of Symbolic Interactionism developed by Blumer (1989) and refined by Charmaz (1980).

Learned Optimism is the tested theory that optimism can be cultivated, similar to joy (Seligman, 2011). It echoes the belief that helplessness can be learned, that optimism is significantly linked to achievement and success. Within the work of Learned Optimism, Seligman (1998) established the Attributional Style Questionnaire which determines how a person explains their outlook on life. These styles consist of three dimensions: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. Through a picture created by these three dimensions, it is possible to determine if a general pessimistic or optimistic explanatory style is prevalent, a lens which is related to further success and failures. This questionnaire has been used in many venues, including colleges, as a means to identify students' explanatory style and predict success in college.

In the second theory utilized for this research, Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory articulates transitions as integrated, as we are all involved in a transition at any point in time, moving in, through, or out of a situation (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). Moving in involves the anticipation and rationalization of what an event may or may not do to one's understanding of self and context. It is a preparation phase. Moving through is a complicated component of the theory in which one is searching for and understanding new roles, relationships, routines and assumptions. There tends to be a period of emptiness and confusion or a neutral zone, a cycle of renewal, and a time of hope and spirituality. Moving out is the conclusion of a transition, in some ways a resolution, but also with a new understanding of resources. To successfully navigate through a transition, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) articulated three steps, which include approaching transitions, taking stock of coping resources, and taking charge. This theoretical foundation supports the need for study into the transition experiences within a psychological framework.

The final component of the theoretical framework for this study is Symbolic Interactionism. This sociological theory is a dynamic theoretical perspective that sees human actions as constructions of self, situation, and society (Charmaz, 2014). Language and symbols play crucial roles in forming and sharing our meanings and actions. Interpretation and action are reciprocal processes, affecting each other. Subjective meanings emerge from experiences, and change as experiences change (Reynolds, 2003). Symbolic interactionism rests upon three premises developed by Blumer (1989):

1. Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them.
2. The meaning of things arise from, or are derived from, the social interaction that one has with their peers or fellows.
3. Meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by the individual dealing with the things they encounter.

Three additional premises help to clarify and extend Blumer's position:

1. Meanings are interpreted using shared language and communication (Charmaz, 1980).
2. The creation of meaning in social interaction is distinguished by a continued emerging processual nature (Charmaz, 1980).
3. One's interpretive process becomes explicit when meanings and/or actions become problematic, or situations change (Charmaz 1980; Snow 2002).

The use of symbolic interactionism is vital to this research as the underpinnings of the theory form an open-ended theoretical perspective while emphasizing process and change. Within this, novel aspects of experiences can give rise to unique and new interpretations and actions. Further, symbolic interactionism assumes that people are reflective, creative, active, and social creatures,

and that the ability to communicate with ourselves and others allows for the changing of views and actions.

Research Question

How do full time, first year, traditionally aged college students with a pessimistic explanatory style at a small, private, liberal arts institution in the East Central region of the United States experience transition to college?

Definition of Terms

To aid in the understanding of language used throughout this study, the following definitions have been provided for consideration.

- Depression - May include depressed mood, loss of interest and enjoyment in usual activities, reduced energy and decreased activity, reduced self esteem and confidence, ideas of guilt and unworthiness, pessimistic thoughts, disturbed sleep, diminished appetite, ideas of self harm (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
- First Year Full Time Student - A first-time student has no prior postsecondary experience attending any institution at the undergraduate level, with two exceptions: (a) students who attended any institution for the first time the summer prior to entering an institution in the fall term are to be counted as "first-time", as are (b) students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school) (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2018). Full time refers to a student who is enrolled in college for four course units, or sixteen semester hours, per semester (M. Rawlings, personal communication, November 13, 2017).
- Optimist - When confronted with difficulties, this individual believes that defeat is a temporary setback with causes contained to one situation or case (Seligman, 1998).

- Orientation - A period of time at the beginning of the semester in which new students participate in various activities to prepare them for collegiate life, both inside and outside of the classroom (M. Covert, personal communication, July 10, 2017). The orientation period is designed to last from Move-In Day through the first day of classes for the Fall Semester, equaling 11 days. Activities include move-in day, meetings with Resident Advisors, field day type competitions, a university induction ceremony, foreign language testing, diversity training, a dance, field trip opportunities, and presentations from Student Well-being, Residence Life, the Title IX Coordinator, Student Accounts and Billing, and the Department of Public Safety.
- Pessimist - An individual who tends to believe that bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and that they are likely at fault (Seligman, 1998).
- Pessimistic Explanatory Style - This explanatory style attributes failures to internal, stable, and universal factors, and successes to external, unstable, and specific causes (Seligman, 1998).
- Transition - A process or a change; any event, or non event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg, 1984). Includes potentially overlapping phases of moving in, moving through, and moving out of changes.

Assumptions

The philosophical assumption surrounding this research is that of a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2013). Within the perspective of constructivism, instead of one ultimate reality existing, multiple realities are constructed by each individual as a result of their own life experiences and understandings. Further, the researcher recognizes the ontological understanding that multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions and the

epistemological belief that reality will be co-constructed between the researcher and participants, while respecting the axiological beliefs of the individual values. In an effort to gain the knowledge of the participants, the researcher will strive to get close to the participants to comprehend their own understandings and descriptions. Both theories of Learned Helplessness and Transition will serve as a lens through which to view and interpret the data.

Additional assumptions are present within this research. First it is assumed that the pursuit of wellbeing and happiness is the right of all individuals, including those in college, and that this pursuit results in a benefit to individual students and society as a whole. Likewise, and as articulated in the joint statement by ACPA and NASPA (2017), it is assumed that colleges and universities should do everything reasonable to better understand their students and their experiences, producing programming that assists students with the transition to college and the promotion of their well-being. Finally, it is assumed that the methodology developed for this study will address the research questions by asking the correct questions to elicit relative responses, and will allow for interpretation of the participants' experiences.

Delimitations

Delimitations allow for the narrowing of scope within a study (Creswell, 1994). This constrains the researcher and readers from asserting findings to a larger population (Bryant, 2004). To achieve this, the current study focuses on first year, full time, traditional aged students attending a small and private liberal arts institution in the East Central region of the United States.

Limitations

The limitations and shortcomings of this study and methods are rightfully admitted in an effort to further support confirmability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Anticipated and confirmed limitations of this study include a limited sample size, time of data collection, and self-

reported data. Access to the participants was limited by the voluntary nature of participation and the limited longitudinal nature of this study which was to be conducted within the first ten weeks of the first semester.

Significance

This research strives to provide an understanding of the transition experiences of students who possess a pessimistic explanatory style. In detail, this research sought to understand the process of transition experiences, including coping assets and liabilities, the types of experiences, and the three dimensions of attributional style including pervasiveness, permanence, and personalization. Through this more formalized understanding, a commitment to enhancing wellbeing and support can be pursued by colleges and universities in their transition programs. Implications exist for supporting future transitions, including textit from college to the work world.

Summary and Chapter Overview

The following chapters support the study through thoughtful detail. In chapter two, literature is reviewed consisting of foundational research by Seligman (1970) and Schlossberg (1981), as well as relative studies to attributional style and transition. This literature cultivates a conceptual model to understand the experiences of students with a pessimistic explanatory style. Chapter three consists of the research design and methodological overview of this qualitative, grounded theory study. Data collection results and analysis are reviewed within chapter four. Finally, in chapter five, discussions of the findings are provided and recommendations are made for further application and research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the transition experiences of traditional, first time, full time, undergraduate students with a pessimistic explanatory style at a small, private, liberal arts institution in the East Central region of the United States. This study finds foundation in the psychological concept of explanatory style from the theory of Learned Optimism, the Theory of Transition prevalent in adult counseling and higher education, and the sociological theory of Symbolic Interactionism. In addition to unpacking these concepts, this chapter reviews relevant literature to provide a conceptual framework for this study. Specifically, this chapter will discuss the mental health climate in college, the impact of explanatory styles in higher education, the purpose and goals of orientation and transition programming in higher education, and the need for the current study.

Mental Health in College

The collegiate environment has seen an increase in counseling usage for mental health concerns, a persistence of presenting concerns, and a higher documented hospitalization rate. In the 2015 Annual Report by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health at Pennsylvania State University (2016), 48.8% of college students attended counseling for mental health concerns. The majority of mental-health directors in higher education who were surveyed in the 2016 by the Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) reported a rise in access to mental health services (Reetz et al., 2016). Directors surveyed in the 2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers reported 52% of clients have psychological problems, up from 44% in 2013 (Gallagher, 2015). Anxiety continued to be the most predominant and increasing concern among college students, followed by clinical depression, relationship concerns, psychiatric medication issues, learning disabilities, suicidal ideation, self-injury, sexual assault,

and alcohol abuse (Gallagher, 2015; Reetz et al., 2016). While 50.6% of college students were identified as having been diagnosed with anxiety-related issues in the 2016 AUCCCD survey, 94% of directors nationally in the 2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers reported recent trends toward greater numbers of students with severe psychological problems, with anxiety being the most pressing. These reports echoed the 2014 survey by the American College Health Association (2014) in which 54% of college students surveyed identified feeling overwhelming anxiety in the past year. This was an increase from 49% five years earlier.

College mental-health directors also reported that voluntary and involuntary hospitalizations have increased. In the 2016 AUCCCD Annual Survey, 3,484 students were hospitalized or transported for psychological reasons (Reetz, Bershad, LeViness, & Whitlock, 2016). In this same year, 637 students were hospitalized involuntarily. This is an increase from 2015 with 3,550 hospitalized or transported for psychological reasons and 411 hospitalized involuntarily (Reetz, Krylowicz et al., 2015). Ninety percent of centers that responded to the 2014 National Survey of College Counseling Centers reported hospitalizing at least nine students for psychological reasons (Gallagher, 2015). The average number of hospitalizations per 1,000 students was 1.5. In the same report, it was found that eight percent of clients have an impairment so serious that they cannot remain in school, or can only do so with extensive psychological or psychiatric assistance.

In a survey report on mental health from the National Alliance on Mental Health, college students who were diagnosed with a mental health condition were asked to share their experiences of attending college while living with mental health conditions (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). Of the 765 responses, depression was the leading illness at 27%, with bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizophrenia, posttraumatic stress disorder, ADHD, and substance abuse following in decreasing

order. The survey revealed that a majority of respondents who said that they were no longer in college attributed dropping out to mental health related reasons; primarily depression, bipolar disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder. According to the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey, 3,470 students in 2015 and 3,140 students in 2016 were placed on leaves of absence for psychological reasons (Reetz, Krylowicz et al., 2015; Reetz et al., 2016).

Seventy-three percent of the respondents from the National Alliance on Mental Health Survey report indicated having experienced a mental health crisis while in college (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). These were attributed to a variety of factors including extreme feelings of anxiety or depression about school and life, difficulty adjusting to a new routine and environment, feelings of homesickness or loneliness, stress concerning course load, posttraumatic stress disorder episodes triggered by class content, or medications no longer working properly. In most of these instances, the survey found that colleges and universities did not know about the students' crises. When colleges did respond, efforts were rated as good 21% of the time, and fair 17% of the time.

Support from colleges regarding mental health issues was also explored, with the classification of "somewhat supportive" found 32% of the time (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). "Supportive" colleges had advocates who helped students understand their rights and access to resources, demonstrated a commitment to mental health, and established positive partnerships with the community while maintaining ease of access on campus. Those colleges that were identified as "not supportive" seemed to establish a culture of stigmas, lack of acknowledgement for accommodations, and failure to acknowledge the importance and impact of mental health issues across the community.

The same survey explored the awareness of mental health services on campus. The majority of students identified that they became aware of their college's mental health services and support primarily through the college's website, but also through the student health center, campus tours, local providers, faculty or staff, and peers (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). Through the responses regarding accommodations for mental health needs, participants identified that there is often a disconnection between counseling centers and disability resource centers. While the majority of students indicated that they knew how to access accommodations, 57% did not request accommodations from their school. When exploring why students did not request accommodations, respondents indicated that they were unaware they qualified for or had a right to receive accommodations, did not know the disability resource center was available for students living with mental health conditions, were fearful of stigma, claimed that the process of obtaining accommodations was too burdensome and required too much documentation, or that it was too expensive to obtain the documentation for accommodations. When exploring barriers to accessing mental health services and supports, the survey results identified eight primary concerns: (a) the mental health center is highly visible and students were fearful of being seen by peers, (b) the mental health center employs students or peers that the respondents did not want knowing about their particular situation, (c) a cap or limit was placed on use of mental health services and support, (d) excessive documentation was required to access mental health services and supports, (e) no mental health services or support was available on campus, (f) the referral system for mental health services and support was poor, (g) the respondents were unaware how to access services and support, and (h) high staff turnover disrupted care (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012).

Learned Helplessness

In the late 1960s, depression was conceptualized as a cognitive disorder (Beck, 1967). Through this, many theorists suggested and sought to determine if depressive symptoms might be more profitably understood by accounting for the causal attributions made by individuals with depression for the good and bad events in their lives (Abramson & Sackeim, 1977; Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Klein, Fencil-Morse, & Seligman, 1976; Peterson, 1979; Peterson, Schwartz, & Seligman, 1981; Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, & von Baeyer, 1979). Such theories of attributional consideration propose that those with depression and those without depression differ in their causal judgments, and that those differences can be linked to the presence of and extent of depressive symptomatology.

In 1969, Seligman began research on Learned Helplessness, an extension of an exploration into depression (Schulman, 1995). The resulting theory found that experience with uncontrollable events can lead to a belief or expectations that desired outcomes are independent of one's actions (Maier & Seligman, 1976; Seligman 1975). This is comparable to the concept of Learned Optimism in positive psychology in which joy and other positive mindsets can be cultivated (Seligman, 1998). When considering human depression, it was found that expectations of helplessness led to three deficits: motivational, cognitive, and emotional (Schulman, 1995). A motivational deficit is the lowered response initiation and persistence. Cognitive deficit is the inability to perceive contingencies between actions and outcomes. An emotional deficit refers to sadness and lowered self-esteem. While all humanity will experience uncontrollable and aversive events, not everyone develops an expectation of helplessness and the relative deficits.

In response to this, researchers looked into the aspects of individual differences to predict who is more vulnerable or resistant to learned helplessness. This was the attributional

reformulation (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, & von Baeyer, 1979). This reformulation was also referred to as an explanatory style; a psychological attribute that indicates how someone explains to themselves why they experience an event and if they do so positively or negatively (Schulman, 1995). Individuals who possess a pessimistic style and habitually attribute negative events to internal, stable, and global causes and positive events to external, unstable, and specific causes were found to be at greater risk for helplessness deficits than those with an optimistic style. Further, repeated exposure to controllable events can instill an optimistic perspective, just as repeated exposure to uncontrollable events can cultivate a pessimistic perspective (Eisner, 1995).

Seligman (1998) identified four criteria for depression, the first of which is a negative change in thought. A pessimistic explanatory style is foundational to depressed thinking. A negative concept of the future, the self, and the world stems from seeing the causes of bad events as permanent, pervasive, and personal, and seeing positive events in the opposite way. The remaining criteria of depression are a negative change in mood; behavioral symptoms of passivity, indecisiveness, and suicidal action; and undesirable physical symptoms: appetites diminish, no sex drive, sleeping excessively, lack of sleep, etc. In the Diagnostic Statistical Manual produced by the American Psychiatric Association (2013), most of the symptoms required to substantiate depression are produced by learned helplessness. Despite the need to exemplify only some of the symptoms, one piece is critical: the symptoms cannot be momentary and must last for at least two weeks. The difference between people whose learned helplessness disappears quickly and those for whom it lingers is that the latter is grounded in a pessimistic explanatory style (Seligman, 1998). This style changes learned helplessness from brief and local instances to long-lasting and

general. Learned helplessness becomes full onset depression when the person who fails is a pessimist.

An exploration into the relationship between pessimism and depression was needed. In multiple studies following, Seligman (1998) found that when people are depressed, they are also pessimistic. To determine if the relationship was more than circular causation, Seligman (1998) looked at undergraduates' experiences with exams during the course of the semester. He asked for the students to define failure for themselves for the upcoming midterm after having assessed their depression and explanatory style at the very beginning. With the Beck Depression Inventory distributed along with the midterm exam results, it was found that 30% of the those who defined failure for themselves and who failed the midterm became very depressed. Seventy percent did not. With further research and models of testing, and study into how therapy works, Seligman determined that pessimistic explanatory style predicts who is going to get depressed, who will stay depressed, and who will relapse from therapy. A change of explanatory style from pessimism to optimism relieved the depression significantly.

The results of Seligman's work, especially with undergraduates, has been utilized to support further research. The motivational effect of learned helplessness has been seen in the classroom (Dweck, 2006; Ramirez, Malonado, & Martos, 1992; Stipek, 1988). Dweck (2006) identified that a pessimistic explanatory style is a culprit for poor academic performance. With a pessimistic explanatory style, problem-solving strategies were found to deteriorate, sometimes to a first-grade level. Even with successes, those with a pessimistic style discounted them. Further, students with a pessimistic style predicted that they would only solve 50% of the problems that they had just solved, as opposed to the students with an optimistic explanatory style who predicted 90% success. Students who repeatedly fail may conclude that they are incapable of improving

their performance, and this attribution keeps them from trying to succeed (Ramirez, Maldonado, & Martos, 1992; Stipek, 1988). This lack of effort results in increased helplessness, continued failure, loss of self-esteem and social consequences.

In a longitudinal National Institute of Mental Health study with Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania, two major risk factors were identified for depression and poor achievement among children: a pessimistic explanatory style and bad life events (Seligman, 2011). Children with a pessimistic explanatory style were at risk for depression. This study was also unique as it revealed that the young men were more pessimistic and depressed than young women. Young men were more fragile in their response to bad events, including divorce. As women were found to be more than twice as vulnerable to depression in adulthood, this was an interesting discovery regarding the development of pessimistic styles by gender. Chang and Sanna (2007) found that young adults and middle-aged parents with a pessimistic explanatory style often suffered from depression.

Attributional Style Questionnaire

In order to measure explanatory style, the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) was established; a self-reporting instrument yields scores for explanatory style for bad and good events using the three causal dimensions: internal versus external, stable versus unstable, and global versus specific causes (Peterson, Semmel, von Beater, Abramson, Metalsky, & Seligman, 1982). The survey presents twelve hypothetical events, half defined as good and half as bad. The respondent is asked to write down one major cause of each event and then rate that cause on a 7-point continuum for the three causal dimensions.

The ASQ was distributed in 1982 to 130 undergraduates including 50 males and 80 females enrolled in an abnormal psychology course at the State University of New York at Stony Brook,

with a follow up completed by 100 participants (Peterson et al., 1982). The results found that there were no differences between gender. Values were more comparable within bad items and within good items than between bad and good items. Good events tended to be explained more internally, stably, and globally than bad events (p 's < .0001). Alpha coefficients of .75 and .72 were found for the composite scales for good and bad events, respectively. Three-item subscales were derived, but did not attain sufficient reliability to make them useful in future analysis. Internality, stability, and globality for achievement events were significantly correlated with the respective ratings for affiliation events with a mean of .37 and a range from .23 to .59 (p 's < .05). Unfortunately, there was no evidence for the ability to discriminate achievement from affiliative goal areas. This can be attributed to the instrument or to the discrimination of the subjects. Composite attributional style scores on all of the items for bad events and all items for good events were more strongly related to depression than individual attributional dimensions (Seligman et al., 1979). Of important note, high internality for good events did not necessarily imply high internality for bad events, and conceptions that combine the two did not maximize the power of the concept (Peterson et al., 1982). It was also found that there was less discrimination among internality, stability, and globality for good events as compared to bad events. It is possible that people may make fewer distinctions among good events as they spend less time ruminating over them, and that people may focus more on the causes of bad events (Langer, 1978). The results of the study aligned with the learned helplessness reformulation hypothesis: a style in which internal, stable, and global attributions are offered for bad events is associated with depressive symptoms in college students and other populations (Seligman et al., 1979). A cross-lagged panel design found that the ASQ predicted the development of depressive symptoms one month later in college students (Golin, Sweeney, & Shaeffer, 1981).

Explanatory Style

From the ASQ, a range of explanatory styles were identified. These include explanations that individuals make for their successes and failures, which lead to expectations that affect their reactions to future successes and failures (Schulman, 1995). These expectations can create self-fulfilling prophecies that either enhance or undermine performance. As alluded to in the format of the ASQ, there are three dimensions that compose these styles: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization (Seligman, 1998). Permanence is considered to be stable or unstable, and looks at events in realms of permanency or temporary. A person who gives up easily may believe that the causes of the event are permanent, that the bad event will persist, and will always be there to affect their lives. Those who resist helplessness believe that the causes of bad events are temporary. While permanence is about time, pervasiveness is about “space”. This is the difference between individuals who identify universal explanations for their failures, who then give up on everything when a failure strikes in one area, and people who make specific explanations, who may become helpless in that one part of their lives and continue on in others. Personalization is the degree to which a person attributes an event to themselves or to external forces. Internalization is blaming ourselves and externalization is blaming other people or circumstances. Seligman believes that low self-esteem comes from an internal style for bad events. An optimistic explanatory style attributes failures to external, unstable, and specific causes, while successes are attributed to internal, stable, and universal factors. A pessimistic explanatory style attributes failures to internal, stable, and universal factors, and successes to external, unstable, and specific causes. Examples of a pessimistic explanatory style can be found in Table 2.

Table 2.

Examples of Statements associated with a Pessimistic Explanatory Style

Failures	Successes
<p>Permanence: Stable “I’m all washed up” “Diets never work” “You always nag” “You never talk to me”</p> <p>Pervasiveness: Universal “All teachers are unfair” “I’m repulsive” “Books are useless”</p> <p>Personalization: Internal “I’m stupid” “I have no talent at poker” “I’m insecure”</p>	<p>Permanence: Unstable “It’s my lucky day” “I try hard” “My rival got tired”</p> <p>Pervasiveness: Specific “I’m smart at math” “My broker knows oil stocks” “I was charming to her”</p> <p>Personalization: External “A stroke of luck...” “My teammate’s skill...”</p>

(Seligman, 1998)

Explanatory Style in Higher Education

Multiple studies have been conducted that investigate the predictability of success using the ASQ. When looking at the grades of college freshmen, Peterson and Barrett (1987) assessed the predictability of the ASQ while controlling for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and depression using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). They found that explanatory style significantly correlated with and predicted the first-year Grade Point Average (GPA). In a similar study, Schulman (1995) explored if explanatory style could predict first semester college GPA and beyond-traditional measure of ability, like the SAT, achievement test scores, and high school rank. Further, the study sought to understand if those who exceeded their predicted grades had more optimistic explanatory styles than those who do not. A composite positive explanatory style combined with other traditional measures significantly predicted GPA, however ASQ scores alone did not correlate with GPA. Students with better grades than what the traditional measures

predicted were slightly more optimistic than those who had worse predicted grades (Gibb et al., 2002; Schulman, 1995). Schulman (1995) then explored upper class students' grades in a separate study. When combined with traditional measures, the ASQ correlated significantly with GPA, and significantly predicted GPA when traditional measures were partialled out.

At West Point, it was found that a composite positive and negative explanatory style of the ASQ affirmed previous research and significantly predicted first year GPA when SAT scores were removed (Schulman, 1995). However the ASQ total did not correlate with the first-year GPA. Further, those who dropped out of boot camp or first year classes had a significantly more pessimistic composite than those who did not. Among non-traditional students, optimism and an optimistic explanatory style were found to be positively correlated with age (Eppler, Carsen-Plentl, & Harju, 2000). Beyond these traditional measures of success in college, optimistic students report lower levels of psychological stress and loneliness and higher levels of social support and psychological and physical well-being (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Scheier & Carver, 1992). The effect of optimism was also found by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001), in which academic self-efficacy and optimism were strongly related to performance and adjustment, both directly on academic performance and indirectly through expectations and coping perceptions relating to classroom performance, stress, health, and overall satisfaction and commitment to remain in school.

To further understand the direction of attributions, Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, and Hankin (2004) explored the magnitude, ubiquity, and adaptability of the self-serving attributional bias in which people make more internal, stable, and global attributions for positive events than for negative. In other words, the researchers explored the expansiveness of an optimistic explanatory style. In regards to age, children and older adults displayed the largest bias. Asian populations

displayed a significantly smaller bias than the United States and other Western samples. As could be predicted, bias was smallest for samples with depression, anxiety, and Attention Deficit (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). A self-serving attributional bias was found to be pervasive in the general population with variability across age, culture, and psychopathology.

Athletics

Explanatory style has also been explored in relationship to athletic performance. Studies demonstrated that optimistic soccer players demonstrated better performance during a loss than did pessimists, with no significant performance differences found between these two groups during a subsequent win, and had more assists and steals with fewer rebounds and more fouls (Schulman, 1995). Some negative relationships were a function of female athletes attributing negative outcomes to lack of effort as opposed to lack of ability, also defined as a pessimistic explanation.

Thriving in College

Finding roots in Seligman's attributional and explanatory styles, the concept of thriving established by Schreiner (2010) is linked to models of student retention within higher education. Bean and Eaton's (2000) psychological model of retention emphasizes the psychological processes through which students engage with their collegiate experiences, process a sense of fit, both academically and socially, ultimately leading to institutional fit, retention, and graduation. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon's (2011) focus on psychological process in their persistence models that include communal potential, proactive social adjustment, and psychosocial engagement. In a culminating review, Schreiner (2010) indicated that a connection between such processes and the construct of flourishing is important for research.

After combining these various perspectives on well-being and student success with descriptions of successful college students, a reliable measure was developed (Schreiner,

2010). Pilot testing, revisiting, and performing factor analysis resulted in a 35 item survey instrument surrounding five factors of engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness. Each of these factors represents an element of academic, intrapersonal, or interpersonal thriving that has demonstrated to be empirically related to change within students, rather than fixed personality traits over which there is little control. Seligman's concept of explanatory style has provided a foundational theory for the aspect of intrapersonal thriving. Healthy attitude towards self, in addition towards the learning process, is vital for thriving in college (Schreiner, 2010). In the survey created by Schreiner, intrapersonal thriving is composed of a factor called positive perspective. Positive perspective is a way of viewing reality and proactively coping with that reality.

Schreiner (2010) sought to determine if knowing a student's level of thriving adds to the understanding of the variation in their success beyond traditional predictors of gender, ethnicity, generation status, high school grades, and admission test scores. After controlling for such factors, the five elements of thriving explained an additional 8 to 18% of the variation in outcomes such as college grades, intent to graduate, self-reported learning gains, and institutional fit. This indicates that there is a significant piece of the student-success puzzle that the concept of thriving can help administrators understand. The results of Schreiner's (2010) study also found that differences in students' backgrounds were not as important to understanding their success as was their level of thriving. Students who were high in thriving reported greater institutional fit, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, academic ability, or type of institution they attended (Schreiner, 2010; Schreiner, Hulme, Hetze, & Lopez, 2009; Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012). In regards to the disparate graduation rates across different ethnic groups, this information can be used to increase student's likelihood of success by designing interventions that promote thriving.

Transition Theory

In the fundamental student development theory guiding many orientation and first year programs, Schlossberg provided language to understand transition of any human experience by articulating that we are all involved in a transition at any given moment (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Prior to the application of this theory to college student development, Schlossberg's theory was derived from working with adults in general. The original theory was published in the article "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation" in the *Counseling Psychologist* journal (Schlossberg, 1981). In this theory, a transition is defined as an event or non-event that results in changed relationships, assumptions, routines, or roles. It is vital that the role of perception in transitions is understood. Each person defines transition for themselves. In order to understand the meaning or impact of transition for a specific individual, the type, context, and impact of the transition ought to be considered.

In each experience of transition, Schlossberg identified three phases: moving in, moving through, moving out (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). When moving into a new situation, one must become familiar with new roles, relationships and routines. Once an individual understands the context and operations of the initial situation, they then tend to begin the experience of moving through. In this phase, adults confront issues of balancing activities with other parts of their lives, while also figuring out how to feel supported and challenged in their new journey or experience. The moving out phase is the end of a transition, when individuals often start looking forward to the next event.

There are three steps for a successful navigation of transition (Anderson et al., 2012). First is "approaching transitions" which involves identifying the transition, identifying how much it will

change a person's life, and understanding where the individual is in the transition process. Second, "taking stock of coping resources" utilizes a 4 S System to be described further. Finally, "taking charge" involves strengthening resources. These resources fall into four categories and can be viewed as assets or liabilities, depending on how they are interpreted by the individual and how they affect the transition.

The 4 S System includes examining the situation, the self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). The *situation* includes elements such as the trigger for the transition, the timing, the source or level of control over the situation, whether a role change exists, the duration of the transition, experience with previous similar transitions, concurrent stress, and one's assessment of the transition as positive or negative. The *self*, in terms of coping assets and liabilities, includes an understanding of one's personal characteristics, including socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity or culture. This area also accounts for psychological resources, including ego development, outlook, optimism and self-efficacy, commitment, values, spirituality, and resilience. Sources of *support* varies by individual and may include family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, strangers, organizations, and institutions among other resources. *Strategies* vary as well, but can be viewed in three categories of responses. Some responses seek to modify the situation by altering the source of strain through negotiation, optimistic action, self-reliance versus advice seeking, and exercise of potency versus helpless resignation. Responses that control the meaning of the problem to cognitively neutralize the threat include positive comparisons, selective ignoring, and substitution of rewards. Finally, responses that help the individual manage stress once stress has occurred include emotional discharge, self-assertion, and passive forbearance. The ratio of assets to

liabilities helps to explain how individuals can react differently to similar transitions and why the same person can react uniquely at different times (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

To tie the theory of transition into higher education and the intent of this study, two important points of the theory should be highlighted. First, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) were intentional in pointing out that institutions need to implement orientation programs to help individuals know what is expected of them to facilitate positive moving in and moving through phases. Second, within the phase of moving through, Schlossberg identified that one of the major resources that influence the ability of someone to cope with transition is the psychological resources, especially including one's optimistic outlook (Goodman et al., 2006). As this study continues to follow students with pessimistic explanatory styles, it is important to find this link between explanatory style and experience of transition.

College Transition Programs

Arguments are plentiful for strong and thoughtful transition programming for students entering college as success is largely determined by the experiences during the freshmen year (Smith & Bracken, 2003; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Wolcott, 2006). A first year's most critical period of transition occurs during the first two to six weeks of college life (Levitz & Noel, 1989). Students often decide within the first few weeks if they will pursue higher education seriously (Gardner, 2001). Further, initial encounters with the institution and the community within have profound effects on levels of involvement and aspirations for intellectual achievement (Lewis, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1992). A good start to college also results in the benefits of enhanced retention, a positive atmosphere, and skill development (Gardner and Hansen, 1993; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Twale, 1989).

Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) explored the longitudinal predictors of adjustment to college in a sample of 672 first year students. A direct effect of optimism on adjustment was found, though most of the predicted effects were mediated by coping methods. When initial positive and negative mood were controlled, the beneficial effects of optimism, control, and self-esteem on adjustment were mediated by the non-use of avoidance coping, greater use of active coping, and greater seeking of social support.

Among the elements that constitute transition into college, social adjustment is vital for the transition experience, as previously indicated in the work of Schlossberg. Of particular importance for first year students is the establishment of close friends, primarily during the first month of enrollment (Upcraft & Garner, 1989). Woosley (2003) found that initial social adjustment is linked to higher probabilities of degree completion, even when the pre-enrollment characteristics and educational commitment level were included in the model. Further, trust that is developed in interpersonal relationships builds an optimistic explanatory style. Upon review of the Thriving Quotient, developed as an instrument founded in positive psychology to determine college student thriving, Nelson and Vetter (2012) discussed that psychological sense of community is one of the most impactful and predominant predictors of thriving among first year students. A positive perspective is cultivated out of genuine relationships with peers and faculty, in turn promoting understanding of self as a learner and member of the community. Their positive perspective is indicated by the quality and diversity of their relationships, and a clear sense of purpose in which psychological energy is dedicated to the learning process. In a study by Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, and Madson (1999), the most significant predictor of attrition was social isolation. The risk of student departure increases if students do not have the skills necessary to become socially integrated nor does the institution create or promote policies and programs to foster social

integration (Komives and Woodard, 2003; Tinto, 2006). The findings suggest that universities need to continue to focus attention on social activities and adjustment as soon as students arrive on campus.

In order for student learning and growth or development to occur, students must actively engage in their environment, and educators should create opportunities for such engagement in and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1984). Gardner and Jewler (2001) echoed this stance by calling educators and scholars to provide dedicated support, customized to a variety of student needs. They call for faculty and staff responsibility to increase student success rates during the first year, as measured in terms of grades and GPAs, course completion, and retention in addition to personal growth and development.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the National Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA) have established best practices and core competencies to guide the work necessitated. CAS states that orientation programs must facilitate the transition of new students into the institution, prepare said students for educational opportunities and responsibilities, and initiate the integration of new students into the intellectual, cultural, and social aspects of the institution (Dean, 2006; Wells, 2015). To achieve this, programs ought to be attentive to multiple domains of a successful orientation: (a) knowledge acquisition, integration, construction, and application; (b) cognitive complexity including dimensions of critical thinking, reflective thinking, effective reasoning and creativity; (c) intrapersonal development including dimensions of realistic self-appraisal, self-understanding, self-respect, identity development, commitment to ethics and integrity and spiritual awareness; (d) interpersonal competence including dimensions of meaningful relationships, interdependence, collaboration, and effective leadership; (e) humanitarianism and civic

engagement which includes understanding and appreciation of cultural and human differences, social responsibility, global perspective, and sense of civic responsibility; (f) and finally practice competence which encapsulates the dimensions of pursuing goals, communicating effectively, technical competence, managing personal affairs and career development, demonstrating professionalism, maintaining health and wellness, and living a purposeful and satisfying life. As the CAS standards do not provide specific competencies for the professionals implementing such programs, NODA fills this gap and offers direction through core competencies (National Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education, 2016). These competencies were designed to be an organizational system of knowledge, skills, and abilities; a benchmark for the profession and each professional. As such, there are twelve competencies: (a) theoretical and institutional knowledge; (b) diversity, inclusion, and access; (c) campus collaboration; (d) curriculum and content development; (e) program delivery and management; (f) organization and leadership; (g) communication; (h) crisis management; (i) financial management; (j) laws, policies, and governance; (k) enrollment management; and (l) research assessment and evaluation. Smith and Brackin (2003) state that the primary goal of a college orientation program is to facilitate the adjustment and success of entering students.

With the guidance of CAS and NODA, professionals must understand the strengths and needs of students in order to program effectively, demonstrating a need for this research. Therefore, recognizing the transition issues students commonly face will help in not only understanding the context, but also needs. Robotham and Julian (2006) found common stressors for first year students, including time demands, financial pressures, new responsibilities, increased academic expectations, new relationships, career development, fear of failure, and parental pressures. These stressors compete for students' time and energy, and can create conflicts between

work, personal, and family issues, leading to a lack of academic commitment and social participation, affecting attrition (Hoyt, 1999). Several texts have been written to help students work through these issues that include topics on defining success, accepting responsibility, working towards interdependence, developing self-awareness and lifelong learning, emotional intelligence, managing alcohol and drugs, promoting health, managing money and time, developing relationships with faculty and navigating their expectations, help seeking, involvement on campus, motivation, selecting a major, finding one's fit on campus, homesickness, friendships, relationships at home, living with roommates, stress management, and class management through academic preparation (Cohen, 2011; Downing, 2011; Nist-Olejnik & Holschuh, 2011). Within the common stressors, we find even more connections to depression. Extreme homesickness and separation anxiety can lead to nightmares, isolation, headaches, stomach aches, nausea, vomiting, stress, obsessionality, memory loss, and even anxiety and depression, further complicating normal transition issues in the absence of coping strategies and help (Claborn & Kane, 2012; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Flett, Endler, & Besser, 2009; Ollendick, Lease, Cooper, 1993).

Need for Current Study

The experiences of students are richly layered and complex, and researching underlying causes and perceptions by listening to student voices can strengthen the work of college developmental educators (Higbee, Arendale, and Lundell, 2005). Research on students with pessimistic explanatory styles appears to be lacking from the literature, especially in regards to their transition into the college experience. Even though previous research has provided insights into how students might need to develop and transition successfully into colleges and what institutions can do better to support students' academic pursuits, often overlooked are skill set

development, strengths, assets, attitudes, aspirations, and abilities which could facilitate transition are neglected (Hutson and He, 2011).

In summary, depression and mental health concerns are rising among the college populations in the United States. Simultaneously, enrollment is decreasing. A clear link between depression and pessimistic explanatory style exists. Further, the vital time of preparation and success development for a college student occurs within the first few weeks of collegiate life. From multiple directions, there is evidence to support that explanatory style has a significant impact on student success by way of mental health. These connections call for further research to understand the transition experiences of our students who possess a pessimistic explanatory style. Through this exploration, we can hope to gain understanding of the transition experience of full time, first year students attending a private, liberal arts institution in the east central region of the United States who possess a pessimistic explanatory style.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the transition experiences of students with a pessimistic explanatory style who also qualify as full time, first year, traditionally aged students at a small, private, liberal arts, four year institution in the east central region of the United States. In doing so, a qualitative grounded theory approach is utilized (Charmaz, 2014). This chapter reviews the methods used to achieve this, including the research design rationale, the role of the researcher as an instrument, the context, sampling method, participants, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness of the research.

Research Design Rationale

A qualitative design was chosen as such methods are especially useful for exploring and describing the experiences of college students when little is known about a topic of interest (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, and Schneider, 2002). In grounded theory studies, the researcher focuses on a process or action that has distinct phases or steps in an effort to develop context-specific theories of these processes and practices (Creswell, 2013). Charmaz (2014) provides a foundation for this research with an approach that offers a constructivist and interpretive lens. Charmaz (2014) places an emphasis on the views, feelings, values, beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals as compared to the methods of research. This practice still requires collection of rich data, initial and focused coding, memoing, and theoretical sampling. As this study is rooted in an understanding of the experiences of transition and explanatory style, a grounded theory method supports researching this subject matter. Characteristics that distinguish grounded theory qualitative research include theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, coding and categorizing the data, theoretical memos and diagrams, literature

as data sources, and theory integration (Clark & McCann, 2003). These characteristics are reviewed further in following sections.

Interpretive Theory and Framework

A constructivist paradigm surrounds this research as the goal is to understand how a student with a pessimistic explanatory style experiences the transition into college (Creswell, 2013). This includes the ontological understanding that multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions, the epistemological belief that reality will be co-constructed between the researcher and participants, while respecting the axiological beliefs of the individual values.

According to Creswell (2013), ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of reality and relative characteristics. These assumptions hold that there are multiple, subjective realities, which are experienced differently among the study participants, researchers, and readers. The researcher will use quotes and themes directly pulled from the words of the participants to provide evidence for different perspectives regardless of common themes.

Creswell (2013) also reviewed the epistemological assumptions, which are concerned with the relationships between the researcher and the participants being researched. Of particular interest in qualitative studies, researchers strive to lessen the distance and space between themselves and the people or participants being researched. This is accomplished by getting to know the participants while sharing information about themselves and the intent of the research, interacting with participants in the field, collaborating with participants, and becoming an insider of sorts.

Finally, axiological assumptions are focused on the role of values (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher will make an effort to position themselves in the study, they accept that the research is

value-laden and that biases are present. The researcher is not striving for value-free or bias-free data. Because of this, researchers must discuss their own roles in the research including their history, beliefs, and assumptions of the topic, and further, how these perspective and factors influence the narrative. The researcher presents their own interpretations with those of the participants to provide context of understanding. As the study was conducted, the assumptions and interpretive framework guiding this work were refined.

Role of Researcher

In an effort to provide an understanding of the lens I will use to conduct this research, I want to share: (a) my history with transition and work with college students; (b) my beliefs, outlook, and assumptions; (c) relationships with the participants; and (d) bias.

History

I experienced the transition of moving away from home and into collegiate life as an undergraduate student at a small, private, liberal arts institution in the east central region of the United States. I remember the feelings of transition and change; being excited to move and create a new life, in which I would potentially create a new version of myself. I remember disliking many of the team orientation exercises, feeling awkward, out of place, and disconnected. I remember creating instant friendships with fellow first years as we sat in front of our residence hall, just hanging out. I remember my first introductory professor; someone who has remained in touch even today. I remember the freedoms of choice, and the increasing joy I found from being with friends and going to class.

Through the many transitions since that time, I have personally become more aware of how I interpret each transition. I have spent a great deal of time in contemplation about what going into that transition will look like, what “moving in” looks and feels like. When I am able to

conceptualize this, anxieties translate into excitement. With more and more transition experience, I have found that I understand my inner workings and my personal psychology more, and am more keenly aware of my network of support. I am able to strategize my process of movement more eloquently than during that first transition into college. In retrospect, that transition into college was a time and space of heightened and unarticulated emotions. It is no wonder I now understand the components of self-change more fully through reflection. As a researcher, I carry these experiences with me. I see the transitions students are experiencing as strong, powerful events that have the potential to elicit intense emotions such as sadness, excitement, anxiety, fear, communion, etc. I also see that the initial brunt of a transition can be curbed by experience and through reframing. As I researched and listened to participants, the empathy that I possess allowed me to understand the process and thoughts of the students, and their feelings as well.

In the past ten years, I have worked in several functional areas within student life. While working in Housing and Residence Life, I served as an active mid-level practitioner and chief housing officer at both large public and small private institutions within the southeastern region. This experience has included direct work with first year students, providing basic counseling, preparing their residence halls and programmatic agendas, training their Resident Advisors, developing policies and procedures to meet business practices while supporting student development, and acting as a primary responder to their crises. Through this, I have also served as a Chief Student Conduct Officer and Title IX Investigator, experiences that have helped in developing my understanding of the stressors, issues, and traumas our college students experience: drugs, alcohol, relationships, emotional support animals, sexual assault, abuse, etc.

I am now the Director of Student Transitions and Parent Family Programs at the same small, private liberal arts institution from which the sample population was selected for this study.

My role at the university falls within the divisions of Enrollment and Student Life, and allows for a detailed understanding of the transition process as I am charged with overseeing the entirety of the program and retention efforts of the first year class. In this role, I oversee the development and implementation of new student communication practices, parent and family programming, orientation of all new students, and I provide administrative support for the first year course which the participants will experience. This means that the incoming full time, first year class knew my name as soon as they were accepted and submitted their deposit. I served as their guide as they completed forms, signed up for housing, selected roommates, and moved onto campus. I knew their academic profiles and accommodations before they started school, working with the Registrar, Disability Services, and Counseling to prepare for their arrival. Once on campus, I facilitated their orientation week with 25 orientation leaders and a faculty co-leader, who oversaw the classroom component of their first week on campus. I worked closely with this faculty member to make sure that the learning outcomes of the classroom experience were met: (a) facilitate the emotional, physical, and academic transition of each new student into college life, (b) provide resources and opportunities to engage in resources necessary for a successful collegiate experience, (c) cultivate positive relationships between the new students and the institution, (d) set the standard for academic rigor and evaluate for placement into general education class level. I am responsible for facilitating a cohesive introduction to college life for these students, and I am only able to do this because of my detailed understanding of the university and because of the positive relationships I try to maintain with Academic Affairs, Admissions, the Counseling Center, Student Conduct, Student Success, Residence Life, Campus and Community Engagement, and Public Safety. I coordinate retention efforts through data analysis of variables such as poor midterm grades, and results in developing support plans for students of concern. For students who are

struggling with the transition to college academically, personally, emotionally, physically, or otherwise, I am a first stop for them. I serve as a place to process all of their feelings in a solution-oriented way. Often our meetings end with to do lists: talking to professors, signing up for counseling, withdrawing from a class, dropping an extracurricular activity, meeting with tutors, or eating a good meal and taking a nap.

Beliefs, Outlook, and Assumptions

I believe that Schlossberg's (2011) theory of transition is an excellent guide for the experiences of college students, though the dynamics of how students prepare and manage it are changing. Students now seem intensely career driven and aware of their financial burdens; much more so than when I was going to college. I believe that the college students at the institution I serve are incredibly intelligent and have a sincere desire to do well. I also believe that no one is perfect, including students. I believe that college is truly a time of self-discovery and change. It is a time in which students begin to understand how the roles of race, spirituality, religion, gender, psychology, and all other identities play out and intersect in our lives. It is a time for students to cultivate or decide how they will operate moving forward. It is a time to make mistakes and learn who they want to be. Change and transitions are gifts and opportunities. They are challenging and stressful.

I have long been fascinated with the intrapersonal nature of our minds, how we self-motivate, interpret, and function in the world. Working with students while simultaneously exploring my own understanding of self has created an evolving space of reflection and comparison. When I discovered the concepts of positive psychology, which encompasses the work of Seligman (2011) and his theories of well-being, Learned Optimism, and explanatory style, I found a language that finally matched the trends that I was seeing within my operational world.

Feeling compelled to also take the Attributional Style Questionnaire, I found that for the negative event questions, I was moderately optimistic in terms of permanence, moderately optimistic in terms of pervasiveness, and average in terms of personalization, resulting in a moderately optimistic score for general negative experiences. For positive event questions, I was moderately optimistic in terms of permanence, average in terms of pervasiveness, and moderately pessimistic in terms of personalization, resulting in an average score for general positive events or experiences. In total, I possess an average explanatory style, not identifying as clearly pessimistic or optimistic. As I moved forward in analysis of student participant responses through this study, I was aware of my lens of operation and the breadth of experiences that are involved in the transition into collegiate life. I believe that not all students will connect or buy into this kind of thinking, and I want to learn what and how they think.

In conducting this research, I assume that students will have the language to talk about their outlook and perspective on life, how they perceive their successes and failures, and how they experience the transition to college. I also assume that their pessimistic explanatory style will impact their experiences. I hope to uncover how, what, where, and why this occurs. I assume that all participants will possess an explanatory style, and that their style will impact their ways of operating as evidenced by the literature.

Relationships with Participants

Relationships were established between myself and several participants, reframing the research as a resource or support in some cases. This points to the role that relationships played in the transition experiences of the participants. Throughout the interviews, it was easy to see that the relationship developed over time, and that it was unique with each participant. At the beginning of the project, while comfortable and relational, it was still new. Answers needed more coaxing or

support to become fully-formed. In the middle of the study, participants started to express more excitement as evidenced by their sharing of experiences and stories. The participants, almost immediately following the initial interview, began to associate more openly with me as more than a researcher, but also a mentor or guide.

Bias

The goal of qualitative study is not to eliminate the actual influence of the researcher, as that is impossible, but to understand how to use it productively (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This is called “reactivity” in observational settings and “reflexivity” in regards to interviews, as the researcher is part of the world in which they are studying (Maxwell, 2013). This influence is inescapable, but understood as always present since the researcher, or the research situation, is always a present condition of the study. As such, I tried to minimize explicit influence, as demonstrated in the interview guides. More important, however, is understanding how the researcher impacted outcomes and how this impacts the validity of the assertions and inferences drawn from this study. Several researcher biases were identified in this study.

I grew up in the city in which the university of this study is located, and developed opinions about the institution during that time. Now, I serve as the Director of Student Transitions and Parent and Family Programs at the same university where this study took place. Because of this, I hold a personal interest in the success of the university. Further, I have been aware of the characteristics of the participants since they were accepted to the university and submitted their deposit to attend. As such, I am familiar with their histories, academic profiles, and personal demographics. In my role, I am tasked with the responsibility of designing their transition experience from high school to college. My experience and knowledge is an asset as well as a vulnerability as I have a vested interest in the success of these students, and my day to day work is

designed to support their transition. My personal experience has provided me with extensive knowledge about the admissions image of the university, as well as the programs, policies, and challenges.

As I have experienced my own transitions and hold beliefs about the transition process, I had to be aware not to assume that the experiences of the participants would be similar to mine. Rather, they needed to have the space to discuss their experiences. I also had to avoid overgeneralization of findings if themes emerged among one or several participants, but not all.

To address these biases, I used intensive involvement, rich data, triangulation, and discrepant evidence. Intensive involvement allows for the confirmation of observation and inferences by engaging in long-term participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957; Maxwell, 2013). By incorporating a sustained presence and including repeated observations and interviews, questionable associations and underdeveloped theories were identified. Further, extended time allows for the ability to investigate emergent themes, thereby embracing the iterative process of the study. This intensive involvement included 42 hours spent in the field, equating to seven hours per participant. Field time occurred over the course of ten weeks starting one week before the beginning of the fall semester. Of those seven hours, three were spent interviewing, three to four were devoted to observations, and the remaining time constituted the taking of the Attributional Style Questionnaire.

Rich data was obtained through long-term intensive involvement and intensive interviews, as recognized by Becker (1970, pp. 51-62). These types of data collection are detailed and unique enough that they provide full and clear pictures of what is happening in the study. Seeking rich data means seeking a thick description as is defined by Geertz (1973), such as writing extensive field notes from observations, finding relevant documents, and compiling or comparing detailed

narratives from transcripts (Charmaz, 2014). This included transcripts of the three one-hour long interviews set at the beginning, middle, and end of the study, as well as detailed, descriptive note taking of the four observed events: orientation observation, first year course observation, class observation, and observations outside of class during extra curricular involvement. Data collection was designed to capture experiences throughout the transition period, allowing for cyclical return to themes, expressed experiences, and topics guided by the theoretical framework.

Triangulation was used in an effort to corroborate evidence from various sources and shed light on themes and perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). This included collection of observations, individual interviews, and artifact elicitation to provide a background and explain participant attitudes and behaviors. Triangulation helps to eliminate chance associations by using a consistent method (Maxwell, 2013). Triangulation was used for the sources of data and method in order to identify sources of error. The use of observations, interviews, and artifact elicitation allowed for broad and free communication of experiences, and justification of assertions across the breadth of data collection sources. Additionally, multiple levels of coding, especially theoretical coding and symbolic interactionism, allowed for triangulation of themes and ideas.

Finally, as themes and assertions formed, I looked for cases among the participants that were negative. Maxwell (2013) states that identifying and analyzing discrepant data and negative cases is vital to the validity of qualitative research. When a theme started to emerge, I made sure to see if the theme was present across all participants. When all participants' examples and experiences did not support the emerging theme, the theme was dropped from exploration or was reframed and repositioned to see if it resonated across all participants in a different way.

Therefore, each assertion was founded based upon examples from all participants. Variation within themes and assertions were addressed in the findings.

Context

This study took place on the campus of East Central University, a pseudonym for the true site of study. East Central University (ECU) sits downtown in a small to medium sized urban city. ECU is a small, private, liberal arts institution serving a predominantly white population of students. The institution primarily recruits students from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee, and houses 75% of the student body on campus. Roughly 1,100 students are enrolled in undergraduate courses as the university only awards bachelor degrees. The academic calendar year consists of a 4:4:1 model, in which four months constitute a fall semester during which four courses are taken, four month constitute a winter semester during which four courses are taken, and one month constitutes a spring semester during which students only register for one course. The mission and values of the institution strive to support preparation for a humane and fulfilling personal and public life through engagement with the characteristics traditionally associated with the liberal arts. This includes development of independent thinking, open-mindedness, creativity and expression, and a deep commitment to a life of learning through social responsibility to a diverse world.

Sampling Methods

Criterion and theory based sampling was initially used in a critical and homogeneous population (Creswell, 2013). For this study, a two-step sampling process took place. First, a funnel approach was utilized, collecting data from the entire incoming first year class to determine the population from which the true sample was selected. The data included demographic information and admissions data. Selection of full time, first year, traditionally aged students

constituted criterion based sampling. A letter of informed consent and description of the research was provided to all participants, as exemplified in Appendix A. The full entering cohort consisted of 297 full time, first year, traditionally aged students. For ECU, full time enrollment status consisted of at least 4.25 units, which equals roughly 16 credit hours. Traditional age refers to individuals who have completed standard pre-education, including elementary, middle, and high school, and upon completion of these or compatible qualifications, entering first year students are typically ages 17 to 20. Students under the age of 18 were not eligible for participation.

Of the 297 students from which sampling would occur, 59.1% identified as female, 40.4% identified as male, and less than one percent identify as transgender or “other”. The majority of the cohort was white or Caucasian at 85.1%. African American or black students make up eight percent of the cohort, Hispanic or Latino/a students make up three percent of the cohort, and the remaining 3.9% of the cohort identify as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or other. The largest religious affiliations among the cohort identified as Baptist at 15.8% and Roman Catholic at 12.7%, with remaining religious affiliations of Buddhist, Church of Christ, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Evangelical, Independent Christian, Lutheran, Methodist, Muslim, Christian, Non-Christian, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian, Wiccan-Pagan, and no preference. Over 74% of the cohort were residents of the same state in which ECU is located. The remaining 25% hail from other states. No participants were classified as international. Over 99% of the incoming cohort fall within the prescribed traditional age range.

In the second step, theory based sampling was informed by the Attributional Style Questionnaire determining pessimistic explanatory style. The researcher distributed the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) to the full cohort of new students on the first night of

orientation during opening residential and commuter student meetings. From the full cohort, 229 completed questionnaires were eligible for consideration. The Attributional Style Questionnaire scores range from +18 to -18. Of the 229 questionnaires returned, 207 possessed an optimistic explanatory style, 13 possessed a pessimistic explanatory style, and nine possessed a neutral style. The resulting scores ranged from +11.83 to -5.33.

Participants of the ASQ who are found to possess a pessimistic explanatory style were invited to participate in further study having met the criteria of full time enrollment status, first year of collegiate education, and traditional age. These individuals were sent a letter of solicitation, found in Appendix B. While a prescriptive number of participants is not recommended for qualitative grounded theory research, Charmaz states that an increased number of interviews should be sought when pursuing a controversial topic, when findings are provocative or surprising, to construct complex conceptual analyses, when interviewing is the only source or data, and when the research seeks professional credibility (2014). Six participants agreed to continue further research, and were assigned aliases. Only the researcher knows actual names and identifying factors. A descriptive profile of the participants can be found in Table 3.

Table 3.

Participant Profiles

Characteristic	Participant		
	Anne	Daniel	Jacob
Age	18	18	18
Gender	Female	Male	Male
Race	White	White	White
ACT	21	31	25
High School Type	Magnet	Public	Public
Housing	On Campus	On Campus	On Campus
Home	Non-Local	Local	Non-Local
Religion	Christian	Catholic	Atheist
Depression	No Depression	No Depression, Diagnosed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	No Depression
Interests	Athlete: Track	Painting, Sculpture, Poetry	Athlete: Lacrosse
Beginning ASQ Score	-2.17	-1.33	-0.5
Ending ASQ Score	-0.5	1.17	-0.17
Difference	1.67	2.5	0.33

Characteristic	Participant		
	John	Nicole	Thomas
Age	18	18	18
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Race	White	White	White
ACT	32	25	32
High School Type	Public	Public	Private
Housing	On Campus	On Campus	On Campus
Home	Non-Local	Non-Local	Local
Religion	Atheist	Atheist - Spiritual	Jewish (Converting)
Depression	Undiagnosed	Diagnosed	Undiagnosed
Interests	Trumpet	Classics, Books	Poetry, Theatre
Beginning ASQ Score	-0.17	-1.67	-0.17
Ending ASQ Score	1.33	0.67	1.33
Difference	1.5	2.34	1.5

Data Collection

Data was collected in multiple ways to support transferability, credibility, and dependability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In chronological order, the researcher collected admissions data, ASQ scores, direct observations, interview information, and artifacts. As is typical with qualitative research, data collection opportunities also occur in a cyclical fashion. When additional information was sought, the researcher returned to data collection (Charmaz, 2014). In total, 42 hours of data was collected, averaging seven hours per participant as displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Data Collection by Participant and Type

	ASQ	Beginning		
		Orientation Observations	Initial Interview	First Year Course Observations
Nicole	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Campus Sing	9/6/17 4:00 PM	9/12/17 11:00 AM
John	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Campus Sing	9/6/17 3:00 PM	9/12/17 11:00 AM
Daniel	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Playfair	9/5/17 3:00 PM	9/14/17 11:00 AM
Anne	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Playfair	9/5/17 2:00 PM	9/14/17 11:00 AM
Jacob	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Health Fair	9/4/17 3:15 PM	9/14/17 11:00 AM
Thomas	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Ice Cream Social	9/4/17 11:00 AM	9/12/17 11:00 AM
Hours (42)	1	6	6	3

	Mid-Study		
	Mid-Study Interview	Classroom Observations	Observations Outside of Class
Nicole	9/28/17 3:00 PM	10/6/17 9:30 AM	Classics Club, 9/25/17 2:30pm
John	9/28/17 2:00 PM	10/9/2017 9:30:00	Marching Band, 9/30/17
Daniel	9/29/17 3:30 PM	10/5/17 11:00 AM	Poetry Club, 9/28/17 6:00pm
Anne	10/4/17 3:24 PM	10/19/17 9:30 AM	Track Practice, 9/29/17 7:30pm
Jacob	9/29/17 2:30 PM	10/10/17 3:00 PM	Lacrosse Practice, 9/30/2017 8:00am
Thomas	9/29/17 9:30 AM	10/10/17 8:00 AM	Poetry Club, 9/28/17 6:00pm
Hours (42)	6	6	6

	End		
	Final Interview	Artifact	ASQ Retest
Nicole	10/26/17 10:00 AM	10/26/17 10:00 AM	10/26/17 10:00 AM
John	10/26/17 1:30 PM	10/26/17 1:30 PM	10/26/17 1:30 PM
Daniel	10/31/17 11:00 AM	10/31/17 11:00 AM	10/31/17 11:00 AM
Anne	10/24/17 1:00 PM	10/24/17 1:00 PM	10/24/17 1:00 PM
Jacob	10/26/17 12:00 PM	10/26/17 12:00 PM	10/26/17 12:00 PM
Thomas	10/26/17 11:00 AM	10/26/17 11:00 AM	10/26/17 11:00 AM
Hours (42)	6	0	1

Demographic and Admissions Data

Admission data was collected on each sampled participant. This information was collected several months prior to the study implementation, but was accessed only after sampling and permissions were obtained. Information included home location, race, gender, age, intended major, American College Testing (ACT) scores, and high school type. This information was combined with data collected during the study, including housing, religious affiliation, depression diagnoses, interests, beginning ASQ score, ending ASQ score, and the difference between the two. This information was used to create a profile of the participants, for further investigation and to establish a baseline for data collected. This information also aids in any generalizable information that readers wish to interpret for their own situations, though advised with caution.

Attributional Style Questionnaire Distribution

The Attributional Style Questionnaire established the sampling for this study and was distributed to all qualifying participants on the first night of orientation in two locations. Residents were invited to complete the questionnaire in the large dining hall on campus. Commuters were invited to complete the questionnaire in the cafe located on the academic side of campus. This separation is due to the limited availability of time and space with all students in the orientation schedule. Participants were invited to complete the ASQ again during their final interview. The researcher reviewed their scores with them, and used this to inform further questions about their

experience during the transition. While there is no agreed guideline as to what is considered acceptable in terms of test-retest reliability coefficients, literature presents significant coefficients ranging from 0.4 to above 0.8 (Campbell, Rohlman, Storzbach, Binder, Anger, & Kovera 1999; Hersen, 2004; McDaniel, 1997). Studies have produced a test-retest coefficient was calculated at .64 (Peterson et al., 1982)

Observations

Observations allowed the researcher to see, hear, and experience the transitions of the participants in a variety of settings. Creswell (2013) considers observations as a vital tool in data collection. Researcher observations included one hour of observation in the classroom of each sampled participant during their orientation first year course, one hour of observation during co-curricular activities during the first week of orientation, one hour of observation at co-curricular events or athletic practices during the semester, and one hour of observation during fall semester classes. During these observations, the researcher acted as a non participant observer, watching and taking notes from a distance without direct involvement with the participants (Creswell, 2013). This class was chosen due to expressed difficulty by the participant. Throughout the first six weeks of the transition period that begins with orientation, these observational times allowed for capturing the process of moving in, moving through, and moving out. Observations informed interview questions regarding engagement, participation, outlook on the transition experience, and feelings of depression, connection to campus, and other factors related to an explanatory style. Observations framed and triangulated data about the transition and about the experiences of the participants. Observations were recorded through field notes and memos on a laptop with word processing capabilities. Data was stored in a personal cloud based drive. The observational guide can be found in Appendix C.

Individual Interviews

Interviews allowed for participants to share their experiences through verbal communication which included stories, interpretations, and feelings. Intensive interviewing aligns well with grounded theory research as both are open-ended yet directed, shaped and emergent, and paced but unrestricted (Charmaz, 2014). Interview facilitates open-ended, in-depth exploration of a substantial experience of the participant.

Sampled participants were invited to participate in three interviews. These lasted roughly an hour in length. Interviews were recorded at the permission of the participant, and transcribed for analysis. These were recorded using a handheld device and downloaded as an MP3 file. Hand notes, memos, and field notes were also utilized. Interviews of selected participants took place in a comfortable venue of the student's choice, though all chose the office on campus of the researcher. Notes were taken on a laptop with a word processor. All files were stored in a personal cloud based drive.

The first interview took place following the week-long orientation, as classes began for the fall semester. This allowed time for the participant to build rapport and establish a baseline relationship with the institution and also with the researcher. The second interview took place roughly halfway through the study period, each lasting roughly an hour in length. Rather than conducting smaller check-ins, this full length interview allowed for collection of data regarding important events in the middle of the study: sorority and fraternity bid days, involvement fairs, first classes, major papers and examinations, and welcome week activities. The third interview took place the week following when midterm progress reports are due; the last week in October. By intention of design, this timeline for interview aligns with when the Counseling Center at ECU reports a traditional spike in student cases for anxiety, depression, and general counseling. These

interviews began with big picture topics, allowed for reflective questioning, and include probing for category development.

The aforementioned methods allowed the researcher to investigate direction and centrality of the data for theory development. This intentionality of trying to locate important events in the transition influenced how and when data was collected. The goal was to collect data from many angles, opportunities, and time periods, allowing for strong triangulation. As recommended by Charmaz (2014), as the researcher pursued theory construction; specifically addressing concerns of theoretical plausibility, direction, centrality, and adequacy will affect data collection.

Interview Guide

Interviews followed a guide constructed by the researcher, found in Appendix D. The type of interviewing used for this study is rooted in both a constructivist and person-centered approach (Rogers, 1966). A constructivist grounded theory approach attends to the situation and construction of the interview, the construction of the participants' stories and silences, and the relationships between the interviewer and participant as well as the explicit content (Charmaz, 2014). Through this, the interview is a site of exploration, emergent understandings, and legitimation of identity and validation of experience. As such, interviews are used to elicit reflections, through open ended questions, such as "what" and "how" questions very early on. This maintains an emphasis on the process of grounded theory. "When" dimensions are introduced as well as questions that pertain to emerging theoretical interests. The language used in this orientation emphasizes eliciting participant's definition of terms, situations, and events in an effort to unearth assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules.

As a constructivist approach often challenges a researcher to create a balance between asking significant questions and forcing responses, a person-centered approach of question asking

influenced this study. Rogers (1966) believed that through strong relationships, his clients would be able to discover within themselves the capacity to use that relationship for growth and personal development (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2012). To achieve this type of relationship, interviews are designed to allow clients to freely talk about their concerns with minimal external structure and direction. This emphasizes listening techniques. This study did not employ a therapeutic approach like that of Rogers (1966), but did incorporate the components of minimal external structure and direction as well as emphasized listening. To achieve this focus, the researcher stayed close to the topics and questions in the interview guides as they were directly related to the theoretical framework. Further, the researcher avoided offering any assistance to the participants unless asked, and articulated the purpose of the interviews was for research rather than other purposes related to the researcher's job responsibilities. This approach supports the recommendations from Charmaz (2014) to give the participant's comfort higher priority than obtaining juicy data, to frame questions to understand the experience from the participant's view, and affirm that the views and experiences of the participant is important. Table 5 contains the topics pulled from the theoretical framework of this study that formed the questions asked. The full interview guides can be found in Appendix D.

Table 5.

Interview Guide Topics

Initial Interview	Mid-Study Interview	Final Interview
Experience of Transition: Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out & Situation, Self, Social, Strategies	Experience of Transition: Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out & Situation, Self, Social, Strategies	Experience of Transition: Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out & Situation, Self, Social, Strategies
Outlook on Life	Outlook on Life	Outlook on Life
Successes & Failures	Successes & Failures	Successes & Failures
Describing Self and Future Self	Involvement in College	Artifact Elicitation
Permanence, Pervasiveness, Prevalence	Response to Campus Event Permanence, Pervasiveness, Prevalence	Emergent Theme Exploration: Diversity, Spirituality
Observation Follow-Up	Observation Follow-Up	Observation Follow-Up
Events & Influence on Self	Events & Influence on Self	ASQ Re-Test

A combination of both a constructivist and person-centered approach supports the belief that participants are regarded as the best experts of their own experiences (De Jong & Berg, 2008). This study moved forward with interviews using the language and relationship creation associated with a person-centered approach and the directionality of scope, specifically within transition experiences, as is associated with a constructivist approach. Charmaz (2014) identifies that using this combined approach acknowledges and works from the individual's concerns and words, while allowing for the construction of follow-up questions that encourage elaboration and contribute to reevaluation and revision throughout the research process. Interview questions allowed the participants to explore their experiences and concerns, and reflect on the phenomena in their lives while eliciting rich data. As such, the interview guides for each interview in this study, adopted as

few open-ended questions as is possible to begin an informal and conversational interview.

Prepared probing questions were listed and utilized as needed.

Artifacts

Artifacts, documents, written texts, and recorded visual images provide a major form of data as they consist of information that the researcher had no hand in shaping, and therefore can be seen are more objective than interviews or fieldnotes, and assists with the validity of data and analysis through triangulation (Charmaz, 2014). The use of artifacts, or visual research, as a methodology has roots in visual ethnography, sociology, and anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986). The idea is that there is the capability of scientific insight about society and people through observing, analyzing and theorizing from visual manifestations (Margolis & Pauwel, 2011).

Visual data or artifacts are loosely defined as two or three dimensional materials, images, objects, or representations that are found, created, collected, or crafted within the context of the research setting for understanding the phenomenon under study to a fuller extent.

Participants in this study were asked as part of their final interview to bring two artifacts. The first was a paper, project, test, or other academic assignment on which they performed well. The intent was to provide a physical device that resonated with the participants that they could dissect, explain, and use to articulate their academic adjustment to college and their feelings of success or achievement. The hope was to elicit feelings associated with their transition and with their pessimistic explanatory style.

Participants were also asked to bring a creative “something” that they felt exemplified their experience of college thus far. Suggestions included a gift from a family member or friend, a letter from home, a piece of music, artwork, poetry, or a symbol. The intent of this exploration was to

provide a tangible object of consideration and examine how that reflected their perception of the transition.

Rationale for Time Period

This study was restricted to the first ten full weeks of the semester, which included the orientation period. By constructing this study within the first ten weeks, the conceptualized phases of “moving in”, “moving through”, and “moving out” would likely be captured while allowing for the presence of stressors that would resonate with explanatory style. Multiple studies and theorists have identified the first few weeks of the semester as a vital time for studying student transition and development (Levitz & Noel, 1989, Gardner, 2001). In alignment with these findings, the Counseling Center at ECU identified a significant uptick in the number of counseling appointments and the number of clients in October and February (A. Hill, personal communication, June 13, 2017). Further, the fourth week in October falls right after midterms. The plan for this study aligned with the prescribed institutional academic timeline for preparation, learning, and initial testing. Concluding data collection after midterms allowed for capturing the negative and stressed feelings associated with mid-year testing as has been demonstrated to result in heightened explanatory styles in other studies.

Figure 1 presents the methods timeline calendar used for this study. Grey highlighting for weeks one and two signifies the time of orientation when only first year students are active on campus and no other formal classes are in session. Clear or white cells signify the Fall semester, when all students are active and classes are in session. Grey in weeks eight and nine signifies the time of MidTerm Exams. Events related to this study are in bold font. By arranging data collection to include interviews and observations throughout the study, the researcher was able to tend to the cyclical nature of data collection; returning to previously asked questions, responding to

iterative needs or themes, and identifying congruence among questions and themes in regards to time.

Figure 1.

Methods Timeline Calendar

	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Week 1	8/25 New student move in ASQ Distributed	8/26 Orientation Events Participants Agreed to Further Research	8/27 Orientation Events Participants Agreed to Further Research	8/28 First Year Class & Orientation Events	8/29 First Year Class & Orientation Events Orientation Observations	8/30 First Year Class & Orientation Events Orientation Observations	8/31 First Year Class & Orientation Events Orientation Observations
Week 2	9/1 Labor Day Weekend Events	9/2 Labor Day Weekend Events	9/3 Labor Day Weekend Events	9/4 Labor Day Initial Interviews	9/5 Fall Semester Classes Begin Initial Interviews	9/6 Initial Interviews	9/7
Week 3	9/8	9/9	9/10	9/11	9/12 FY Course Observation	9/13	9/14 FY Course Observation
Week 4	9/15	9/16	9/17	9/18	9/19	9/20	9/21
Week 5	9/22	9/23	9/24	9/25 Outside of Class Observations	9/26	9/27	9/28 Mid-Study Interviews Outside of Class Obs
Week 6	9/29 Mid-Study Interviews Outside of Class Obs	9/30 Outside of Class Observations	10/1	10/2	10/3	10/4 Mid-Study Interviews	10/5 Classroom Observations
Week 7	10/6 Classroom Observations	10/7	10/8	10/9 Classroom Observations	10/10 Classroom Observations	10/11	10/12
Week 8	10/13	10/14	10/15	10/16 Midterm Exams	10/17 Midterm Exams	10/18 Midterm Exams	10/19 Midterm Exams
Week 9	10/20 Midterm Exams	10/21	10/22	10/23	10/24 Final Interviews, Artifacts, & ASQ Re-Test	10/25	10/26 Final Interviews, Artifacts, & ASQ Re-Test
Week 10	10/27	10/28	10/29	10/30	10/31 Final Interviews, Artifacts, & ASQ Re-Test	11/1	11/2

Data Analysis Method

As theoretical sensitivity is the understanding of the data, giving meaning to it and determining what aspects are important within the data, the researcher is able to develop concepts and a theory that are grounded within the data (Glaser, 1978). Charmaz (2014) defines theoretical sensitivity as the ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms, and to demonstrate abstract relationships between studied phenomena. This type of sensitivity allows grounded theorists to discern meanings in their emergent patterns and define distinctive properties of their constructed categories. Ultimately, this allows for the construction of analytic codes leading to abstract concepts with clear empirical indicators, distinguishable from other concepts. This is achieved through review of literature, data immersion, and personal experiences, though researchers are warned not to immerse themselves too deeply as to bias their ability to fully explore concepts and theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To encourage this theoretical sensitivity, a researcher should exercise several analytic tools: (a) use of personal experience; (b) recognizing biases and assumptions that may affect the analysis; (c) exploring all possible meanings of words and phrases; (d) examining emotions that were expressed and the situations that cultivated them; and (e) exploring who, what, where, and why of the data. Through the exploration of the role of the researcher, many of these tools are reviewed. Charmaz (2014) offers that to gain theoretical sensitivity, a researcher must look at the studied life from multiple vantage points, making comparisons, following leads, and building on ideas. Further, theory construction is not a mechanical process. Theoretical playfulness is vital, as whimsy and wonder can lead a researcher to see something novel in the mundane. Openness expands the view of the studied life and theoretical possibilities, while hard work reins in ideas to best fit data and develop cohesion.

Charmaz (2014) identifies several aspects involved in the analysis and development of grounded theory, beginning during the interview and data collection phase. Figure 2 presents a visual representation of grounded theory as established by Tweed and Charmaz (2011, p.133), which is further discussed.

Figure 2.

Visual Representation of Grounded Theory

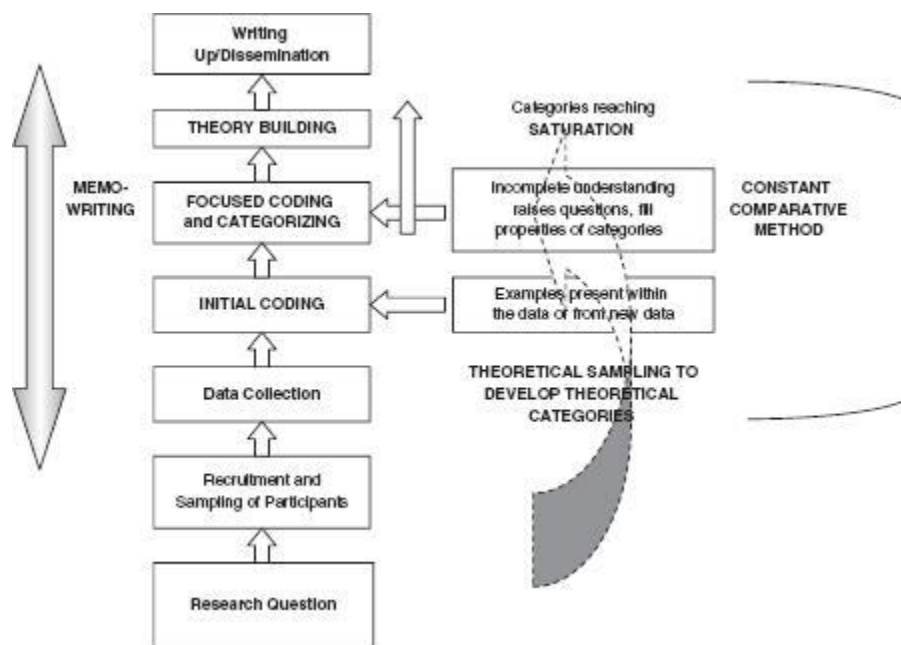


Figure 2. A visual representation of a grounded theory. An earlier version of this figure appeared in Tweed and Charmaz (2011, p. 133), constructed by Alison Tweed. Reprinted from Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.

As open ended questions and interviews propel exploration of experiences and concerns, the researcher begins to attend to the emergent areas of possible theoretical interest. This includes engagement with initial coding, memo writing, and focused coding. Recurring interview statements are considered for theoretical plausibility. From this, tentative categories are created and developed. This helps to identify the theoretical direction necessary for continued interviews. The researcher then conducts interviews within a framework of theoretical sampling. This is often

the time in which the researcher also moves from a background engagement style to a more forefront position. Interview questions become more focused, which then allows for a more clearly defined theoretical centrality.

The first phase in Charmaz's (2014) recommended analysis for grounded theory is initial coding. This coding required the researcher to stop and ask analytic questions of the data that had been gathered. Fragments of data, such as words, lines, segments, and incidents, were coded and studied closely for analytic importance. Initial codes were provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data, which allows for looking at tacit assumptions, explicating implicit actions and meanings, crystallizing significance, comparing data, and identifying gaps. This coding allowed for the researcher to define what is happening in the data and to grapple with what it means; to continue the interaction with participants while collecting data and entering an analytic space. Through this phase, the researcher remained open to all possible theoretical directions indicated in the data. During this stage of analysis, 101 initial codes were identified, and can be found in Appendix E.

The second phase of coding was focused and selective, in which the most significant or frequent initial codes were sorted, synthesized, integrated and utilized to organize large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding pinpointed and developed the most salient codes, and began theoretical integration which was used through the rest of the data analysis. Further emergent coding was utilized to develop sub-categories. During this analytical phase, the data naturally grouped into three time periods: beginning, mid-study, end. The beginning grouping included the Attributional Style Questionnaire, observations during orientation, the initial interview, and observations during the first year course. The mid-study group included the mid-study interview, classroom observations, and co-curricular observations. The end grouping

captured the final interview, artifact reflection, and ASQ re-test. Further, this phase reduced the 101 codes into 25 prominent codes and subsequent sub-categories. Prominent codes included codes of diversity, depression, comparing, politics, self, independence and ownership. Initial and focused coding examples can be found in Appendix E.

Next, theoretical coding was used to conceptualize the focused coding to substantiate how codes relate to each other in the development of a theory (Charmaz, 2014). These codes were meant to be integrative. It was also during this time that preconceptions were wrestled with and reviewed as they shaped analysis. Charmaz (2014) advises that intimacy with the studied phenomenon is a strategy and prerequisite for engaging in the study; a return to the literature may be necessary. During this phase, the researcher returned to the work of transition theory to shift and rearrange some of the coding, making sense of placement and importance. In doing so, it became clear that certain codes were more prevalent at certain times of the study, and yet present throughout. This phase allowed for further interpretation of how often, important, or present codes were.

Relatively, this was also when a picture started to develop in terms of relationships. Codes such as outlook, religion, successes, failures, and global impact started to appear to arch over the study. Conversely, codes like comparing, expectations, and creativity started to pull away from the codes allowing for the researcher to recognize pure experiences: academics, diversity, authenticity, relationships, stress, etc. The researcher also looked at the data through the lens of explanatory styles, identifying if there were present codes that seemed to contribute to the idea of possessing an outlook of self and of successes and failures that fit into experiences or means of understanding experiences.

Symbolic Interactionism, one of theories creating the theoretical foundation of this research, was reconsidered during the analysis process. Symbolic Interactionism is the perspective that views human actions as constructing self, situation, and society (Blumer, 1989; Charmaz, 2014). This language is very similar to that of the resources in Schlossberg's (1981) Transition theory. As such, it was assumed that language and symbols play a critical role in forming and sharing meanings and actions. Interpretation and action are reciprocal processes, affecting each other, and as such a review of this perspective of social realities was considered for coding and analysis. This allowed for the contemplation of the relationships between self, society, collective relationships, and environment.

Finally, theory development took place. A theory states the relationships between abstract concepts and strives for explanation or understanding (Thornberg, Perhamus, & Charmaz, 2012). The culminating theory takes account of what happens, how it ensues, and why it happened. For this study, an interpretive approach was used, which gives abstract understanding greater priority than explanation, seeking indeterminacy rather than causality of patterns or connections (Charmaz, 2014). In short, this study hopes to demonstrate the meanings and actions and how people construct them. This assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; inextricable linked facts and values; provisional truth; and a progressive social life. The findings in chapter four reveal a theory of how the codes and assertions interpreted through this analysis relate to each other for the participants in this study.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, it is vital to evaluate trustworthiness of research as the concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way as naturalistic work (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for inclusion in any qualitative

study that pursues trustworthiness. These criteria are: (a) credibility, in preference to internal validity, (b) dependability, in preference to reliability, (c) confirmability, in preference to objectivity, and (d) transferability, in preference to external validity or generalizability,

Credibility

Credibility seeks to ensure that the study measures and tests what is actually intended (Shenton, 2004). This is one of the most important factors for establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure that the phenomena under scrutiny has been accurately recorded, the researcher is to follow several provisions. For this study, the researcher made every attempt to ensure that the adoption of research methods were well established as well as the correct operational measures for the concept. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend prolonged engagement between the researcher and participant in order to form an adequate understanding of the organization, population, and develop a relationship of trust between parties. This was achieved given the extensive time with the participants, including seven hours of field time per participant. Further, the timing of the study allowed for deep understanding of the transition process.

As referenced in the Researcher as an Instrument section, triangulation was used to compensate for individual limitations in an effort to corroborate evidence from various sources and shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). This study included the use of different methods of information collection, including individual interviews, artifact collection, and observations, which provided a background to help explain attitudes and behaviors of the participants. The honesty of participants is necessary for credibility (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, each participant was given the opportunity to refuse participation in an effort to promote a genuine willingness to participate and offer data freely. Frankness was encouraged at the beginning of

each interview with an aim to establish a positive rapport. Additionally, participants were told that there were no right answers. The right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation was made clear.

The previous provisions were preventative in nature. In addition to these, the researcher sought to understand inconsistencies, as part of the complexity of human nature. This included iterative questioning, probing to elicit detailed data which was then used to return to matters previously raised and rephrased, and comparing to other participants. No discrepancies were discovered by individual participants, but uniqueness between participants was used to explore the breadth of possible answers to the research question.

The background, qualifications and experience of the researcher are important in qualitative research as the researcher serves as a major instrument of data collection and analysis. As Maykut, Maykut, and Morehouse (1994) recommend including any personal and professional information relevant to the study, the section regarding the “researcher as an instrument” served to address these recommendations. Additionally, Patton (1990) advised that the researcher should disclose any methods of funding. For this study, a grant of \$500.00 was awarded by Bellarmine University to aid with travel, research development, and presentation materials.

During the analysis of the study, peer scrutiny was used to confirm applicability of the theory from multiple perspectives. Several critical friends helped to review data for themes and trends, and checking of logical thought. They helped by asking why some categories formed the way they did, challenging and confirming the researcher’s thought process concerning themes, overlap, and relationships. Having other parties review this logic and confirm results supports the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

Dependability

Dependability is the ability to replicate the work in the same context and the same methods, thereby producing the same results. This is difficult to achieve in qualitative research as the phenomena studied often change and researcher's observations are often tied to a specific and unreplicable situation. In practice, there is overlap and influence between credibility and dependability, as exercising credibility provisions ensures dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

There are steps to address dependability more directly, including the detail of study processes. In doing so, this study created a structured methodological process that could be used in further research design and allows for readers to understand the methodology fully, as recommended by Shenton (2004). The researcher made every effort to produce a clear research design and implementation process, detailed operations of data gathering, and a reflective appraisal which evaluates the effectiveness of the process for inquiry.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the researcher's concern of objectivity, ensuring that the findings of the work are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, not the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). In order to achieve this, the researcher made a commitment to disclose personal biases. Given that the research was designed by humans, researcher bias is inevitable (Patton, 1990). As demonstrated throughout this section, it was vital that the researcher share beliefs underpinning the decisions made and methods adopted, the reasons for taking one approach over another, and admittance of weaknesses in the techniques that were employed. The final point is discussed more in detail in chapter five. The researcher also

discussed preliminary theories that do not emerge out of the data, as demonstrated in chapter two and five. This is possible through reflective commentary in field notes and memoing.

In further support of confirmability, an audit trail in the form of charts and a process description is available in Appendix F. This audit includes the specific data that was collected, the dates or events at which it was collected, procedural steps, and data management. A second procedure shows the analysis operations of initial, focused, and theoretical coding; conclusions drawn; and research comments. This path of audit allows for readers and replicating researchers to understand the data analysis paths and constructs that emerged.

Transferability

As the findings of qualitative work are often specific to a small number of participants in a particular environment, it is not possible to demonstrate that findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004). However, it is acceptable that if a practitioner believes their situation to be similar to that described in the research to relate the findings to their positions (Bassey, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve this, it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide enough contextual information to make a transfer of findings possible. It is not the responsibility of the researcher to make transferability inferences (Shenton, 2004). It is important to have thick description of the study in order to provide a proper understanding of it and the findings. To promote this contextual information, the researcher provided a thick description of the institutional context, sampling methods, participant profiles, data collection methods, time span of interview, and length of study.

Additional studies should be conducted to support further understanding of this phenomenon. Studies in isolation may offer different results not consistent with each other. While

this does not imply preferable trustworthiness, it reflects multiple realities and an opportunity to further develop a comprehensive theory (Shenton, 2004).

Limitations

The limitations and shortcomings of this study and methods are rightfully admitted in an effort to further support confirmability. It is possible that the self-awareness of the participants influenced the results given the self-reporting nature of the ASQ. During the development of the questionnaire, less discrimination was found among internality, stability, and globality for good events as compared to bad events as it is likely that people tend to spend more time thinking about bad events than good (Langer, 1978; Peterson et al., 1982). Lack of self-awareness could be a contributing factor to less focus on bad events, possibility approaching one's perspective choosing to or not realizing they are ignoring negative factors.

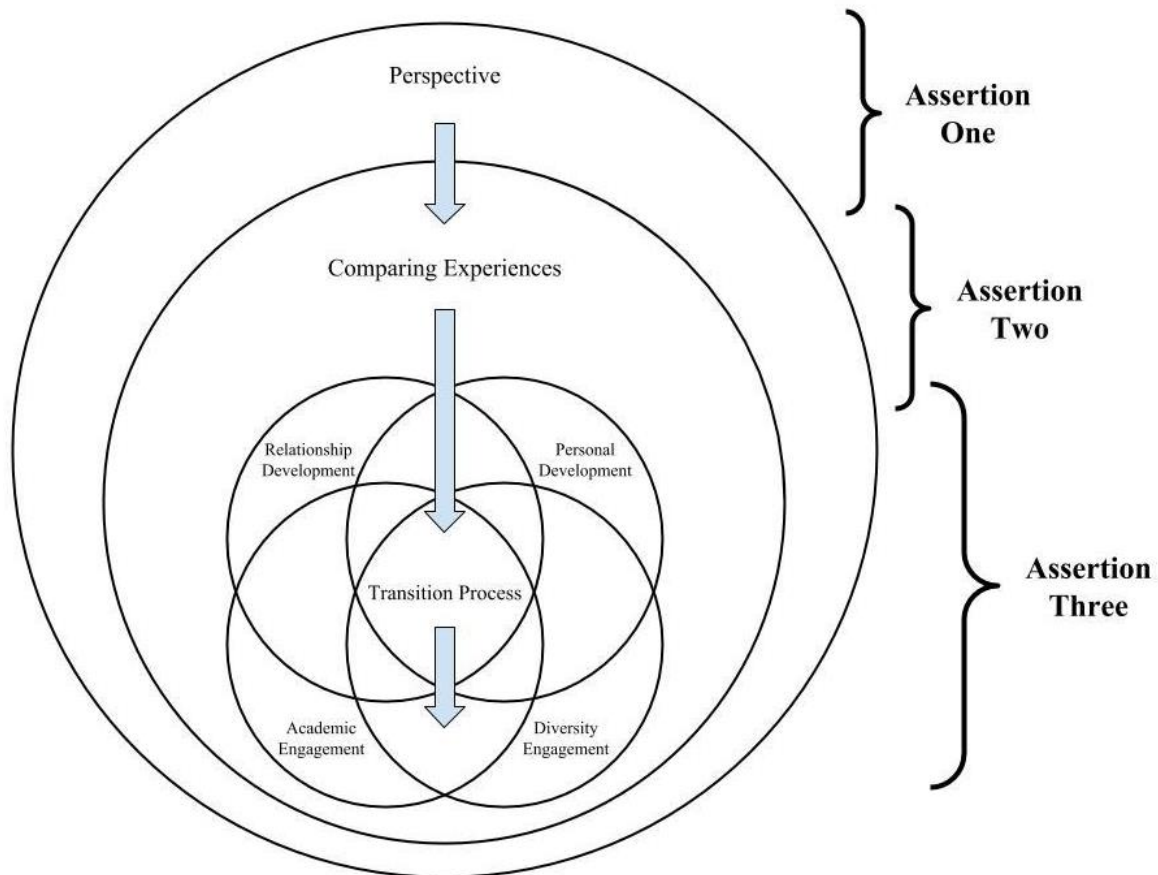
Anticipated and confirmed limitations included a limited sample size, lack of prior research studies on this particular topic in a qualitative fashion, and self-reported data. Data retrieved from an individual must be taken at face value despite the potential for bias, including selective memory, telescoping, attribution, and exaggeration. To deal with bias, when concerns arose for bias, questions were asked of participants in multiple ways to elicit unbiased answers. This was done tactfully, but directly. Additionally, the same or similar questions were asked of participants multiple times during the study. This resulted in a consideration for changes over time, but also allowed for confirmation of feelings, thoughts, and triangulation of experiences and information. The actual limitations are discussed in chapter five with more rigor and include a lack of diversified sample, the aforementioned bias, time constraints, and poor observational data quality.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter reviews the findings of this study that answer the research question: How do full time, first year, traditionally aged college students with a pessimistic explanatory style at a small, private, liberal arts institution in the East Central region of the United States experience transition to college? Three assertions compose the resulting theory that answers the research question: (a) students with a pessimistic explanatory style filter their transition experiences through a keen awareness of a dynamic reality, (b) students with a pessimistic explanatory style employ a comparative lens to prepare for and make sense of their transition to college, and (c) students with a pessimistic explanatory style experience their transition through a two-phase process that begins with a focus on relationships and personal development then shifts towards academic and diversity engagement. A fourth unanticipated assertion was found identifying that the students with a pessimistic explanatory style showed a positive change in attributional style by the conclusion of the study.

In response to the research question, the first assertion identified the perspectives of participants that influence and shape their experience of transition. The second assertion explores how students make meaning of their experiences through comparison. The third assertion identifies the types of development and engagement students experienced during their transition into college and that those aspects fluctuated mid-study. These assertions answer the research question by addressing what the transition experiences were, when they were experienced, and how they were experienced. To see how these assertions relate to each other and the research question, Figure 3 provides a picture of the theory of transition experiences among students with a pessimistic explanatory style.

Figure 3.

Diagram of Transition Experience

The participants' perspectives are represented by the outer circle as this is foundational to them as individuals and was present throughout the study. The mid-layer circle represents the time and act of comparing one's beliefs and experiences to the past and to others. This act of comparison was also a constant through the study. This surrounds the set of four intersecting circles central to the figure which represent the two-phase process of transition. These aspects of development and engagement constitute most expressly the "what" of the transition experience. As the arrows pointing down represent time, the first two intersecting circles represent the first phase of relationship and personal development. The next two circles below represent the second phase

comprised of academic and diversity engagement. Recognizing the fluidity by which participants experience these things, Figure 3 is meant to present a whole picture of the transition experience. The following sections include specific examples from the research that support each assertion, further unpacking of the assertion, and a chapter summary.

Assertion: Students with a pessimistic explanatory style filter their transition experiences through a keen awareness of a dynamic reality.

In an effort to understand the participants' perspective, they were asked to share their understanding of their outlook on life and how this influenced their transition to college. This study showed that participants are likely to describe their outlook in a manner that is both optimistic and pessimistic, despite the outcome of the Attributional Style Questionnaire. They went further into personal analysis of their perspectives to identify that they are aware of a dynamic reality, that grounds their approach to life. This outlook created lenses through which participants seemed to filter their experiences through the transition as exemplified later. Table 6 displays examples of interviews from all participants that support this assertion.

Table 6.

Awareness of Dynamic Reality

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	I'd say [my perspective is] a mixture, because like, I guess you could say that I've seen negative parts the world. So I think, I don't know... It's hard to be completely positive on life. Like that's, I don't really think that's a real thing. I've had a lot to do with suicide. Alcoholism, just like stupid stuff that ruins lives. And I guess people's outlook, so, not saying that I always had this positive outlook on life, like I always knew that there were dark parts but I hadn't necessarily seen them until things happened. But I just don't think classifying the outlook of life as one giant positive thing is not realistic. So I guess a mixture. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)
Daniel	I think that, not to sound, this sounds sad. I think I've kind of double edged outlook on life. I can, tend to be someone, I can somewhat be very negative. And

sometimes I always kind of, sometimes I get caught up in that too much. And I that kind of persists. Usually if it's in a new situation or something I'm afraid of making mistakes. So I always have, kind of, maybe a constant worry about things. But, I guess at the same time, I always kind of always look at it; I'm Catholic so I always kind of look at it from a more eternal perspective. (Daniel, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)

Jacob I would say that I try to stay positive most of the time. I can come across negative sometimes. So when someone is like "oh I believe it's going to happen". But I can stay positive and look, like there's this one kid on the team one, of the freshman's who's super negative. We kind of like have different personalities I feel like which makes me feel like I'm more positive. Sometimes I think I'm negative. So I guess a mixture. (Jacob, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)

John I mean, right now with like everything that's going on, I'm pessimistic. I mean I'm seeing like all the international affairs, all the domestic affairs, you see that and I just don't think there's very much positive going on right now. I just feel like I'd rather be pessimistic and be surprised when it's good than optimistic to be surprised when it's bad. I'd rather not put my hopes up too high, and just be disappointed when like all this world is is just disappointment right now. So it's kind of setting the bar low. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Nicole I think it [my outlook] is a mixture. I personally like to think of myself as a realist. [A] disagrees with me. I don't know why. I told him that last night and he laughed at me. Why don't you understand... Yeah. More or less just go. I more or less just try to go with the flow of everything. But some more serious things, like North Korea, like that pushes down on me. I think about that more like negative light than anything. So stuff like that but for the most part and just try and go with, like roll with the punches makes sense. (Nicole, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Thomas (laughing) The only way I can say it is probably through a color and that's gray. And because I really kind of dislike a very black and white outlook on life. And I mean by a very objective way of looking at life and I'd say, like, my outlook is very gray because I don't necessarily know all that I believe yet. I'm majoring in religion and international affairs, but for that religion part I'm still trying to figure out a lot of stuff. And so for me things are very mixed. Things are very subjective for me right now. So that's why the world's gray. There seem to be more questions and answers... that's the way I look at the world. (Thomas, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)

The outlooks of the participants are influenced by a variety of contexts. Anne spoke of difficult situations, like “Alcoholism, just like stupid stuff that ruins lives.” Daniel shared that his affiliation with religion, specifically the Catholic faith, has an impact on his view of the world: “I’m Catholic so I always kind of look at it from a more eternal perspective.” Jacob compared his outlook on life to one of his teammates, stating: “We kind of like have different personalities I feel like which makes me feel like I’m more positive.”

In an additional example captured through artifact elicitation directed at understanding the college transition, Daniel shared his awareness through creative expression. In a poem he wrote for class, he said:

A squirrel was padding its way silent along the street and I thought about the quiet of winter -
how the snow mutes and leaves the world beating beneath an icy chrysalis - and how quickly
change comes, how an elephant will see the passing of many civilizations and never forget
the ghostly humming of people once in motion. (Daniel, personal communication, Final
Interview, October 31, 2017)

When asked to describe the poem and how it came to be, Daniel shared how he wove together different aspects of his experience, including the death of his dog, his knowledge of elephants and making a mask of one for a class assignment, and the current weather. He explains his work this way: “So this is a kind of amalgamation of things that kind of came up and then I was like okay, I can put these all together.” (Daniel, personal communication, Final Interview, October 31, 2017) His example gives a picture of how the influence of his family pet, the class assignment of making a mask in his art class, and how the discussions in another class contributed to his understanding of perception, to his keen awareness of his own dynamic reality.

Several of the participants were influenced by the nature of the current world and global context. A trend of awareness of a climate greater than the participants' selves was identified. John spoke of "the international affairs, all the domestic affairs, you see that and I just don't think there's very much positive going on right now." Similarly, Nicole referenced the serious situation in North Korea and the negative impact that has on her perspective, and Thomas discussed how he was majoring in religion and international affairs, and perhaps how that was related to his outlook of "gray." To provide further contextual awareness, at the time of this study a turbulent shift in American politics was underway, highlighted by the new governance of President Donald Trump, increasing hostile conflicts with North Korea, the ignition of the #MeToo movement, removal of confederate statues from locations near the site of study, the mass shooting at a concert in Las Vegas, and local conflicts regarding DACA and the Dreamers Act. There was a feeling among some participants that they ought to pay attention to the world surrounding them, and that the politics and wars of the world were going to have an impact on their future. John expanded upon his discussion earlier and shared that he does not view the world in a positive light.

I feel like, 'cause with the presidential election, I just didn't agree with any of it, like either side. And I just don't see America going towards a great direction, and especially with all the international affairs. Some of it was going to happen and some of it is because of us and I just don't see the world as a good place right now. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Nicole shared this sentiment, and talked about how the situations in the world, and her attention to those situations are impacting her outlook directly.

It's, [my outlook] depends on if I actually read the news or if I avoid it, because if I just stay in this little world that you have created for us, everybody has created, then I don't, it's

like it's stressful, but it seems like I still have like a straight path. The news scares the crap out of me. Makes me feel like everything that I have planned to do or that I want to do is just going to blow up literally....I think that just more recently with talk of war and stuff. 'Cause I never really thought about that stuff, and never really thought about people's lives when the country was in war and it didn't really change when everybody was in Afghanistan and stuff because that was over there not here. And so it, I just haven't experienced that sort of stuff and almost none of us have. So it's kind of, like I don't. Yeah. It's like, the fear of not knowing how my life is going to be in that situation. (Nicole, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Each participant articulated an awareness of the global impact of the world at some point. As has been seen, John, Nicole, and Thomas were the primary articulators of this awareness in the beginning of the study in regards to perspective, though Anne, Daniel, and Jacob did bring up concepts of global context when discussing politics and diversity as discussed in a later assertion. Across all participants, global context was identified in 63 instances (phrases or lines) at the beginning of the study, 30 instances mid-study, and 19 instances in the final interview.

This assertion shows that students are very sensitive to the world around them. They are aware of the increasingly unstable personal contexts and the global political climate, and are potentially changing how they act and what they expect because of it. They did not identify this in ways that show they are overly emotional, but rather there is a heightened awareness that the world's direction will impact their decisions, options, and abilities in the future. This translates to a perspective that appears to be sensible or realistic, as the participants used words like "mixture" (Anne, Nicole), "double edged" (Daniel), and "gray" (Thomas). They do not want to be scared or surprised, so are trying to stay level headed, taking in the realities of the world while navigating their

own experience. They appeared to approach the transition and the experiences of it with questions and concern for themselves and for others.

Assertion: Students with a pessimistic explanatory style employ a comparative lens to prepare for and make sense of their transition to college.

Participants used comparison to make sense of their experiences and expectations. This readily occurred throughout the study, though most prominently captured through data collection at the beginning and middle of the study. Participants would talk about their academic experiences in college and how the demands and expectations of them in the classroom were more or less rigorous as compared to high school. Participants also compared themselves and their experience transitioning into college to their peers at other institutions and to their siblings' or family's successes and failures. They also shared how their expectations of what college life was going to be like had changed or were clarified once having experienced the transition to college. Table 7 shows examples of these comparative experiences, offering a variety of examples of what was being compared and to whom or what.

Table 7.

Comparing Experiences

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	I don't know, I really didn't know what to expect of college, about college, I mean it's like it still hasn't hit me that I'm in college yet. I don't think, I came in knowing that are going to be times when I don't know what's going on and it'll be ok in the end because I'm here to have new experiences and that's what everyone tell you, it's going to be the best time of your life. And I mean, now that I'm here, I can see that's going to happen. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)
	Like idea of, what I mean I like, I had an idea 'cause my brother went for a good two semesters. I mean, I kind of wanted to come in here without knowing like what it was going to be like because then I couldn't compare it to anything. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)

I don't know, I mean homework's been hard but it's like nothing I can handle. So I went to like a magnet high school and like it is hard. So I feel like I'm in a good place now....Like if you didn't work hard you got called out for it. (Anne, personal communication, Final Interview, October 24, 2017)

Daniel And I've, I've really enjoyed looking at my brother to see how he's living life. Sometimes people are like "oh you graduate from [ECU], you got to major in international affairs. Why aren't you working in a law office. Why don't you do, or why aren't you in graduate school." He's just like you know I feel like, I just feel like, and he worked for a lawyer and he said he just did not enjoy it at all. [He] said "I did not like the experience of working for him". And he said "I wanted to make donuts, he's like I'm making donuts now." I can see how happy he is because he's literally just, he goes, does this job that most people would be like, well that's not a job from someone who just graduated college, but he does this job and he's like "I come home and I talk with people". He was like five other guys he's like and then I just write. (Daniel, personal communication, Final Interview, October 31, 2017)

Jacob I feel like only about two classes in high school helped me in college whatsoever, like AP language and AP literature. The others didn't really help me at all, and AP stats. Those are the only three classes I feel like have had any weight so far. Because AP literature all we did was go over like a greek mythology and like things to allude to in papers which has helped a lot and then AP language is like structure of paper stuff and then stats helped me. I had a question on my test today like I would had no idea without that stats class what it was like. What is a T-test? What is a p-value? and what is a normal distribution and how are they all relate together? I was like, we didn't learn that in here. That's not something I'm supposed to know. (Jacob, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

I'm glad I don't have to... I have a lot of friends that went to [state school], like me and my high school friends like us. Me and [my roommate] went to here obviously. And then like six of them went to [state school] and went to [private school] and one went to go play volleyball at like [out of state school] or something. I'm like the only people that don't like hate college are me and my roommate. And [R] because he went to [private school]. (Jacob, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

John I only had two classes today. I was done at like 11:30, so I've been catching up on homework whereas like in high school I would have all day that all that homework on the one night with like a job and marching band. And so like, now I have a lot more time to do stuff. And a lot more time to do other things like marching band. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

I've taken the ACT multiple times. I kept getting 29s and then I took it like, it was after like a big competition, so I wasn't really expecting to do well, but I got to 32 which is like higher than my entire family. So I felt really good. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Nicole For the most part, that particular situation, I think it was because of other events like there was a part of it that was definitely me... not being able to handle the stress of finding it I guess... Because I'm sure that other people who aren't as inclined to break down at the littlest things can actually do something. (Nicole, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 28, 2017)

Thomas A lot of, a lot of different stuff actually. I've written about insults, because I hear, there seems to be, something that really does bother me though with [the residence hall] itself, and I know everybody will grow out of it eventually but they're still like, a lot of people there, they're still, some people are still in high school. They'll grow out of it. I just go study when I get around that. But so, I wrote a whole poem about insults. The nature of them. (Thomas, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

Throughout this study, there was a pervasive and strong tendency to compare experiences and expectations with others and their beliefs, experiences, and expectations. The participants were reliant on others' experiences to guide their own; to tell them if theirs is right or wrong. Anne and Daniel both talked about their brothers, who had unique college experiences, and to whom they compared their expectations, goals, and plans. John echoed a similar sentiment of comparison with family when talking about his own: "...but I got to 32 which is like higher than my entire family. So I felt really good." Jacob compared his experiences to his friends at other schools, recognizing that "the only people that don't like hate college are me and my roommate." Thomas even compared some of his experience to the maturity of his hall mates. He noted that "some people are still in high school. They'll grow out of it." Nicole also compared her own tendencies of stress to the abilities of others as she said "...I'm sure that other people who aren't as inclined to break down at the littlest things can actually do something." Academic comparison was found, exemplified as Jacob recognized the impact of his high school studies: "...only about two classes in high school helped me

in college whatsoever.” John acknowledged the structure of time comparing highschool and college as he said “I’ve been catching up on homework whereas like in high school I would have all day that all that homework on the one night with like a job and marching band.” It appeared that the participants often tried to understand and embrace the transition of college by comparing it and questioning it, making sense of their world. There was a dependency that existed, especially at the beginning of the transition in which students held a hesitancy and used comparison to trust and believe the experience of transition and what it meant for them as individuals. This exists throughout the study, but most drastically at the beginning, during the prime of physical moving and routine changes.

Assertion: Students with a pessimistic explanatory style experience their transition through a two-phase process that begins with a focus on relationships and personal development then shifts towards academic and diversity engagement.

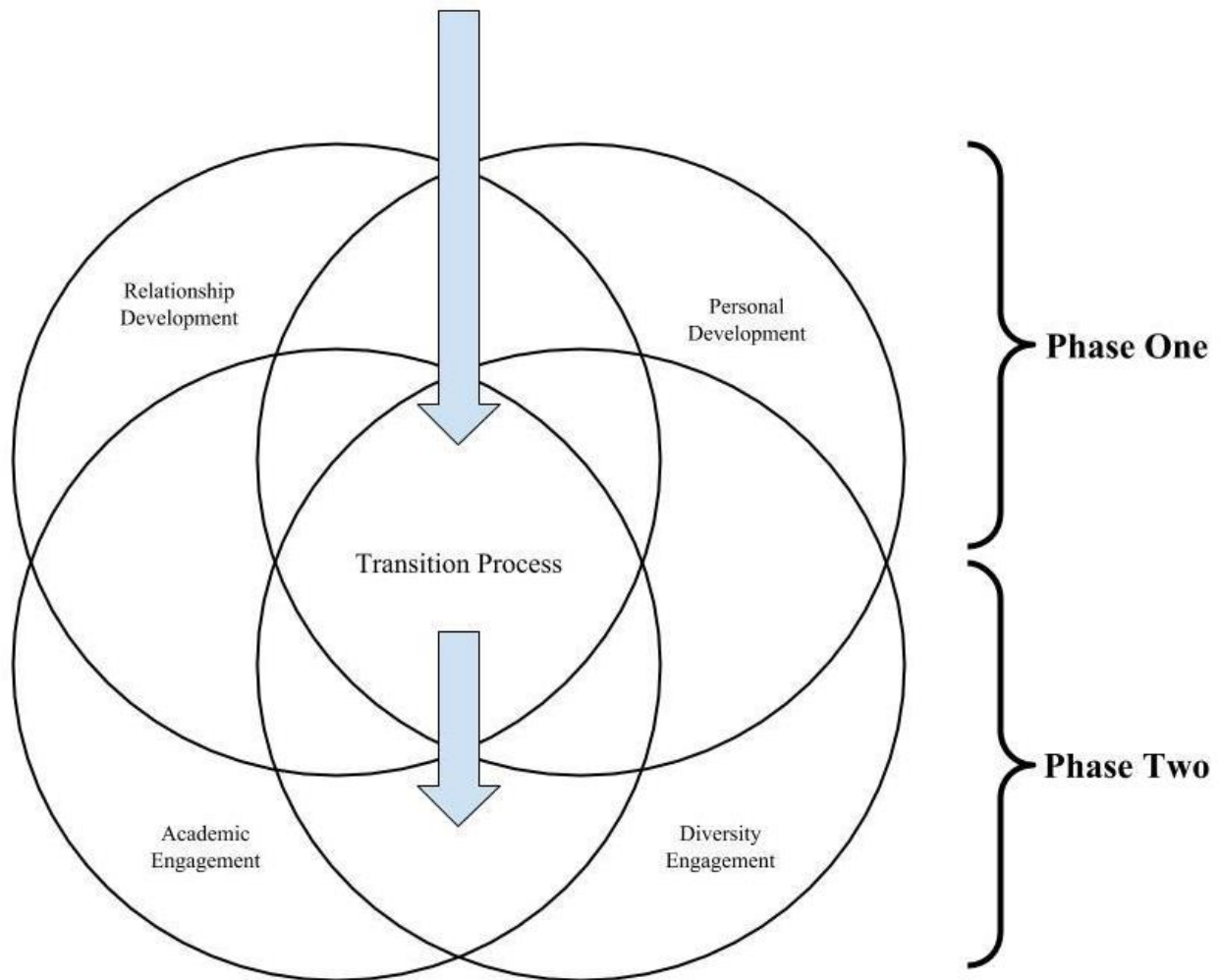
This study revealed that full time, first year college students with a pessimistic explanatory style experience the transition to college through relationship development, personal development, academic engagement, and diversity engagement. At the beginning of the transition into college, students with a pessimistic explanatory style engaged primarily through relationships and personal development. This was identified as the first phase of the transition process, which lasted for the first five weeks of the semester, beginning with move-in and orientation. During this phase, participants demonstrated that their transition called for past relationships with family and friends to remain strong and new relationships to be formed, while participants started to understand their needs and new role in college. New relationships that formed assisted participants in feeling confident about their new decisions and future successes. Participants’ dependency on relationships with others was

high, often mentioned as an important piece of their experience. Simultaneously, they started to express personal desires for their independence and authenticity.

In weeks five and six of the study, a dramatic shift occurred and the participants expressed more awareness of and articulated their academic and diversity engagement. This constitutes the beginning of the second phase of the transition process, which lasted through the final interviews in week ten. During this phase, participants articulated and demonstrated clear opinions about their courses and classwork, recognizing their strengths and limitations regarding study. Further, participants readily articulated an engagement with diversity, specifically their understanding of and role in perpetuating negative aspects of a diverse and complicated society. While engaging in concepts and conversations around diversity was challenging, the participants articulated a desire for dialogue and conversation around topics of race, class, religion, and politics.

At no point in the study did any of the means of relationship and personal development or academic and diversity engagement disappear. They were always present, though changing in intensity. These phases and concepts overlapped throughout participants' examples and experiences, with aspects of development or engagement happening at the same time and affecting each other. Figure 4 provides a closer view of this two-phase process of transition with clarification to the right of the diagram as to what constitutes phase one and phase two. The arrows pointing down continue to represent time. The four pieces of the two-phase transition process are reviewed further.

Figure 4.

Diagram of Transition Phases

Phase One

Relationship Development

Strong and positive relationships were immediately identified by the participants, and were developed with various types of individuals, including friends, mentors, and family members. Friendships proved to be the most prominent form of relationship engagement among all participants. This was vital to their new experience in college, even referred to as the most important part of the

initial onset of transition. In Table 8, examples are identified for each participant that demonstrate the powerful development of friendships.

Table 8.

Relationship Development of Friendships

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	Definitely friends that I've made, and my [orientation leader] has been hopeful. I really haven't been in situations where I really need resources that much. I'm sure I will, but right now friends and people that I've talked to who know they're doing these. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)
Daniel	[The fraternity] really forced me to like get my work done quickly and get it done efficiently so that way I can like do things with them. That's I think that's what that's really taught me is that, how to not dwell on my work as much. And just like put it out there, know that I've done a good job and not worry about it and just move on to the next thing that way I can have time to, time with friends but also with just extra curricular stuff I've been doing. (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
Jacob	Probably just be on the lacrosse team because I, it's pretty much all my friends, there's 14 of us that are freshmen on the lacrosse team, and that's who I hang out with every day; the majority of my friends are like on the lacrosse team. I mean, whoever your friend group is going to affect your life in a lot of ways. Like, [the fraternity] there's a lot of them on the lacrosse team, and that's kind of the reason I'm in [the fraternity]. (Jacob, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
John	[A success] is meeting a lot of people on my floor. I've gotten to know like most of my entire hall. ... Yeah, my mom's like "How many people did you meet? Do you have any new friends?" I said, a few. And that ranks pretty low on my priority list. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)
Nicole	I think it's just here, in general, I mean making friends was a lot easier because everybody is so nice. I told my orientation class that I've never had so many people hold doors open for me, in my life. And I think I was scared of that at first, but I guess that with everyone that moves away to college. (Nicole, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)
	I guess ever since I did find people that I actually like love me for actually being the very insane and weird person I am, I don't really care that much

about people they don't like that aspect of me. And so I've just like, I don't really care about what you think because I know that people like the way I am so, I will cover myself in Harry Potter memorabilia and walk around campus. (Nicole, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Thomas I've made really good relationships, particularly some of the upperclassmen... we now have tea time every week. (Thomas, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, October 10, 2017)

In many of the instances referenced, friendships were formed through a shared interest. Some experiences were university formed engagements, such as a sports team or marching band. John shared how he joined the marching band, and expressed his joy with having instantly made forty new friends:

So I guess being forced, not really forced like inserted into like the marching band, that was good for me because I didn't have to like do it on my own. I probably wouldn't have been able to make forty something new friends easily....Yeah we have a football schedule. I'm going to all of the home games. I really like the community there. So there's like forty-one trumpets. Yeah. So I made forty new friends and they're really great people. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

When watching a football game for which John was playing in the marching band, the researcher saw him attentive to the game, but laughing and talking with the other trumpeters in his section. For being so quiet and content within himself, seeing him engage with others left a strong impression of the strength of his new relationships through his engagement with the band.

Several other participants had similar experiences with formal organizations, including Jacob in sharing his story of playing on the lacrosse team and how he spends significant time with the freshmen members of the team. The majority of the participants expressed that they were also interested in things that were not university formed organizations, but student formed clubs

surrounding topics of poetry (Daniel, Thomas), music (John), classics (Nicole), Harry Potter (Nicole), and intramural sports (Anne).

Participants also developed relationships with mentors: individuals who were supportive, offered guidance, and were held in positive regard during the transition. These mentors existed in many forms, including professors, coaches, and even the researcher. Table 9 illustrates examples of these mentor relationships.

Table 9.

Relationship Development of Mentors

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	It was more fun than I thought it would be....It was like, I didn't think it was going to be fun but actually it was. I know the classes are really neat, like the way that they kind of set you up and prepare you for your normal courses, and my class was like everyone talked, everyone was really respectful. And my professor is really cool so, you know....And we went on a lot of, like we'd go on like, to see the community. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)
Daniel	Professor [B] is honestly, possibly of the most relaxed, also helpful professors I've ever had; he's great. He's how, he always answers all my questions and stuff. He's awesome, he always takes time out. He answers in English if I can't get it out in German, which is usually most of the time. (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
Jacob	Yeah the classes are not that bad. I have a couple teachers that are kinda of hard asses. [F] is actually really helpful, I've met with him twice. I met with him this morning. Because we're writing a big paper, and it's like 20% of our grade. So like I've met with him twice over it already and he just basically tore it apart twice. So we'll see how that goes. And then [B]'s just like, I don't know he's just not like any teacher I've ever had. He just basically just talks the whole time and you're like I don't know what you just said and then he's onto something completely different like 50 years later and you're saying gosh what did I just miss. (Jacob, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

And just the coaches on the lacrosse team have helped us out too. Yeah, it's part of the reason that I'm here. Well they were my summer team coaches actually. I played travel ball with them. They help me in a lot of ways. The

biggest thing about them, which was really helpful, was whenever, like he would get me seen by other coaches even though he was trying to get me to come here. He would get me seen by other coaches. And he was giving me options which is part of the reason like...But he wanted me to have options which spoke about his character which is one of the reasons that I came here. (Jacob, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)

John The computer science professor asked all of the students in the class to convert 10.875 to binary. John began to write down his response. He reflected on the problem, looking at the piece of paper. He erased an answer and re-wrote. The professor broke the silence by telling a story about his cats and dogs. John stopped writing and looked up. He laughed at the professor's story. The professor asked John to share his answers. He did, quietly, and the professor praised him for his work. (John, Class Observation, October 9, 2017)

Nicole Interviewer: Ok, these are not like the most comfortable tissues.
Nicole: It's fine.
Interviewer: But they are a paper product by which, it will soak up things.
Nicole: This is not a tissue.
Interviewer: Ok, ya know what... don't judge me. At least I was able to offer you something!
Nicole: (Laughter) It's a paper towel!
Interviewer: Do you want a paper towel? (Sarcastically)
Nicole: Sure!
Interviewer: Ok, apparently, I need to buy tissues.
Nicole: Just don't advertise them as tissues! (Laughing)
Interviewer: Ok, fine. Do you want me to take them back and offer you some paper towels? I can offer you the sleeve of my sweater! What happened with the calc test?
Nicole: And like I literally just took it and I gave up. So I just needed to decompress for a minute, and I knew we had this meeting, but I also knew that I could come in here and talk about the test. Can you help me figure out what to do next? I mean, I've never been bad at math. I'm so disappointed in myself.
Interviewer: Absolutely. And don't be disappointed. Was this the first test? Because if it is, there is plenty of time to talk to your professor and figure out next steps. (Nicole, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 28, 2017)

Thomas And then of course I wrote down Professor [B]'s stories because she's amazing. She cracks me up. I want her to be my adviser. It's like a harsh, no not a harsh love not it's harsh, it's examined, and it's critical. Oh yeah that's a good word. Yeah. (Thomas, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

As participants began to engage further into the classroom setting midway through the study, they started to identify professors they liked and with whom they had positive interactions, and those who were difficult academically and relationally. Many of the participants expressed positive regard for their professors. Thomas shared his warm regard for Professor B mid-study. Anne also spoke of how her expectations of class and the positive regard for her professor changed during orientation. Daniel discussed the patience of his German professor. Even negative feelings regarding professors are an important example of relationship engagement. Jacob shared such strong opinions of professors, but also recognized their helpfulness. Despite the possibly poor connections with professors, Jacob articulated strong relationships and respect for his lacrosse coaches. He shared how he values their support and recognizes their strong character.

The participants also developed a relationship with the researcher. At an ice cream social during orientation and immediately following his initial interview, Thomas approached the researcher to talk casually about when registration would occur. At a university wide event in which Daniel was hosting a table, he was quick to make light hearted conversation with the researcher. In the cafeteria during lunch time, Jacob said hello to the researcher, upon which she asked about lacrosse practice, and he divulged tales of long practices. The researcher ran into Anne at a health fair, where she shared that she had concerns about a classmate and asked for advice. Even the two quietest participants, John and Nicole, would say hello to the researcher in passing.

The start of Nicole's mid-study interview began with a rush of tears and frustration. Nicole had just completed a difficult test in calculus, surprised that she had just done so poorly. This openness of her emotions was an indicator to the researcher that the relationship in the study had significantly changed. Her responses indicated she had acquired a positive belief in the genuine support and care of the researcher. She felt able to indicate a greater degree of trust in dealing

with her difficult situation, especially when she asked for advice on what to do and disclosed that she was disappointed in herself. This was further exemplified by the offering of tissues from the researcher, which were in fact paper towels, leaving Nicole to laugh about the exchange.

Towards the end of the interviews, another moment occurred in which it was apparent that the relationship dynamic had shifted. In the mid-study interview with Thomas, the researcher was asked for advice on academic paths to follow, such as study abroad and minors. This was a fruitful conversation, and possibly inspired Thomas to feel comfortable in the relationship established. In the final interview, early on, he shifted the focus of the conversation to consider how the researcher was doing. In the discussion of chapter five, further considerations are made for the influence of this study and the relationship between participants and the researcher.

Families were a significant source of relationships for the participants, especially at the beginning of the transition, yet held a flexible role as the study continued. As each participant is unique, so are their family dynamics and relationships. Toward the beginning of the study, language about family communicated feelings of missing them, their influence on views, and even the expectation of separating from them. Further into the study, participants referenced relationships with parents less and siblings more. Table 10 provides examples of these dynamics with family members.

Table 10.

Relationship Development of Family

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	My dad, all he tells me is the most important thing to do is just show up to class and do your best. Because my brother dropped out at [state school]. So he's like even if you're dropping out you can't come to the house. So like, my motivation is just like to keep going because I can't, not to be calling out my brother, but I can't end up like that. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)

Daniel It's been a little rough. I only live about ten minutes from town, which is kind of ten minutes out from here. So which is kind of funny, but like I spend a lot of time with my parents after my brother left, so that's been a little rough not being with them so often. I'm very much a creature of habit, so like being in a new environment was kind of off putting. I mean doing the same thing for pretty much my whole life. So that was a little different for me. (Daniel, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)

Because my brother was a [fraternity brother in the same organization] and they had, all the seniors and juniors knew my brother and I felt like they were possibly just recruiting me because I was a legacy. I brought that up to [him], and [he] was like no we want you here because you are a unique person that's going to bring, like your talents and gifts to the table and to make this place better. And that was very important for me that, they, to know that they wanted me because of me and that they would they genuinely wanted me there... (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

Jacob And when I was coming to college, it was what I thought it was going to be. I mean yeah it was pretty well, with my sisters in college. I don't know. She goes to [university]. She told me what it was going to be like. And I live in [location], so that's really close, and I didn't have to really think about leaving my parents. And my brother is at [university], which I know is our competition, but like, I don't care. So, I know they're all there. I'm just ready. (Jacob, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)

John My family's never been really political but recently it has been, like the two sides my family are like... one's very like conservative Republican, the other one's not as radical left, but it's just seem like them shifting and going towards that. It's been really weird. My immediate family is OK but it's like my aunts, uncles, great aunts. (John, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Nicole My family is like highly religious like, like my mother and her family is very Catholic and I just, like my father is actually extremely Baptist and they want me to go to church and I just don't. But I think I'm also affected by my mother or again because she just, she's very open to the idea of different religions. Like she even told me, she makes this joke a lot. She's like go experience every single one you want, and then decide that Catholic, Catholicism is the right one. (Nicole, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

Thomas Also, I'll be honest, just and this is, this is probably not from any of the other students here, but like as a student of a faculty here and someone who's in the administration as well, because he's both, that has been a challenge to overcome kind of getting past, well I'm [Thomas] not just the [last name]. So

that has been kind of interesting too. So, I'm sure I'll discover that even more as the years go on. (Thomas, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)

Despite his local proximity, Daniel shared how he was struggling to get into a different routine without his family. Jacob's home was also near the university, yet expressed that he "didn't have to really think about leaving my parents." Thomas was also from the town in which the university is located, yet had a different experience of trying to gain separation in terms of identity regarding his father who was a faculty member and administration at the institution. Thomas shared how he found being at the same institution as a parent "a challenge to overcome." Parents were a prominent point of conversation among the participants, yet they hold differing types of relationships with them. Two students who were not from the immediate area spoke about their families and reflected on the characteristics of them. Nicole shared such an example during her final interview, sharing the religious influence of her mother: "I think I'm also affected by my mother or again because she just, she's very open to the idea of different religions". John reflected on the "shifting" occurring in his family in regards to political opinions. He found the changes among his family weird. These dynamics discussed by Nicole and John show the impact of family as well as the relationships.

Additionally, relationships with siblings was discussed by several of the participants. Anne shared how she was compared to her brother who dropped out of college: "not to be calling out my brother, but I can't end up like that." Daniel also was concerned about his relationship with his brother who was an alum of the same school and was even in the same fraternity. Daniel said, "And that was very important for me that, they, to know that they wanted me because of me and that they would they genuinely wanted me there." He wanted to make sure that he was being

valued for himself, and not because he was a legacy student. Finally, Jacob also talked about how his brother and sister attend universities near by. Jacob talked about his sister: “She told me what it was going to be like.” This relationship helped him formulate what the college experience was going to be like.

Personal Development

Through engagement with themselves personally, participants initially expressed a desire for a new independence and saw college as an opportunity for authenticity. This served as a consistent theme among participants. As time progressed, participants articulated that they were enjoying their independence. Authenticity was something to aspire to at the beginning of the study, and then became something that was held or was being nurtured toward the end of the study. Table 11 contains examples from each participant of their feelings and opinions about their development of independence and authenticity. These examples are displayed next to each other to help demonstrate the interconnectedness of concepts; how the participants sought freedom and independence, and how feeling authentic was often related to such freedoms of independence.

Table 11.

Personal Development through Independence and Authenticity

Participant Name	Independence Examples	Authenticity Examples
Anne	I mean, I've done more without my parents than it ever done so that's a success.... Well let's see, I had to get my own books. Yeah, that was interesting, still doing it. I don't know, like them not knowing every aspect of what's going on right now, it's like scary but it's also, you know, getting me ready for like what I'm going to be in four years. My mom doesn't really know what the classes are about or who my teacher is, like	I surround myself with good people who like I, like I feel like I can trust and be myself with them. I feel like, a lot of people like, you kind of like test the ground first and then once you get to know someone you can really be yourself. I feel like I have gotten to that point now in college. And then when I go back home and I'm already surrounded by people that already know who I am, so I can be myself. (Anne, personal communication, Final Interview, October 24, 2017)

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- she did in high school or who my friends are. So I mean it's weird but it's nice. (Anne, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 5, 2017)
- Daniel** Yes. I, I went to bed at like 10:30 last night. It's the first time I gone to bed that early, EVER since I've gotten here. I usually go to bed either somewhere from 11 to 2 o'clock. So, it's never been consistent so I was very happy. (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
- But I didn't see that, I didn't necessarily feel like I was being myself until I really like, the last couple of, the last two weeks and I think me being myself has really open, I've understood that like other people are pretty much going to be drawn to that no matter what. Even if we have differing perspectives, differing religious backgrounds, they are drawn to that because they want authentic people. People want other authentic people to connect to. I've understood just the importance of being authentic rather than just doing what other people think I should do. And so I think in that regard, me trying to be myself and connect with other people has been very important....And not to say that there's not, like I don't put on a mask sometimes here, which I do, I think everyone does, I still think I wear a mask but not, not as much. (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
- Jacob** It was more independence [was calling], because like the end of high school, I felt like a lot of things I was at home I didn't need, like to be like, like treated like a little kid. Not in a bad way, but almost just like you know. (Jacob, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)
- I can be. Your authentic self... if you're putting on a show, then you're not going to be happy. Not being your authentic self, then you're not going to be happy. A lot of people measure success and happiness with money. I mean, I'm happy, I'm authentic. (Jacob, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)
- John** High school used to be like six classes, but then it changed to four my senior year. So it's kind of a better transition. Like, six classes a day was a lot. Like waking up at like six. Getting out at like five sometimes. Homework to like ten,
- I mean nobody really is their authentic self like, if I, I mean I probably don't even know what my authentic self is, so why would I try to do that, when like I don't even know what's going to happen. (John, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

and now it's like waking up at eight, going to class for like an hour, doing homework, going to another class do homework the rest of the day off, It's really nice. (John, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 28, 2017)

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| Nicole | [Want to work on] definitely being less dependent on those people that do love me, because I did get to my confidence level from them, but now I can, like move on to being that way, like all by myself. (Nicole, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017) | In the past, I was definitely more dependent on others for not just... really having all of the responsibility on me, but for my happiness as well. So I've learned to, that was one thing to think about before I moved out here is that I have to be responsible for my own happiness and not relying on others for that. (Nicole, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017) |
| Thomas | Well I'd say that, now in this environment you know there's not such a rigid structure as like previously in high school or middle school or something like that. There's not such a rigid structure and so it allows me to kind of mold my own endeavors all around each other and balance it all out and stuff like that and make more of my own choices. (Thomas, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017) | Their perception of, but now, you know, everything is everybody's first perceptions of me. It's hinged on, you know, how you behave or the way I present myself, obviously which it always should be. But you know, a lot of first impressions, that's probably the best way to put it, so many first impressions right now that have to be made. And I feel like I could always present myself just a little better. (Thomas, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017) |

In the above examples of independence, several of the participants spoke about the freedom of schedules, including Daniel, John, and Thomas. Daniel recognized the freedoms he has to manage his bedtime. John and Thomas both spoke about the change in structure to their day as compared to high school, with the ability to “make more of my own choices.” The other three participants spoke about an independence from people. Anne stated “I've done more without my parents than it ever done so that's a success.” Jacob shared how he didn't want to be “like treated like a little kid” anymore, and was ready to move on from that experience in high school. Nicole identified

that she wanted to be “less dependent on those people that do love me.” All of these examples highlight the desire for more independence.

In the examples resonating with the theme of authenticity, the participants generally spoke about their feelings of how they were acting and the context in which they could be their true selves, especially in reference to other people. Anne spoke about her intentionality of relationships to foster her authentic self: “I surround myself with good people who like I, like I feel like I can trust and be myself with them”. Daniel took this a step farther and recognized that “people want other authentic people to connect to”, and that relationships that are true call for true and real people. Thomas shared: “everything is everybody's first perceptions of me”. Through this, he recognized the pressure associated with being an authentic version of oneself during this new phase of relationship building.

Authenticity also tied into the idea of happiness among participants. Nicole seemed to dig into another aspect of authenticity, and the ownership associated with it when she said, “I have to be responsible for my own happiness.” Jacob identified the necessity of authenticity: “not being your authentic self, then you’re not going to be happy”, a compliment to Nicole’s ownership of happiness. Conversely, John said, “I probably don't even know what my authentic self is.” By saying this, he recognized his lack of self-understanding himself.

Phase Two

Academic Engagement

As the transition continued into the fifth and sixth week, participants began to experience their college transition through academic and diversity engagement. The students appeared to have become comfortable with their past and new relationships, as well as with their understanding of self in a new context, and were able to focus more intensely on academics and diversity. Examples of the

participant's academic engagement can be found in Table 12 in the form of quotes from interviews, and reinforced with a discussion that includes some observations from classes.

Table 12.

Academic Engagement

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	Like literally everyone in my family just like hasn't done college except my dad, so... I think it would be cool, you know the first girl in my family to graduate college. Like I secretly like working hard at school. I like having a lot on my plate, and having to write essays and get all this stuff done because it feels good when you get it done. I think it adds purpose to my life I guess. (Anne, personal communication, Final Interview, October 24, 2017)
Daniel	So sculpture is going really well. [Professor] has been really understanding in terms of, like I've chosen a rather complex project. We have to make masks out of cardboard. And then we have to tape them together by licking pieces of tape. And I've spent like 24 plus hours licking tape, it's nasty, it's like envelope tape, so you lick it, stick it on there, it makes the mask stronger but it's nasty. I made a big mask and made a little mask for my miniature of me that I have to pose with. I've sculpted the miniature out of paper, masking tape, and wire. I'm done with that. Now I have to, I have to plaster it. I'm, I'm on the process of plastering and I have to get that done this weekend....And I have to make a platform for it too, I have to build one for that....I wanted to be a very ambitious person. I'm the only freshman in my intro to sculpture class. I thought "Man I'm gonna show people like", at first it was kind of vein I'd be like, I'm going to show people like how much of a go getter, how good of an artist I am. I'm really regretting that decision, because it has been absolutely horrible. (laughing) (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
Jacob	Yeah, I'm having a good time. It's just that most of my classes it should look at the time management for sure because we like have all this stuff to do in one day. So I do all of my other stuff. I have like three hours of homework a night usually So like if I do those three hours and then I don't work on the thing due in three days. I just do the thing due tomorrow and get to that point I'm like well crap. I have to do this paper. (Jacob, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
John	I've never been, I never liked English classes. That's basically what it is. I mean, I'm good at writing papers but I don't like the English classes. I guess I like more math and science. So I guess I can't like it all. (John, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 28, 2017)

Time management, I've got three, three, four classes to keep track of, marching band to like know when I have a game when I have this, like maybe trying to like be social. I haven't really done that...I don't know if it would be like perseverance. But it's like having the stress of a few papers due, and like I have to go to practice, I have to go to a game, I have to go be somewhere all day and not have time to do this. Like, we had a project recently where we had to make a video and it was also during an away game. And I left on Friday and came back Sunday evening and it was due the next Monday. So we kind of... it was me and two other guys and the other guy was also home for the weekend. And so it was just one guy to do it, the video. But like all throughout the trip, I was like try this, do this, show me this. I try to get a sub to go on. And you know and then on the Saturday, Sunday night we just were done like we had to write a paper with it. (John, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

Nicole I made it to all my classes though. And I am not actually not worried about how they're going to go down. So that's a success in my book. I like, I think I'm going to like calculus and chemistry more though cause I won't have to write essays. I'm not a big fan of writing, not for conventional write. No, no I hate it. Being told to write something analytically for a grade is not my thing. (Nicole, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 6, 2017)

Thomas There are some days where I'm like hey, I think I've got a little bit of air there. And then other days I'm like, like where I am? So that's probably the most challenging for me so far but it's motivating, though. It's a lot of pressure but that makes me want to do it though. (Thomas, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

Participants made quick sense of academic life by identifying their likes and dislikes, demonstrating engagement in the classroom, and experiencing struggle with and development of time management. John was very clear about what classes he liked and disliked, recognizing his strengths: "I'm good at writing papers but I don't like the English classes". Similarly, Nicole identified enjoying her "...calculus and chemistry more though cause I won't have to write essays".

The participants were also observed in their self-described hardest class mid-study. During these observations, the participants were found to be engaged in the classroom environment. As

discussed in a previous assertion in which Nicole identified struggling with a test in her math class, here we see Nicole's receptiveness and engagement in that same class through an observation:

The professor offers an equation for the class to complete. Nicole does not raise her hand or offer to engage in solving the equation. Some of this might be due to her nervousness of having felt bad about the previous test. Another student completes the task, raises her hand, and shares the answer. Afterwards, it's almost as if Nicole is relieved. The professor comes over to Nicole and asks if she needs help on the next problem. He knows her name. He looks at her equation. He says that her work looks good. He corrects one piece, to which Nicole is receptive. (Nicole, Classroom Observation, October 6, 2017)

Thomas's engagement in class was a bit more direct as he asked several questions and was observed:

The professor says that they are going to go over the quiz. Thomas offers an answer to what the professor is asking about the interrelated nature of Al Qaeda and Isis. He asks a question if a particular group is predominantly Sunni or Shiite. Thomas's understanding of the groups is apparent, and his interest is apparent. He offers another answer to a question. He is not talking during any other points in the class, though he is looking at, nodding, taking notes, and making facial expressions throughout the class. (Thomas, Classroom Observation, October 10, 2017)

Beyond the physical classroom, Jacob recognized that organization of classes was a challenge for him, especially "time management for sure because we like have all this stuff to do in one day". John echoed this challenge when he identified "Time management, I've got three, three, four classes to keep track of". In addition to time management, academic engagement also brought on some warm feelings of motivation and pride. Anne spoke about how her classes gave her purpose: "I like having a lot on my plate, and having to write essays and get all this stuff done because it feels good

when you get it done”. Daniel found motivation in another way, challenging himself and his abilities when he said “I’m going to show people like how much of a go getter, how good of an artist I am”. Thomas also identified that the pressure is a motivating factor: “It’s a lot of pressure but that makes me want to do it though”. The transition to college appeared to bring on new ways of organizing, learning, and engaging with the academic experience.

Diversity Engagement

Engagement with diversity was not seen immediately in this study. It can be rationalized that diversity engagement was more internalized by the participants during their initial introduction to collegiate life. As they were in a heightened state of newness and interpretation, it would follow that understanding self and relationships was primary to engagement with academics and diversity. However, in tandem with a new focused engagement with academics was a shift in awareness and desire to engage in conversations revolving around diversity, privilege, race, whiteness, class, gender, politics, and inclusion. The participants recognized their limited understanding of and relatability to such topics, and further recognized their role in the promotion of systemic diversity issues. Table 13 contains such examples from the participants through the issues of race, religion, and class.

Table 13.

Diversity Engagement

Participant Name	Examples
Anne	...like even though I don't consider myself racist, like I play a part in racism every day. Yeah. I mean and I think that's a huge part of the world. ... I mean, especially after reading that article, like just, the idea that I'm never going to know like the struggles that Black people face in their life like knowing that my life is so, like I'm taken care for like, I'm at college right now. Like I have student loans that are like being taken care of right now. And I don't know. Like we talk a lot about in class, like I'll never know the fear of having like my tail light out at night and being pulled over and like you're going to jail for that....which makes me feel like I'm out of touch with

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- like, like with people of color because I like I want to help and I want to stop racism but I feel like because I like, there is no way to cross that bridge of understanding like what they go everyday just like, how am I supposed to help if I don't understand? (Anne, personal communication, Final Interview, October 24, 2017)
- Daniel I'm thinking about things, 'cause that class is about race and gender. So thinking about things outside of my socialization which is like, I'm a white male. So I've not really had to think about the topics of race, racism as an institution or like how we, how we portray history in such a biased way. I've never had to think about that. That in itself has been challenging. I've had to open my eyes to something I never thought, I never knew existed. So I guess it's challenging is that I have to see how that relates to my own perspective and how my socialization has actually been a product of like racism which is very interesting. It's also very very eye opening. And so it can be very it can be a struggle sometimes to think about, that things I thought were good and normal were actually not. Which, I think is very good that I'm, I have that, I'm having that experience. But it's so hard. It's hard because it hits you, it's like a punch to the gut because you're like "oh my goodness I've been perpetuating something I, I have said is immoral but I didn't know I was perpetuating it". So it's. Yeah it's been challenging in that way as well. (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)
- Jacob I try not to think about it. I don't really care. The more I see it is through the lens, the biracial lens of my friends, and everything is to him, not to me. Trying to understand through him. It's hard to empathize with. I've never really been close to someone who has issues with race. I mean, I know it's there. (Jacob, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)
- John Um, I guess it's like... Religion. I guess. I don't know. It's not really like religion itself but it's like what it does, like the denial of basic human rights by religions... like I think it was on TV in the cafe yesterday. Like Kim Davis was on for something. And I remember, whenever it was, two years ago? Like what she did. And like now she's famous... like what she did is terrible and like she was the first person that denied gay marriage certificates. And like now people are celebrating. That just makes me mad I guess. (John, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)
- Nicole How I've grown up it's more of a, a class issue that I've always had to think about. Like my mom working until 3:00 in the morning because she worked at Ford because, like, all of that situations like not being on to have enough food in the house so I would always eat at school. And that would probably be like the main meal I had for the day so I had to make sure I eat there. Or for having to deal with like very hot temperatures in the summer or in the spring and fall. Or like changing seasons because my mom didn't want to

turn on the air and waste the money for that. It's colder outside than just condition the inside of the house...So, I know how to work for things whenever I want. And I don't expect things from other people. And I can just, and I know how rough the world gets even though I may have not experienced as much of that as other people have. But like I, like I know how tough it is, and I know how to actually like build myself up from that. I've seen it happen. So it just makes me feel like a like a strong individual and like my mom is a strong individual. (Nicole, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

Thomas That I have been raised in a system that has offered me many privileges, and there possibly are limits to my personal full understanding of others in all of their experience, which is generally you know across the board for every human, but particularly those of different ethnicities and races because of those systemic demarcations that have occurred. (Thomas, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

In the examples of diversity engagement, several participants identified their inability to truly understand some forms of racism, prejudice, and bias; they recognized their limited understanding. Anne shared “I'll never know the fear of having like my tail light out at night and being pulled over and like you're going to jail for that....which makes me feel like I'm out of touch with like, like with people of color”, recognizing her limitation of understanding. Along the same topic of race, Jacob identified a passivity to feeling the struggles. He stated “I've never really been close to someone who has issues with race”, perhaps influencing his minimal care. In a different vein, John identified that he was frustrated with the impacts of religious diversity, “It's not really like religion itself but it's like what it does, like the denial of basic human rights by religions.” In opposition to these examples of learning and limited understanding, Nicole shared her experience growing up in a household that struggled with class issues: “I know how tough it is, and I know how to actually like build myself up from that.” Her experiences taught her about her strength.

Participants also discussed their role in diversity, prejudice, or societal issues. Daniel had somewhat of a revelation through his academics, revealing: “I've been perpetuating something I, I

have said is immoral but I didn't know I was perpetuating it.” Having been influenced by a completely unrelated class and lesson, Anne acknowledged this by realizing that “I play a part in racism every day ... especially after reading that article, like just, the idea that I'm never going to know like the struggles that Black people face.” Finally, Thomas was forthcoming about how he was raised: “I have been raised in a system that has offered me many privileges”. This perpetuated the trend of awareness among several of the participants in regards to their role in society.

Further exploration of the participants' engagement with diversity revealed that they held opinionated and disconnected stances in the middle of political parties, yet some wanted dialogue about diversity and differing political opinions. During this time of their transition, political events occurred and the participants were immersed in the liberal arts curriculum. Table 14 provides examples from the participants regarding their political opinions. To provide context, a politically charged event occurred on campus mid-study involving several students and national laws regarding immigration protections for DACA and Dreamers. This event, and the institution, received national attention, and is referred to among several of the participants in Table 14.

Table 14.

Political Engagement

Participant Name Examples	
Anne	I've never been into politics or really let it affect my life like I don't even think but I have a political view honestly, like I don't like Trump because of what he stands for. But like now I'm not really in favor....I guess I've never really, like politics has never affected my life in some way like it has someone else, so I really haven't had think about it. (Anne, personal communication, Final Interview, October 24, 2017)
Daniel	I felt very disconnected from [the event] because I didn't know a whole lot about it. What I had gathered was that he put it on her, her like profile on like an alt. right like Facebook page and was like you need to get this person deported. And they started sending her like threats and stuff which I find that is, I, that just bothers me. I didn't feel like such, like it, because I really didn't know her that well, which I feel like maybe I should have a deeper connection

to her. Like in general, that bothers me because, immigrants, people who are immigrants are just as much people as anybody else and plus our entire country - founded by immigrants. So like, it bothers me that people have such a skewed view of what, who immigrants are and they, I don't understand the whole, the they have to be deported to some country they probably don't even remember, because this is their home as much as ours. (Daniel, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

Jacob It feels like my school but more liberal here. I feel like [my high school] was more conservative. A lot of people were a lot more conservative really. But here it's kind of like that but flipped to the other end. ... I mean it doesn't really matter to me either way. I don't really have a problem like by being friends with people of different viewpoints. (Jacob, personal communication, Initial Interview, September 4, 2017)

I don't identify with a party. I mean, I would identify with George Washington. You can't have a black and white view with something as complicated as politics. (Jacob, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

John [The event] didn't really affect me, like not like on a personal or emotional scale like, I wouldn't really... it was kind of shocking. I didn't expect it to happen here. But when I heard about it I didn't think it was going to be that huge video. But I did see like YouTube videos about it. (John, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 28, 2017)

I do, I do subscribe to like the left mostly democratic, but I'm not like actively debating people on it. Like I just, I guess I'm more like a left leaning centrist because like I know... I recognize some things on the right. I recognize some things on the left, and like what... I know what they're doing right, in my opinion. And I know what they're doing wrong in my opinion. (John, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

Nicole I think it's, I think the way that everybody that has like very, like strong views explaining how everybody, like the opposite side explains one side, and then where my views line up in-between them. It's kind of like well I'd like, I like I stand back from everything. So it's kind of like I don't know whether I'm being like rational or not. I guess like, it's kind of confusing to me how people could be like so one sided on things, like black and white. And then just like, it just comes naturally to me to think in gray matter and stuff in-between. So like I feel like if I had um... I think that's like why I would like to sit down and talk to somebody, like have a conversation about that kind of stuff and get all the details from each side, like I don't know many people that are actually capable of sitting down and talking. (Nicole, personal communication, Final Interview, October 26, 2017)

Thomas And so interestingly enough it seems like it, the only thing the individual can do it seems, like is dialogue. That truly seems like one of the most motivating, and that is such a vague thing to say. But really if you if you go through the options and exhaust all of them and realize that there is no clean cut option, dialogue seems the only thing because it allows two individuals to not only say answers for what should be done but actually ask one another and then learn about one. Yes it seems like that's literally the, for me at least, that's literally the only thing I can do right now. (Thomas, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

And I believe the American political system in particular, which is what I've grown up in, so I can't speak on behalf of any other world political system but that is really much fostered binary outlook on the world. So this or that. Yeah even the Western conception is so much very this or that, like we talked about a minute ago with religion and culture, it's like categorized. Instead of allowing things to blend and blur. (Thomas, personal communication, Mid-Study Interview, September 29, 2017)

The participants demonstrated that they were keenly aware of the diversity of politics, sharing their opinions about political diversity, but also recognizing that they felt disconnected from parties or views. Two of the participants spoke of not aligning with a party or view set at all. Anne said “I don't even think but I have a political view honestly” and Jacob stated “I don't identify with a party”. Three others identified a view or stance that sat somewhat central to major parties. Most specifically, Nicole said that her views “line up in-between them”, referring to democrat and republican parties. John said that he believed he was a “left leaning centrist”. Thomas, who enjoyed discussing the philosophies of the world and cultures, identified that the western conception of politics is very “this or that” and “categorized”. He recognized the binary impact this has had on the world.

Regarding the event that took place during the time of this study, it was apparent that the event left the students feeling strongly about the topics, but still disconnected. Daniel stated that he felt “very disconnected from it because I didn't know a whole lot about it”. Similarly, John said, “It didn't really affect me, like not like on a personal or emotional scale”. However, Daniel said, “it

bothers me that people have such a skewed view of what, who immigrants are and they.” He expressed frustration with the incivility surrounding the incident.

Even as the participants identified these viewpoints, several identified that they wanted dialogue about diversity and differing political opinions. Nicole clearly articulated, “I would like to sit down and talk to somebody, like have a conversation about that kind of stuff and get all the details from each side”. She expressed a desire to learn, and to understand sides and opinions of others more clearly. Thomas deduced that “dialogue seems the only thing because it allows two individuals to not only say answers for what should be done but actually ask one another and then learn”. He went on further to share that dialogue and conversation may be the best way to fight systemic issues.

Assertion: Students with a pessimistic explanatory style showed a positive change in attributional style by the conclusion of the study.

An unexpected assertion from this study was the change in scores for the Attributional Style Questionnaire. A re-test of the ASQ was utilized as an aid in reflecting on the experiences of the participants during their final interview. Table 15 shows the scores of participants at the beginning of the study, scores collected during the final interview, and the differences.

Table 15.

Attributional Style Questionnaire Scores

ASQ Score	Participant					
	Anne	Daniel	Jacob	John	Nicole	Thomas
Beginning	-2.17	-1.33	-0.5	-0.17	-1.67	-0.17
Ending	-0.5	1.17	-0.17	1.33	0.67	1.33
Difference	1.67	2.5	0.33	1.5	2.34	1.5

All participants showed a positive change in their ASQ score upon re-test. The differences in scores between test and retest ranged from 0.33 to 2.5. Two participants, Anne and Jacob, retained a

composite score that was slightly pessimistic. The re-tests of all four of the remaining participants indicated an optimistic explanatory style.

Upon reflection with the participants as to why they thought their scores changed, the participants did not provide clear explanations. Anne shared “I don’t really know. I mean, I guess I think my perspective has stayed the same for the most part” (Anne, personal communication, Final Interview, October 24, 2017). Daniel and Nicole, the two participants with the largest difference in scores, were unable to articulate any specific reason as to why they thought their scores changed. However, early in the study, Nicole shared that she was diagnosed with depression and Daniel shared that he was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. John and Thomas, whose scores shifted positively by 1.5 shared only a few similar characteristics, such as ACT score. Otherwise, they were unable to articulate reasons for the adjustment. Anne and Jacob retained scores associated with a pessimistic explanatory style. Interestingly, these two participants were the only athletes among the group.

Summary

The assertions in this study answer the research question by identifying the “how”, “what”, and “when” of the transition experience among students with a pessimistic explanatory style. In the first assertion exposing the perspectives of the participants, it is identified that students with a pessimistic explanatory style experience the transition into college through a lens that is grounded, keenly, in an awareness of their world, thereby influencing and shaping their experience. This perspective is present throughout their transition. The second assertion also demonstrates how students experience their transition, as they compare their experiences and opinions to their past experiences and to the experiences of their friends and family. The third assertion presents two phases of the transition experience, articulating not only when certain aspects of the transition take

place, but also what constitutes that experience. The first phase of this transition experience is composed of relationship and personal development. The relationship aspect of development includes friendships, mentors, and family. The personal aspect of this development focuses on independence and authenticity. At the five and six week mark of the transition into college, students begin to move into the second phase of the transition experience, that consists of academic and diversity engagement. Academic engagement includes making sense of their academic preferences, demonstrating engagement in the classroom, and wrestling with time management. Diversity engagement includes the recognition of limited understand and roles in perpetuating societal issues, while holding distanced opinions about politics. These types of development and engagement are intersecting, and often related to each other. Most prominently, engagement with diversity echo the described perspectives of participants that are grounded in an intense and deep awareness of the dynamic nature of the world. This is evidenced by the desire among several participants for deeper conversations about diversity and politics. An unexpected assertion that falls outside of the research question identified that a change in explanatory style occurred during the transition into college and the course of this study.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Purpose and Research Question

This study sought to discover how full-time, first year college students who possess a pessimistic explanatory style experience the transition to college. In the preceding chapters, the need for this study was established, relevant literature was presented, the methods by which this study proceeded were offered, and assertions were reviewed. Now these assertions must be interpreted, building a case for the importance of this study (Bryant, 2004). Because of the constructivist method of this study, the theory presented is an interpretation (Charmaz, 2014). In an effort to solidify the importance of this study in the world of higher education and college student support, the findings are discussed and compared to current literature. This discussion focuses on how the findings of this study contribute to the literature by means of strengthening, confirming, questioning, or contradiction. Further, practical applications, the significance of findings, and recommendations for future research are presented.

Discussion of Findings

As research regarding pessimistic explanatory style was reviewed in chapter two and no qualitative studies were found that focus on the transition of college students with a pessimistic explanatory style directly, it is important to review the literature associated with the findings of this study. The findings of this present study strengthen research concerning the general college student population, while also identifying new veins of influence or explanation. This elicits confidence for the findings of the study relative to the mass college population, as well as concerns for providing implications for future research and support.

Perspective

This study found that students with a pessimistic explanatory style possess a perspective that is grounded in a keen awareness of a dynamic reality, through which their transition experiences are filtered. Another recent study found that current students describe themselves as loyal, thoughtful, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible, indicating they are a mature group of students who possess sincere care for others (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Both this present study and the study by Seemiller and Grace (2016) indicate how the social, geographical, and political world shapes students' perspectives. However, the study by Seemiller and Grace looks more at generational concepts, as opposed to the present study, which used explanatory style and transition as a frame. For example, Seemiller and Grace identified that the current generation of students hold a realistic outlook on life as inherited from their Generation X parents: They see the world through multiple screens and recognize societal issues are much larger than themselves. The findings of this present study hold a resemblance to the findings of the Seemiller and Grace (2016) study. Most specifically, the participants of this study identified an outlook on life that was described as a "realistic", "gray", or a "mixture". Their keen awareness for the dynamic reality in which they operate resonates with the concepts of thoughtful and open-minded as identified by Seemiller and Grace (2016). However, the present study found that students present a greater breadth of definitions regarding their outlook, rather than subscribing to labels of loyal, open-minded, thoughtful, compassionate, etc.

This present study revealed that participants were aware of the global climate, and some considered how it will impact their future. When considering the things that the students in this study may have experienced in their lifetime, there are numerous disasters and tragedies. While participants were likely too young to understand the impact of September 11, 2011, they have

witnessed the effects in which the United States has been involved with ongoing wars and conflicts (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). As teenagers, they experienced the recession, seeing the impact affecting their parents, the destruction of Hurricane Katrina and super storm Sandy, the tsunami in Japan, the earthquake in Haiti, and have dealt with the swine flu, bird flu, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and Ebola. Because of these experiences and others, this generation has been influenced to believe that airports are scary places and bombs can be hidden anywhere (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They have not known a time when airports were a place to reunite with others rather than being on high alert. This fear is not isolated, given the acts of public violence, such as school shootings at all levels of schools, the catalysts of the Black Lives Matter movement, the Boston Marathon bombing, and shootings in movie theatres or at concerts, like in Las Vegas in 2017. Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that 60% of Generation Z, individuals born between 1995 and 2010 who are entering college between 2013 and 2028, are optimistic about their future. This is a decrease from 89% among Millennials (Seemiller and Grace, 2016). Given these events and impressions, Generation Z students were found to not be risk takers, rather to be pragmatic and possess attitudes that help them navigate a dangerous world.

The findings of the Seemiller and Grace (2016) support the findings of this present study, possibly supplying more explanations as to why the students in this study expressed concerns about the global climate. It is possible that the makeup of the world in which current students have grown up is influencing the outlooks and operation of those in this study. Further, the findings of this present study provides an example of how the perceptions of current students are impacting their transitions into college and experiences with collegiate life. This present study adds strength to the findings of Seemiller and Grace (2016) in this understanding of global impact, as identified through the opinionated yet disconnected stances of participants regarding politics and the desire to

engage in diversity based conversations. The findings of this study add strength to the idea of students being highly impacted by the global “climate”, yet wanting to be engaged in it.

Comparing Experiences

This study revealed that participants prepare for and make sense of their transition to college by comparing their experience and expectations to their own past and to other people’s opinions and experiences. Personality judgments about one’s self, and in comparison, to others is an important part of our daily lives (Kolar, Funder, & Colvin, 1996). These methods help to determine our behavior and how we think and feel about ourselves and others. Funder (1987), identified that the process of personality judgment tends to focus on potential errors. This was not a holistically supported by the findings of the present study. Students did identify that their perceptions and outlooks are often influenced by negative events in the world, but students also identified utilizing shared interests and connections with others in the development of friendships, authenticity, and independence. This present study challenges the notion that Funder (1987) presented as the experience of a potentially positive transition encouraged the development of personality.

Little research has been found on the comparison technique of college students explicitly. This present study found that this comparative technique was a normal and regular occurrence among the participants. Relatively, Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) identified that entering first-year students most often compare and contrast the expected difficulty of college classes to their high school classes. The assertions of this study strengthen the findings of Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) as participants compared to high school, peers, and the experiences of siblings and family members.

Development and Engagement

Four aspects of intersecting development or engagement were identified in two phases: relationship development, personal development, academic engagement, and diversity engagement. Relationship and personal development were predominant early in the study constituting the first phase of the transition process, with academic and diversity engagement became more prominent at weeks five and six of the study and constituting the second phase of the transition process. Taken comprehensively, these aspects of development and engagement strengthen the theory of student involvement as developed by Astin in 1984. The theory of student involvement consists of five components: (a) involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy into highly generalized or highly specific experiences or objects, (b) involvement occurs along a continuum where a student may demonstrate different degrees of involvement at different times and different students may demonstrated different degrees of involvement depending on experience or object, (c) involvement is both quantitative and qualitative, (d) student learning and personal development relative to an educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement, and (e) the effectiveness of an educational policy or practice is related to the ability of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984). The four aspects of this current study, as well as the two phases, demonstrate how involvement with others, self, academics, and concepts of diversity are present during the first ten weeks of the transition process. More specifically, the findings of this present research showcase the qualitative nature of involvement as well as the times at which degree of involvement may shift throughout a transition.

Relationship Development

Friendships and relationships were prevalent themes in this present study. Participants identified that relationships were an expectation, a concern, and a comfort. Friendships were

developed through shared interests. A study by Seemiller and Grace (2016) identified that students prefer friends with whom they can relate. As was found in the results of this study, Pierce, Sarason, and Sarason (1991) also found that students identify shared values and shared hobbies as the most important factors related to making friends and sustaining friendships.

Mentors

This study showed that the participants value relationships with mentor figures, such as their professors and coaches. Research confirms that students are accustomed to having close relationships with their teachers, expecting guidance from their college professors (Arzy, Davies, & Harbour, 2006; Van der Meer, Jansen, & Torenbeek, 2010). Some students expect that professors get to know them personally (Krallman & Holcomb, 1997). Studies investigating the influence of faculty and student interaction have found positive effects, such as persistence, academic self-confidence, satisfaction with the college experience, and a greater sense of belonging (Lamport, 1993; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that among current students, teachers are revered as role models, likely due to the teachers from grade school who had a profound impact on them. Further, Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that current students respond well to coaches who do not yell, but rather remain calm, care and encourage their players by involving them in decision making: Character is more important. Interestingly enough, bosses, religious leaders, professional athletes, celebrities, and political leaders are much less likely to be considered role models among Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

These previous studies present findings that were reflected in the assertions of this present study. One participant discussed their positive relationships with coaches, who demonstrated investment in talent and future, and were encouraging on and off the field. Many of the

participants disclosed fond feelings for their professors, as well as the developments in the relationship with the researcher, occasionally serving as a potential mentor. The findings of this present study add strength to the previous research, and confirm many of the characteristics found in those relationships.

Family

Family relationships in this study were present across participants, though unique and seen in a breadth of ways including political influence, comparing experiences, authenticity and independence development. Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that current students are incredibly close to their parents, seeing them in many ways as friends and advisers, and as sources of emotional and financial support. In 2001, Nora and Lang found that precollege parental encouragement was positively related to student persistence.

The assertions of this study revealed that its participants were similarly close to their families, many of which maintained regular contact with or received advice from their parents. Siblings were mentioned among half of the participants, some as a vital comparison for engaging with the college experience. Little research exists on the impact of siblings solely and in isolation, but they are readily identified as a source of support for college students (Schlossberg, 1995). However, the findings of this research do not confirm, and rather question, the immediate understanding of the relationship with family members. The findings did not identify sentiments of family being seen particularly as friends, emotional support, and financial support. Rather, the findings identified how family's views impact the views of the participants, the expectations families held for their students, adjustments to proximity, and using the experiences of family members to help inform the participants' experiences. This dissonance identifies that questions of

relationships with family members could be explored more to discern the perceptions of relationships with family members from the actual acted relationships.

Personal Development

Development of the character is an original purpose of going to college, according to Bok (2009). In the findings of this study, the participants demonstrated a desire for more independence and authenticity, while navigating various sources of stress. According to Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005), first year students emphasize freedom and independence, missing family and friends, increased responsibility, maturation and self-development, and having their values tested. The findings of this study strengthen the findings of Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005).

Authenticity was identified in tandem with independence through this course of this present study. Goldman (2006) identifies that authenticity is described as a developmental process whereby individuals explore, discover, accept, and behave in accordance with their true selves. Erikson (1968) and Harter (2002) found that this process is prominent during the college years, becoming a hallmark of an achieved identity. However, the concept of authenticity has received scant attention compared with the concept of identity formation, which has been the focal point of a voluminous amount of writing and research (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Marcia, 2002; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993). Research suggests that the development of an authentic sense of self can reduce feelings of distress often experienced during transitional periods (Reich, Harber, & Siegel, 2008). The results of a study by Pisarik and Larson (2011) found that there are statistically positive relationships between measures of authenticity and measures of psychological well-being.

The desire for authenticity and independence as found in this study strengthens the previous relative research. Further, previous research presents possible explanations for the

findings of this present study. As the participants of this study started to identify stronger desires and opportunities for authenticity as the study progressed, it is possible that the development of authenticity aided in the development of positive psychological well-being. It is also possible that the development of authenticity as was seen in this study was a coping mechanism for the transition.

Academic Engagement

In complement to the reference made in the review of personal engagement, Bok (2009) also identified that the purpose college is to train the intellect. The assertions of this study support this purpose, as the participants demonstrated full immersion into their classes and coursework, sometimes even sharing dislikes and frustrations. The participants also demonstrated typical responses to academic endeavors. Time management was discussed as a challenge among participants in their engagement with academics, a concept that is well represented in other studies. Time management is readily identified as a challenge of college students (Holdaway & Kelloway, 1987; Urquhart & Pooley, 2007). Research shows that time management skills are better when developed at an early age (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996). In this study, students identified that they were actively trying to balance and understand time management, adding strength to the research previously presented on the subject.

Diversity Engagement

The assertions of this study evidence that the participants are keenly aware of diversity and developing their understandings of the same. They have experiences with class, gender, and racial diversity, yet recognized their limited understanding, or relatability to people who are different than them. They recognize their role in the promotion of system diversity issues, and remain

opinionated and passionate about various diversity issues. Despite these passions and desire for dialogue, they seem to remain disconnected from major diversity or political based situations.

A recent study found that this generation, more than any other previously, has a positive opinion about the country's becoming more diverse (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They believe in equality, holding passion for social justice issues. Fifty six percent of the participants in Seemiller and Grace's (2016) study were concerned with racism, 56% with sexism, and 61% with poverty. The majority of participants were found to be liberal or moderate on social issues. In regards to racial equality, the students held three prevalent beliefs: (a) equality is the right thing to do, (b) racism is terrible, and (c) why is racism still around?

These beliefs about diversity and social justice are likely influenced by exposure to a wide range of people who are different from them (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The percentage of whites in the United States has decreased from 75% to 72% between 2000 and 2010. In the same time span, those identifying themselves as belonging to two or more races has grown to almost three percent as compared to two percent previously. Students are also seeing more diversity in high profile roles. This generation has experienced a lifetime in which the Civil Rights Act, Voting Right Act, Fair Housing Act, and Americans with Disabilities Act were part of the fabric of society. Also during their lifetime, laws and policies have been created or upheld around issues of anti-discrimination, women and fair pay, hate crime prevention, marriage equality, work permits for childhood immigrants, and minimum wage increases. They have also witnessed laws limiting women's reproductive rights and enacting stricter voter identification laws, laws requiring undocumented individuals to provide proof of citizenship or legal residency if stopped for any reason, and laws requiring transgender people to use restrooms designated for their biological sex

as determined at birth or by chromosomes. Further, religious freedom laws have opened up more right for religious individuals, but have also provided more discrimination toward other identities.

The results of this present study align with these representations of engagement with and understanding of diversity. Participants presented a passion for diversity topics of inequity and discrimination. They identified a desire to engage in deeper understanding. What this study revealed further is that these participants are still learning how to engage with diversity, how to act out their opinions and passions. Further, the study by Seemiller and Grace (2016) offers potential explanations for some of the aspects of diversity engagement in this present study, specifically accounting for the experiences of the overarching college generation that includes the participants of this study.

The political related diversity assertion of this present study adds strength to the findings of Seemiller and Grace (2016) as the general student population is liberal to moderate on social issues, and gives support of social issues. In regards to financial issues, students today are moderate to conservative, and are acutely aware of their financial obligations (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). These dynamics are predicted to make it difficult for students to ascribe to our historically dual-political party system. The assertions of this present study in which students were acutely aware of societal issues, as well as a perspective that is keenly aware of a dynamic reality, adds strength to such research as the participants of this present study expressed concerned about political dysfunction.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study was derived from three theories, two of which are reviewed in regards to theoretical implications. Learned Helplessness is the theory that optimism can be cultivated and that helplessness can be learned (Seligman, 2011). Through this theory,

Seligman identified attributional styles, also known as explanatory styles, which attribute successes and failures to factors of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization. In the findings of this present study, aspects of the participants' perspectives were identified. Most prominently related to the work of Learned Optimism is the keen awareness of a dynamic reality possessed by the participants, and the way in which this filters their understanding of their transition. The findings of this present study identified that this perspective and a comparative practice were present throughout the study, that a change in explanatory style occurred, and the development of authenticity and independence during the initial phase of the transition process. These findings provide new considerations for the theory of Learned Optimism and raises questions about the dynamics of the transition process and its relationship to the cultivation of optimism and the learned nature of helplessness.

The theory of transition, as developed by Schlossberg (2011), was the second theory used to inform this study. Schlossberg defines transitions as events or non-events that result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. There are three types of transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. Anticipated transitions, such as going to college, are events that individuals expect and for which they can prepare, while unanticipated transitions are unexpected, and typically negative, and non-event transitions are expected but do not occur. The results of the study confirmed the assumptions of Schlossberg's (2011) theory relative to the aspects of an anticipated transition.

Schlossberg's (2011) theory consists of a 4S system, including considerations for the situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). *Situation* refers to how a transition is viewed, positively or negatively. Within Schlossberg's theory, students who have a positive perspective are able to reframe their experiences, and experience less

psychological distress. This aspect of Schlossberg's (2011) theory supports Seligman's (2011) work into attributional style towards successes and failures. In the findings of this present study, the two phase process of transition most aptly strengthens the concept of situation, as participants seemed to naturally experience situations relative to the transition such as relationship and personal development in phase one, and academic and diversity engagement in phase two. *Self* includes the perceptions, strengths and weaknesses that an individual carries with them in a transition. The current study explored the concept of this self, articulated in the form of perspective and personal development. *Support* includes all those resources available to an individual, including family, friends, partners, and institutions. These consisted primarily of family, professors, coaches, and friends in this present study. Finally, *strategies* are the methods by which an individual copes through a transition. The participants in this study made light of this concept through the demonstration of comparing their experiences to their past experiences and to the opinions and experiences of others. Strategies were also exemplified through the process by which participants experienced the transition, most notable engaging with relationships and personal understanding in the first phase before engaging with academics and diversity in the second phase. The results of this present study also provide the opportunity to consider updates to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, identifying specific phases experienced by full time, first time college students with a pessimistic explanatory style. Considerations could also be made for the presence of perspective and comparative techniques throughout a transition experience. Further, theoretical updates should be considered for the way in which white students experience the transition into college as compared to black students or students of minority identities at predominantly white institutions.

Schreiner's Thriving Quotient

The results of this current study also showed strong connections to Schreiner's (2010) concept of thriving. Influenced by the psychological model of retention, Schreiner's Thriving Quotient consists of five constructions: engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Schreiner, 2010). All five of these constructs emerged in the assertions of the current study.

In the second phase of the transition process identified in the findings of this present study, academic development was prominent as the participants identified a focus on balance, time management, engagement with the course content, and deeper professor relationships. According to Schreiner (2010), academic thriving is characterized by engaged learning and academic determination, aspects that were present in the findings of the current study, but not as explicit in definition. Schreiner (2010) notes that students who are thriving academically are psychologically engaged in the learning process, not only engaged in the behaviors. Simply showing up for class and reading the assignment does not qualify as engagement in learning. Rather, it occurs when students are meaningful in processing material and making connections between what they know, are interested in, and what needs to be learned. These students are focused and attentive to new learning opportunities, actively thinking and discussing what they are learning, energized by the process of learning. The second component, academic determination, is characterized by investment of effort, management of one's time among the multiple academic and personal demands of college life, motivation to succeed, and intentional pursuit of goals. Academic thriving is a continual and regular investment continually of effort. Students who display such thriving are motivated to do well, have educational goals that are important to them, and have strategies in place to attain such goals. When things become difficult for these students, such as a

boring class or a hard assignment or a confusing concept, they do not give up. They try new strategies, ask for help, and dig in until they finish.

Two pieces of the findings of the present study delve into personal understanding: (a) students' perspectives are keenly aware of a dynamic reality through which their experience is filtered, and (b) personal development occurs during the first phase of the transition process. According to Schreiner (2010) a healthy attitude towards self, in addition to a healthy attitude towards the learning process, is vital for thriving in college. This intrapersonal thriving is composed of the factor called positive perspective. This concept is foundational to the concept of thriving and is supported by the work of Seligman (L. Schreiner, personal communication, ACPA Convention Montreal, March 7, 2016). As opposed to operating out of an unrealistic view of the world, this perspective actually enables a person to come to grips with difficult situations. It is not simply feeling good about one's life, it is a way of perceiving events and the strategies one uses to cope with difficulties. Students who have a positive outlook on life, and optimistic way of viewing the world and their future, often thrive and express higher satisfaction with their lives, enjoying the college experience more. This enjoyment is not overly optimistic, unrealistic, arrogant, or naive. Positive perspective is a way of viewing reality and proactively coping with that reality, which is highly reminiscent of the first assertion presented in this present study. In Schreiner's (2010) work, students were often found to have a positive perspective had a broader and more long-term view of the events that happen to them or occur. They were less likely to overreact and ultimately handle stress better. This including putting things into perspective and reframing negative events to find positive benefit or learning opportunity.

In the present study, relationships were identified as an important part of the transition experience, especially through friendships, mentors and family. Schreiner (2010) identifies that

thriving is truly incomplete without relationships, especially social connections and diverse citizenship. Social connections includes having friends, being in relationships with others who listen, and experiencing a powerful sense of community within the college environment. Diverse citizenship is a complex combination of an openness and valuing of differences in others, an interest in relating to others from diverse backgrounds, a desire to make contributions to the world, the confidence to do so, and the belief that change is possible with effort. When considering the findings of this present study with the theory of thriving, considerations arise for the impact of a pessimistic explanatory style.

Complicating Thriving

The assertions of this present study, especially the possession of a perspective that is grounded in a keen awareness of a dynamic reality, relates to the concept of positive perspective as defined by Schreiner (2010, 2015). Considering Schreiner's work, the degree to which participants' outlooks match the realistic view they claim to possess, is the degree to which they are able to use this perspective to perceive events accurately and cope with the struggles and difficulties they entail. This theory and the findings of this study directly challenge the literature that indicates strong ties between pessimistic explanatory style with depression, retention, and GPA (Chang & Sanna, 2007; Dweck, 2008; Ramirez et al., 1992; Seligman, 2011; Stipek, 1988). Instead, the findings offer that a pessimistic explanatory style is linked to a realistic outlook which then is productive in coping with struggles and difficulties. It is possible that aspects of a pessimistic explanatory style contribute to a positive perspective. This may also explain why more participants in this study did not identify struggling with depression. Further, it is possible that a slight pessimistic explanatory style equips students with a mindset or perspective that aids in navigating difficult experiences, disappointment, and other difficulties.

Practical Applications

Grounded theorist Charmaz (2014) advises that theories must reach beyond and across disciplines. This is a strength of all grounded theory. This study reached across the worlds of higher education and student affairs, into psychology by constructing a picture of how students with pessimistic explanatory styles engage with and experience their transitions. This study should be considered in isolation, as implications only exist for the university at which it was conducted. However, a college's wealth of student services also expand across disciplines. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (Dean, 2006; Wells, 2015) has identified 45 functional areas within student affairs, many of which demonstrate this expansiveness. Each is charged to uphold the shared ethical principles of autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, veracity, and affiliation, and may be helpful in consideration of the following implications and recommendations.

Changing Attributional Styles

The findings of the present study found that attributional styles scores changed positively over the time of the transition being studied. Further, several participants demonstrated a change in attributional style. While this present study did confirm the presence of pessimistic explanatory styles, none of the participants blatantly demonstrated lack of institutional fit, inability to develop strong relationships, significant academic failure, or advancement of depression. In fact, the results of this study showed positive efforts in regards to attributional explanatory style. When looking deeply at the scores of the attributional style questionnaire, all of the participants demonstrated only slight pessimistic explanatory styles. During a re-test of the questionnaire at the conclusion of the study, all participants demonstrated changes to their scores in which they moved more toward an optimistic explanatory style.

The founding work of Seligman (2011) and the studies completed by Schreiner (2010, 2015) suggest that there is also a demand to change the perspectives and attributional styles of students, with current programs in place to cultivate such change. Perry, Hall, and Ruthig (2005) demonstrated this through presenting optimistic reframing videos and then having students complete a writing assignment. The Penn Resilience Program, in a twelve week intervention, evidenced success in improving the abilities of middle and high school students to adopt and use an optimistic explanatory style (Perry et al., 2005). The University of Manitoba, that conducted similar work, has consistently demonstrated that their exercise changes college students' sense of academic control and subsequent investment of effort, leading to higher academic performance (Schreiner, 2010; Schreiner, 2015). As the students realize the psychological process that impacts their success, they are able to normalize their journey which gives them a sense of control over it. Only when this internal process occurs can a student begin to benefit from concrete skills assistance provided at most campuses. Ruthig, Perry, Hall, & Hladkyj, (2004) examined the greater impact of attributional retraining (AR) on 256 first-year college students' test anxiety, cumulative academic achievement, and course persistence in college over an academic year, finding that high-optimism students were more receptive to AR and experienced more benefits.

Schreiner (2010, 2015) suggests that encouraging positive perspective among first year students can assist in the transition to unfamiliar environments in which they feel they have little control. This resonates with the findings of this study, and the challenge presented to current literature findings regarding the impact of a pessimistic explanatory style. According to Schreiner (2010), this encouragement of a positive perspective can include the use of peer leaders as role models in orientation and first year seminars, capitalizing on advising to reframe events, and incorporating brief lessons on attributional styles. Additionally, teaching students to develop their

strengths is a process that allows for further understanding of self in terms of the following questions: Who am I? Who do I want to become? How do I relate to others? How do I work with others effectively? By identifying and affirming students' talents and their ways of processing information and relating to people, students can begin to develop deeper understandings of themselves which contributes to their excelling in other areas of achievement. Dedicating time to develop talents of first year college students sends a very different message to students; they learn they are important to the community. This could be achieved through floor meetings with Resident Advisors, advising sessions with Academic Advisors, programming through offices of Student Activities, conversations with Career Development Advisors, Religious Life, Intramurals, or any other practitioner in a Student Affairs functional area. This recommendation from Schreiner (2010, 2015) possibly explains some of the change in attributional explanatory style among the participants as the interviews themselves gave room to answer many of these questions. It can also be considered that a slight pessimistic explanatory style is in somewhat of alignment with a positive perspective and the accompanying realistic understanding of the world is comparable to the complicating outcomes of a strong and persistent pessimistic explanatory style.

These front line and immediate student serving roles work to further support the missions of student affairs divisions by upholding the two enduring and distinctive concepts identified by Nuss in 2003: (a) a consistent and persistent emphasis on and commitment to the development of the whole person, and (b) support the academic missions of the institutions they are serving, of which the diversity of missions is a hallmark in U.S. higher education. As presented in the Professional Competencies produced by ACPA and NASPA (2017), adopting a holistic approach to wellness and healthy living among students can be fostered through not only the work of the immediate student serving roles, but through consideration of how missions and visions of

institutions and divisions of academic and student affairs can address attributional styles and support such changes. As an example, divisions of academic and student affairs may want to consider adopting the complete state model of mental health as a way to support students with a pessimistic explanatory style. In the complete state model of mental health, mental illness and mental health are seen in two separate continuums as the presence of one does not dictate the absence of the other (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). The first continuum displays degrees of symptoms of mental illness from high to low, just as degrees of symptoms of well-being are displayed from high to low. The combination of these two continuums creates a wealth of possibilities for individual operations: high and high, high and low, low and high, low and low, and variations in between. This could be achieved through collaborative work between clinical health services, Deans of Students, student care and retention success teams, academic advisors, etc. Investigating this further as a technique for support and intervention may allow for the promotion of mental health while tending to mental illness. Additional considerations should be made across all divisions of a college or university to identify responsibility and opportunities for partnership in supporting students in their transition and during the time of changing attributional styles.

Personal Mentorship

During the course of this present study, the researcher was found to be helpful in stressful situations, such as failing a test or discerning how to arrange academic plans to make the most out of college. The positive relationship between the researcher and participant, as well as the time dedicated to discuss how the transition to college was going, may have resulted in the researcher being seen as either a support, resource, or opportunity for comfortable reflection on their transition process and outlooks. It is possible then that the relationship itself may have influenced their transition to college, as designations of support are considered vital to the transition process

according to Schlossberg (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman 1995). In comparison, student orientation leaders and academic advisors have been utilized to support the developmental transitions of students into college (Crockett, 1978; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). In addition to administrative responsibilities, these individuals provide basic counseling, space and time to process experiences, and empathy. Because of the existence of these types of institutional support services, and given the researcher's role at the institution of study, it is sensible that the researcher was perceived in a way that fulfilled some of these support services. This relationship illuminates the consideration that having individuals who do not have additional roles, like academic advising or career development, should be available to new students as they transition into college. Further, this may serve as a positive intervention for students who possess a pessimistic explanatory style, providing an intermediary between functional area-specific support staff and counseling services.

The institution of this study could and should make full use of face to face time as demonstrated by the design of this study and the relationships built with the research as a mentor. This could allow for acceptance of the participants' personalities and histories, furthering their senses of independence and authenticity, and providing a means to manage stress of their transition. This consideration accepts that face to face time with the students occurred with student orientation leaders, professors, and the researcher. Academic advising programs, orientation programs, and first year experience programs would be key areas to help explore this implication. As academics were a prominent experience for the students in this study, continued support of developing time management skills and adjustment to collegiate level courses could be beneficial. The aforementioned functional areas would also be instrumental in developing academic support.

It may also prove beneficial to find ways to address unique perspectives of students with a pessimistic explanatory style, paying particular attention to their keen awareness of a dynamic reality and the impact of such a perspective on their future and career aspirations. Career and internship services may be able to reframe their work with students to consider and address the strong fears and concerns they hold. For the same reasons, it may be well for campus police and other safety officers to find ways to improve the overall campus security and safety, and communicate the efforts taken so as to improve students' perceptions and feelings of being safe and secure.

Significance of Findings

This study presented an in-depth look at the transition experiences of full time, first year students with a pessimistic explanatory style. In doing so, a theory was constructed from the experiences of participants that identified key aspects of their transition. This included grounded perspectives of a dynamic reality, the use of comparison as a tool in transition, the development of relationships and personal selves, and engagement with academics and diversity. This study adds to the growing research on Learned Helplessness, depression, student transition, and student thriving.

Limitations

The first limitation to be recognized is the missed opportunity for the collection of observational data at the beginning of the study. Though multiple opportunities were identified for observation both inside and outside of the classroom, and at different time periods, the observations could have begun earlier in the process to capture more of the experience at the onset of transition. This would have captured more of the immediate feelings and expectations associated with the experiences of the participants.

This study included a homogeneous sample of students with similar backgrounds: full time, first year college students, white, 18 years of age, possessing a pessimistic explanatory style. This serves as a strength as it is fairly representative of the entire population from which sampling occurred, giving power to the theory. However, this lack of diversity is a limitation in understanding the full breadth of experiences of students with a pessimistic explanatory style.

A final limitation of this study is the characteristics of the site: classified as small, private, liberal arts, and attracting high achieving students, predominantly white, etc. These characteristics constituted a focused population and situation for study, but require that readers use their own judgement in generalizing the findings to their own situations or populations of students. The data collected for this study was self-reported, meaning that the possibility for bias ought to be considered as it occurs in non-random samples where individuals voluntarily participate in research.

Future Research

This study sits at the intersection of student transition and attributional style, while recognizing the growing issues with depression of college students. The culminating theory of this study identified that there are many potential factors contributing to the experiences of students with pessimistic explanatory styles, some of which align with the experiences of the general student population. To more fully understand the experiences of the general student population, research could be conducted to understand how students with an optimistic explanatory styles experience the transition into college as compared to students with a pessimistic explanatory style.

There is an opportunity to explore the benefits of possessing a pessimistic explanatory style. As Schreiner's (2010) Theory of Thriving demonstrates that a positive perspective, or realistic outlook, is used to help manage difficulties and reframe the events in our lives, it is

possible that pessimistic explanatory styles may serve in this regard. It would be informative to see additional research that looks at the benefits of the full range of pessimistic explanatory style scores.

The assertion revealing a two phase process of transition in this study also suggests that students are thoughtful about diversity, and want to engage. However the population for this study was limited to a homogeneous sample. Further research should be conducted to understand how students who are not white and hold a pessimistic explanatory style experience the transition into college. Considerations should be made for race, cultural heritage, native american or tribe, ethnicity, religious/secular/spiritual affiliation, gender and gender identity, sexual identity, trans*, as well as other populations.

Additionally, as authenticity and independence were factors identified in this study as areas of personal development, there is room to discover more about the relationship between these factors and depression. Research could explore how authenticity and independence interact with, support, or hinder the development of depression among populations that possess a pessimistic explanatory style. Understanding the causal relationship may present new ways of supporting students.

Finally, the unanticipated assertion identified that there was a change in attributional explanatory style by the end of this study. More research should be conducted to investigate the causes of this change, including the opportunity to talk about the transition experience, the relationship with an administrator or mentor who is unattached to academic evaluation or grades, and the participation in orientation programs. This continued research should also make considerations for the changes in attributional explanatory style without possible interventions to determine if there is a change among the general student population.

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Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent Document

Project Title: A Qualitative Analysis of Transition Experiences among College Students with Pessimistic Explanatory Styles

Investigator and Contact for Questions:

Hannah Piechowski, Doctoral Candidate, Bellarmine University School of Education, (859) 221-5784

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through your home university by Hannah Piechowski and Bellarmine University. Only individuals 18 years of age and older are eligible to participate in this study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the transition experiences of students with pessimistic styles. The reason that we do this research is to further understand how to enhance of education.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** The researcher will use demographic and application information submitted through the admissions process (hometown, age, gender, high school GPA, ACT, estimated family contribution, etc.) and responses from the 2017 Attributional Style Questionnaire distributed to all first year students at your university to select participants. If you identify a willingness to participate in this research. I would schedule two (2) to four (4) interviews with you to last roughly an hour in length and two (2) to three (3) check-in appointments lasting approximately 15 minutes throughout the first six weeks of the Fall 2017 semester. Additionally, I would like to observe your experiences during orientation in the classroom. The whole project will take no more than four (4) to six (6) hours of your time. I hope to interview between 5 and 10 students. My goal is to start the project on August 25th, 2017 and complete meetings by the end of October, 2017.
3. **Discomfort and Risks:** There are no anticipated risks or discomfort association with this study.
4. **Benefits:** No identifiable immediate benefits exist, though participants may benefit from time and space to discuss their experiences. No monetary benefits will be available for participation.
5. **Confidentiality:** This is not a test, and no one from your home university or Bellarmine University will see any of the information with the exception of myself and my professor, also known as the Principal Investigator. All data collected will not be used for further research. Reports and analysis of the data will include pseudonyms to protect involved parties.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** You only have to do this if you want to. You can even start to do this now and change your mind at any time and we will just stop. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the university. Should you agree to participate in this study and decide later that you wish to withdraw, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you do agree to participate at this time please sign and date this statement in the presence of a witness. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records. Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this research project.

Thank you,
Hannah Piechowski

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to participate in this project.

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix B: Letter of Solicitation

Project Title: A Qualitative Analysis of Transition Experiences among College Students with Pessimistic Explanatory Styles

Investigator and Contact for Questions:

Hannah Piechowski, Doctoral Candidate, Bellarmine University School of Education, (859) 221-5784

Dear Participant:

Thank you for taking the Attributional Style Questionnaire on August 25th, 2017! Your results identified that you would be an ideal participant as we move forward with the study. I am writing to ask for your continued participation with this project. Please respond to this with your availability if you are willing to participate. To ensure you are fully informed, the following information is offered as a review.

This project is conducted through your home university by Hannah Piechowski and Bellarmine University. Only individuals 18 years of age and older are eligible to participate in this study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please fill out the scheduling information and return this form to the address listed at the bottom of the second page. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

7. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the transition experiences of students with pessimistic styles. The reason that we do this research is to further understand how to enhance of education.
8. **Explanation of Procedures:** The researcher will use demographic and application information submitted through the admissions process (hometown, age, gender, high school GPA, ACT, estimated family contribution, etc.) and responses from the 2017 Attributional Style Questionnaire distributed to all first year students at your university to select participants. If you identify a willingness to participate in this research. I would schedule two (2) to four (4) interviews with you to last roughly an hour in length and two (2) to three (3) check-in appointments lasting approximately 15 minutes throughout the first six weeks of the Fall 2017 semester. Additionally, I would like to observe your experiences during orientation in the classroom. The whole project will take no more than four (4) to six (6) hours of your time. I hope to interview between 5 and 10 students. My goal is to start the project on August 25th, 2017 and complete meetings by the end of October, 2017.
9. **Discomfort and Risks:** There are no anticipated risks or discomfort association with this study.
10. **Benefits:** No identifiable immediate benefits exist, though participants may benefit from time and space to discuss their experiences. No monetary benefits will be available for participation.

11. **Confidentiality:** This is not a test, and no one from your home university or Bellarmine University will see any of the information with the exception of myself and my professor, also known as the Principal Investigator. All data collected will not be used for further research. Reports and analysis of the data will include pseudonyms to protect involved parties.
12. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** You only have to do this if you want to. You can even start to do this now and change your mind at any time and we will just stop. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the university. Should you agree to participate in this study and decide later that you wish to withdraw, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Thank you very much for your willingness to consider participation in this research project.

Thank you,

Hannah Piechowski

Interview Scheduling

Please check mark the appropriate columns to identify all of your available times for an initial interview.

	Saturday, September 2nd	Sunday, September 3rd	Monday, September 4th
9:00am			
10:00am			
11:00am			
12:00pm			
1:00pm			
2:00pm			
3:00pm			
4:00pm			
5:00pm			
6:00pm			
7:00pm			

Contact

How would you like to be contacted for scheduling?

Cell Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Return this signed form to: Hannah Piechowski in Old Morrison 100, 300 N. Broadway, Lexington KY 40508

Appendix C: Observational Guide

Time of Event:

Date:

Place:

Observer:

Participant:

Position of Observer: [include diagram if necessary]

Position of Participant: [include diagram if necessary]

Class/Event/Meeting Description:

Others present:

Characteristics of room:

Characteristics of participant:

Time

Event/Comment/Observation

Inferences

Wait until class/event/meeting is done; avoid distracting the event.

Appendix D: Interview Guides

Initial Interview

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: [include diagram if necessary]

Brief description of the project:

I am a doctoral student at Bellarmine University and I am interested in understanding how college students at your university experience the transition into collegiate life.

Initial Open-Ended Questions:

- Could you describe your experience of transitioning into college? What has it been like?
- How would you describe yourself before coming to college?
- How would you describe your current outlook on life?
- What has been the best part of transitioning into college?
- What has been the biggest challenge?
- Could you tell me your thoughts and feelings about Orientation and First Engagements?
- Could you tell me about a success and a failure you've experienced since coming to college?

Intermediate Questions:

- Is your outlook on life positive, negative, or a mixture? How do you handle success? How do you handle disappointment?
- Who would you say has a good idea about your outlook on life and disappointment? What would they say?
- Successes - Do you see these as permanent? Why do you think they happened? What do these successes say about you as a person?
- Failures - Do you see these as permanent? Why do you think they happened? What do these failures say about you as a person?
- As you look back on your first few weeks in college, are there any other events that stand out in your mind? Could you describe [each one] it? How did this event affect your transition into college? How did you respond to the event?
- Where do you see yourself in two years, four years, ten years? Describe the person you hope to be then. How would you compare the person you hope to be with the person you see yourself as now?
- What has been the best resources for you as you have transitioned into life at college? People, places, things?
- Who has been the most helpful to you during this time? How have they been helpful?
- There's a theory of transition that involves 3 parts: moving in, through, and out. (Review brief definition) Which part of that theory resonates with you, and why?
- Has the university helped or hindered your transition to college?

Observation or Key Event Follow Up Questions:

- I noticed at (insert key event) that (insert specifics from observation) happened (or was discussed or raised). Tell me what you think about this.

Ending Questions:

- What do you think are the most important pieces of going to college?
- Could you tell me how your views have changed since coming to college?
- How have you grown as a person? After having these experiences, what advice would you give to someone who will be going through this transition?
- Is there something else you think I should know to understand your experience better?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Thank the participant for their insight and sharing. Assume them of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.

Mid-Study Interview

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Hannah Piechowski

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: [include diagram if necessary]

Brief description of the project:

I am a doctoral student at Bellarmine University and I am interested in understanding how college students at your university experience the transition into collegiate life.

Initial Open-Ended Questions:

- How are things going now?
- Last meeting, you identified that you were feeling _____ about the transition into college. What has your experience been now?
- How are your classes going? What class do you think has challenged you the most? Is there a class that you are anxious about or feel is going to have a difficult midterm?
- What organizations or teams or groups have you become involved with? Are there any events coming up with those groups? I'd like to see your style of interpreting the world in action somehow.
- There was a recent event on campus regarding very politically charged issues, specifically regarding a student who is protected by DACA/Dreamers and another student who was protesting. How did you feel about that situation? Did the situation affect you?
- You mentioned that your outlook on life is influenced by bigger things that are happening in the world. How did this situation affect your worldview?
- Are there other events recently that have impacted your view?

- What is something really important that has happened to you since our last meeting? What does that situation say about you? Do you think that it will happen again or was this a one time thing? Do you think that this happened because of something you did or something that happened to you? Do you think this going to affect your whole world or just this situation?

Observation or Key Event Follow Up Questions:

- I noticed at (insert key event) that (insert specifics from observation) happened (or was discussed or raised). Tell me what you think about this.

Ending Questions:

- Could you tell me how your views have changed since coming to college?
- How have you grown as a person? After having these experiences, what advice would you give to someone who will be going through this transition?
- Is there something else you think I should know to understand your experience better?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Thank the participant for their insight and sharing. Assume them of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.

Final Interview

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Hannah Piechowski

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: [include diagram if necessary]

Brief description of the project:

I am a doctoral student at Bellarmine University and I am interested in understanding how college students at your university experience the transition into collegiate life.

Initial Open-Ended Questions:

- How are things going now?
- How were your mid-terms if you had any?
- What classes are going well and which ones are a challenge?
- Those that are a challenge, why do you think they are a challenge?

Artifacts:

Test/Paper

- So, tell me about this test or paper that went well.
- Why do you think it went well?
- Was it the topic or something about the paper, or was it something about you?
- Are you proud of this work?

Feeling in Creative Form

- Would you be willing to tell me about this piece or show it to me?
- Could I take a picture of it?
- What does this say about how you've felt about college?
- What does it say about you?

Emergent Theme Exploration:

Some themes have been appearing to me through this research, and I'd like to ask you about how and what you think about several different concepts, and how they relate to you.

- What is a topic that you are very passionate about? A topic that fires you up? This could be something justice or civil rights related, or something personal.
- What role does race play in your understanding of self?
- What role does gender play in your understanding of self?
- Would you describe yourself as religious or spiritual?
- What role does spirituality play in your understand of self?
- Would you describe yourself as empathetic?
- What role does the politics of the United States play in your understanding of self? What about the world? Do you consider yourself a political person?
- Have you ever experienced depression? Was it diagnosed by a professional or something that you were aware of? What do you think were the contributing factors?
- Do you feel like you can be your authentic self? Why or why not?

Transition Exploration:

As we talked about a long time ago, there are several parts to transition. I'd like to wrap up this exploration of your transition with a few recapping questions:

Situation

- How did you feel about the transition into college?
- Do you feel like you've been in control of your transition into college?
- Has your role changed?
- What have the biggest sources of stress been?

Self

- What about you has made this a successful transition to college?
- What do you value about yourself?
- What do you want to work on?

Social

- Who are your closest relationships right now?
- How have they supported you?

Strategies

- When things have been tough, what strategies have you used to handle the situation?
- Did you try to change the situation, live with it and make meaning of it, or do something to feel better after it was done?

Observation Follow Up:

- You are obviously a very committed student. Why do you think you are a committed student?

Retest:

If you would, I'd like for you to retake the ASQ. I think it would be interesting to see if there are any differences in your score.

- Previous score
- Current score
- Why do you think your score changed?
- How has your outlook on life changed?

Ending Questions:

- Is there something else you think I should know to understand your experience better?
- Is there anything that you think would help me understand you better?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Thank the participant for their insight and sharing. Assume them of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.

Appendix E: Coding

Initial

Academic Performance	Expectations	Management	Preparation
Academic Structure	Experiences	Memory	Present Moment
Achievement	Failure	Mindset	Pride
Acting	Family	Mistakes	Prioritizing Goals
Adjustment	Fate	Motivating	Professor
and Dialogue	Feelings	Nature of the World	Qualifications
Appeal	Fit	or Expression	Quiet
ASQ	Future	or Processing	Reality
Assignment Design	Global Factors	Orientation	Relationships
Attitude	Global Place	Other's Ability	Religion/Spirituality
Beliefs	Global Understanding	Other's Actions	Research Study
Capabilities	Good or Bad	Other's Needs	Self
Communication	Happiness	Other's Opinions	Shared Interest
Community Culture	Importance	Outlook	Skill
Comparing	Inability	Ownership	Societal Issues
	Independence &		
Consequence	Ownership	Participation	Stress
Creative Outlet	Indicators	Passion	Success
Depression/Diagnosis of			
Somekind	Initial Impressions	Personalities	Success and Failure
Developing	Interests	Personality	Support
			Support and
Diversity	Judgement	Perspective	Retention
Diversity - Limited		Perspective and	
Understanding	Justifying	Differences	Talent
Dualism/Paradox	Learning	Politics	Talent/Skill
	Learning/Making		
Effort and Results	Meaning	Positive	Time
Emotions	Limitations	Positive Outlook	Transition
Empathy	Making Meaning	Praise	Trust
Engagement			

Focused Example

Focused Codes	Emergent Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Outlook	Future	Certain	
Outlook	Future	Dependency on Others	
Outlook	Future	General Plan	
Outlook	Future	Uncertain	
Outlook	Global Understanding	Impact of Global Climate	
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Positive and Negative
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Living and Remembering
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Good and Bad
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Worry and Peace
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Family and Leaving Home
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Right and Wrong
Outlook	Perspective	Dualism/Paradox	Fault and Not
Outlook	Perspective	Positive and Negative	
Outlook	Perspective	Realistic	
Outlook	Perspective	Spectrum	
Outlook	Perspective	Spectrum	
Outlook	Politics	Aligning	
Outlook	Politics	Middle	
Outlook	Politics	Division	
Outlook	Politics	Not Good	
Outlook	Politics	Division	
Outlook	Politics	Liberal	
Outlook	Religion/Spirituality		
Self	Difficulty in Describing		
Self	Quiet		
Self	Comparing	to Past	
Self	Comparing	to Family	
Self	Comparing	to Others	
Self	Comparing	to High School	
Success and Failure	Failure	Dependent	
Success and Failure	Failure	External Forces	
Success and Failure	Failure	Learning from	
Success and Failure	Failure	Positive Causes	
Success and Failure	Failure	Self	
Success and Failure	Importance	High	
Success and Failure	Indicators	Learning from	
Success and Failure	Importance	Low	
Success and Failure	Indicators	About someone's character	
Transition	Academic Performance	Likes vs Dislikes	
Transition	Academic Performance	Engagement	Academic
Transition	Academic Performance	Engagement	Interest
Transition	Family	Parents on Transition	
Transition	Family	Siblings Comparing	

Transition	Family	Divided Views	
Transition	Self	Authentic	
Transition	Expectations	Different Outcome	
Transition	Expectations	Experiences	Previous Experience
Transition	Expectations	Experiences	Perspective Shaping
Transition	Expectations	Initial Impressions	
Transition	Expectations	Isolation	
Transition	Expectations	Met Expectations	
Transition	Expectations	of Self	
Transition	Expectations	Others	
Transition	Expectations	Preconceptions	
	Independence &		
Transition	Ownership		
Transition	Management		
Transition	Management	Prioritizing Goals	
Transition	Management	Self	
Transition	Relationships	Anxiety	
Transition	Relationships	Disconnection	
Transition	Relationships	Family	
Transition	Relationships	Joining Clubs	
Transition	Relationships	Joining Clubs	
Transition	Relationships	Making Friends	
Transition	Relationships	Other's Opinions	
Transition	Relationships	Personalities	
Transition	Relationships	Professor	
Transition	Relationships	Shared Interest	Art, Relationships
Transition	Relationships	Shared Interest	Lacrosse, Relationships
Transition	Relationships	Shared Interest	Music
Transition	Relationships	Shared Interest	Personalities
Transition	Relationships	Shared Interest	Poetry, Relationships
Transition	Stress	Causes	Anxiety
Transition	Stress	Causes	Finances
Transition	Support	Coaches	
Transition	Support	Physical Resources	
Transition	Support	RA	
Transition	Support	Receptive	
Transition	Support	Receptive	
Transition	Support	Student Mentor	
Transition	Support	Theory	
Transition	Support	Upperclassmen	
Transition	Theory	In	
Transition	Theory	In and Through	
Transition	Theory	Out and In	
Transition	Theory	Through	

Appendix F: Audit Trail

Data Management

		Beginning		
		Orientation	First Year Course	
	ASQ	Observations	Initial Interview	Observations
Nicole	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Campus Sing	9/6/17 4:00 PM	9/12/17 11:00 AM
John	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Campus Sing	9/6/17 3:00 PM	9/12/17 11:00 AM
Daniel	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Playfair	9/5/17 3:00 PM	9/14/17 11:00 AM
Anne	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Playfair	9/5/17 2:00 PM	9/14/17 11:00 AM
Jacob	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Health Fair	9/4/17 3:15 PM	9/14/17 11:00 AM
Thomas	8/25/17 8:30 PM	Ice Cream Social	9/4/17 11:00 AM	9/12/17 11:00 AM
Hours (42)	1	6	6	3

		Mid-Study		
		Mid-Study Interview	Classroom Observations	Observations Outside of Class
Nicole	9/28/17 3:00 PM	10/6/17 9:30 AM	Classics Club, 9/25/17 2:30pm	
John	9/28/17 2:00 PM	10/9/2017 9:30:00	Marching Band, 9/30/17	
Daniel	9/29/17 3:30 PM	10/5/17 11:00 AM	Poetry Club, 9/28/17 6:00pm	
Anne	10/4/17 3:24 PM	10/19/17 9:30 AM	Track Practice, 9/29/17 7:30pm	
Jacob	9/29/17 2:30 PM	10/10/17 3:00 PM	Lacrosse Practice, 9/30/2017 8:00am	
Thomas	9/29/17 9:30 AM	10/10/17 8:00 AM	Poetry Club, 9/28/17 6:00pm	
Hours (42)	6	6	6	

		End		
	Final Interview	Artifact	ASQ Retest	
Nicole	10/26/17 10:00 AM	10/26/17 10:00 AM	10/26/17 10:00 AM	
John	10/26/17 1:30 PM	10/26/17 1:30 PM	10/26/17 1:30 PM	
Daniel	10/31/17 11:00 AM	10/31/17 11:00 AM	10/31/17 11:00 AM	
Anne	10/24/17 1:00 PM	10/24/17 1:00 PM	10/24/17 1:00 PM	
Jacob	10/26/17 12:00 PM	10/26/17 12:00 PM	10/26/17 12:00 PM	
Thomas	10/26/17 11:00 AM	10/26/17 11:00 AM	10/26/17 11:00 AM	
Hours (42)	6	0	1	

Procedural Steps & Data Management

ASQ

Procedural Steps

1. Introduction of Purpose of Study and Voluntary Nature
2. Distribution of instrument and pens

3. Request for silence as people complete the instrument
4. Collect tests in a mail crate at the front of the cafeteria

Data Management

All scores entered into spreadsheet stored in cloud based personal drive. Participants' ASQ tests stored in physical binder, locked in researcher's office. Non-participants' ASQ tests stored in mail crate, locked in researcher's office.

Analysis Preparation

No preparation necessary

Orientation Observations

Procedural Steps

1. Permission for continued involvement in study obtained, including interviews and observations.
2. Observations made as available. Not pre-planned or arranged.
3. Upon opportunity of participant being at event, notes were taken on handheld device with a word processing feature.
4. Documented context, location, event, environment, participants' actions, conversations, facial expressions, etc.

Data Management

Notes stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point.

Analysis Preparation

Notes reviewed for accuracy and clarifying details. Supplemented by reflection and post-observation memos.

Initial Interview

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained.
2. Scheduled meeting through e-mail.
3. Identified preferable location of participants.
4. Reviewed the purpose of the study
5. Obtained verbal consent for recording on handheld cell phone with voice memo capability, and started recording.
6. Followed Interview Guide
7. Allowed for diversion, questions, and conversation outside of the guide.
8. Thanked participants for their participation
9. Identified areas of consideration for future interviews; added to interview guides

Data Management

Notes, audio recording, transcripts, and memos stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point

Analysis Preparation

Submitted to Temi.com for preliminary transcription. Reviewed by researcher for accuracy of sound, time, and speakers.

First Year Course Observations

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained.
2. Confirmed location, date, and time of attendance through orientation schedule.
3. Confirmed presenter and content.

4. Arrived 10 minutes early.
5. Placed self in back of the room with visual access to auditorium.
6. Documented context, location, event, environment, participants' actions, conversations, facial expressions, etc.
7. Waiting until auditorium was empty before leaving the site.

Data Management

Notes stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point

Analysis Preparation

Notes reviewed for accuracy and clarifying details. Supplemented by reflection and post-observation memos.

Mid-Study Interview

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained.
2. Scheduled meeting through e-mail.
3. Identified preferable location of participants.
4. Reviewed the purpose of the study
5. Obtained verbal consent for recording on handheld cell phone with voice memo capability, and started recording.
6. Followed Interview Guide
7. Allowed for diversion, questions, and conversation outside of the guide.
8. Thanked participants for their participation
9. Identified areas of consideration for future interview; added to interview guides

Data Management

Notes, audio recording, transcripts, and memos stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point

Analysis Preparation

Submitted to Temi.com for preliminary transcription. Reviewed by researcher for accuracy of sound, time, and speakers.

Classroom Observations

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained from student to observe their hardest class.
2. Permission obtained from the professor of class through email to attend and observe.
3. Arrived to class 10 minutes early.
4. Asked professor or students present where no one typically sits and where would be out of the way for the researcher to sit.
5. Took notes on laptop using observational guide template.
6. Refrained for participating in class unless a question was directed toward the researcher. In such cases, answered quickly and politely, and directed attention back towards the class.
7. Waited until class was done and students departed before leaving the classroom.

Data Management

Notes stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point.

Analysis Preparation

Notes reviewed for accuracy and clarifying details. Supplemented by reflection and post-observation memos.

Observations Outside of Class

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained.
2. Arranged presence with coordinator of the event (lacrosse coach, faculty sponsor for poetry club, faculty sponsor for classics club) OR Attended event as regular spectator (university football game, track practice)
3. Took notes using the observational guide on hand held device with word processing capabilities.
4. Remained in observer role.
5. Waited until a break or end of the event to depart.

Data Management

Notes stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point.

Analysis Preparation

Notes reviewed for accuracy and clarifying details. Supplemented by reflection and post-observation memos.

Final Interview

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained.
2. Scheduled meeting through e-mail.
3. Identified preferable location of participants.
4. Reviewed the purpose of the study
5. Obtained verbal consent for recording on handheld cell phone with voice memo capability, and started recording.
6. Followed Interview Guide, including review of artifact and ASQ re-test at conclusion
7. Allowed for diversion, questions, and conversation outside of the guide.
8. Thanked participants for their participation

Data Management

Notes, audio recording, transcripts, and memos stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point.

Analysis Preparation

Submitted to Temi.com for preliminary transcription. Reviewed by researcher for accuracy of sound, time, and speakers.

Artifact

Procedural Steps

1. 1. Permission obtained.
2. Discussed as part of the final interview. See Procedural steps for final interview.

Data Management

Pictures of artifacts stored in cloud based personal drive. Folders created for each participant with subsequent folders for each data collection point.

Analysis Preparation

No preparation necessary

ASQ Re-Test

Procedural Steps

1. Permission obtained.
2. Completed at the conclusion of the final interview. See Procedural Steps for final interview.

Data Management

Participants' ASQ tests stored in physical binder, locked in researcher's office. Scores entered into spreadsheet stored in cloud based personal drive.

Analysis Preparation

No preparation necessary

Analysis Process

1. Transcription Review - Audited clarity of transcription and areas of revision. Temi.com did not transcribe the audio to full accuracy. Cleaning, or preparing, of transcriptions was not completed at this time. Identified themes for future consideration through review of transcriptions, memoing, and reflection.
 - Initial Interview Memo Notes
 - Global events and status impacting personal understanding of self and operation in the world
 - True understanding of “good” and “bad”... originally a moral designation. Used as such?
 - Cross-participant liking for professor/advisor and class
 - All having issues describing self
 - All having issues describing success and failure
 - Recognizing power of moving on from failure
 - Not making big deals out of successes and failures
 - Space that is own
 - Ease of authenticity
 - Previously forced connections; new chosen connections
 - Feeling freedom - coming to college, room, environment, abstract art
 - Mid-Study Interview Memo Notes
 - Emerging: new memories of what the transition was like
 - Researcher highly responsive to relationship ideas
 - Internalize or keep close to self opinions about major events
 - Moving on from the immediate wants of connections with like minded or shared interest people, to finding different views, beliefs, and understandings in dialogue
 - Some participants - very strong relationship with researcher, ability to explore many realms of issues
 - Unaffected by current issues because of experience previously
 - Comfort of all participants with researcher; more vocal and forward/honest
 - Comparison to high school work and relationships
 - While impacted by the global climate to have a larger view of life, self-isolate or remain distant to big issues; strong opinions, but not active in response
 - Surprised by the presence of major national/racial conflict on campus
 - Final Interview Memo Notes
 - Shared frustrations with people’s views in the name of religion
 - Isolation and feeling alone contributes to feelings of depression

- Authentic self: either not able because still searching for it or yes because I am comfortable in current self
 - Stress: time management
 - Racism - empowering the system (Thomas, Daniel, Anne)
 - 3/6 have clear directions of future employment
 - Similar Class: Anne, Nicole, Thomas, Daniel... John or Jacob?
 - Unable to truly understand the experiences of the other
 - John and Jacob - shared atheistic belief structure
 - Central political views
- 2. Initial Coding Process
 - State what is happening
 - Use gerunds
 - Go line by line, for all pieces of data collection including ASQ
 - Remain open to emotions, actions, thoughts, directions, influences
 - Allow for multiple codes per line
 - Identify line with a number, write code into a spreadsheet for future sorting and compiling
 - Average 400 codes per data set; 101 codes total
- 3. Focused Coding Process
 - Combine coding for sections of data: beginning, middle, and end; conduct focused coding by section of data
 - Sort, combine, shuffle, arrange codes
 - Identify those that appear most often
 - Identify those that appear once or only a few times
 - Identify which can fall into other categories based on theory: transition and learned optimism
 - Identify which are an experience, which are personal
 - Identify overarching ideas: attempting to remove likes/dislikes, for or against, success or failure impact, self or others
 - Trying to identifying primary category or thing
 - Recognize that will go back and add emergent subcategories later
 - Used initial codes from ASQ, Bio data, and Initial Interview to craft optional codes for the Mid and Final sections of Initial Coded Data
 - Note to go back and sort
 - Any overarching focused codes
 - Overlap between codes; many relationships
 - Identify 20 to 30 large themes; Write on post-its; place on wall
- 4. Emergent Coding
 - Looked for patterns of themes, and similarities and differences within Focused Codes
 - Removing Patterns that are isolated; only held one time or by one person
 - Relocating Patterns to fit more appropriately under other codes/patterns
 - Cleaning or Changing Codes to better match meaning of Initial Coding
 - Maintaining accuracy to meaning; need to be able to trust that later
 - Removing poor codes and recoding
 - Realized started with WAY too many codes

- Initial:
 - Strong desire for Authenticity
 - Technique of Comparing
 - Impact of Global Culture
 - Importance of Success and Failure
 - Management
 - Mid:
 - Strong preferences for and against classes
 - Filter sub-themes or sections underneath larger themes
 - Write down an outline of all codes; place on wall
5. Theoretical
- Though knowing the pieces and aspects of Transition Theory and support, made self open to the unique pieces presented in this study
 - Found that some pieces of Transition Theory were echoes loud and clear, others were absent; and some aspects revealed new concepts, especially related to management techniques, view of global society, and success and failures
 - Utilized Diagramming during axial and emergent to help understand relationships; taking codes from alphabetical order into a dynamic and flexible format
 - Remembering that just because the researcher is drawn to something doesn't mean that's what the data is saying
 - Themes are present throughout the different times of data collection, but some are more prevalent at certain points than others
 - Looking for the prominent themes and patterns, and then understanding the differences among them
 - Isolating unique themes that support the exploration of transition
 - Removing themes that do not support the theoretical model
6. Diagramming
- Multiple forms drafted, overlapping circles, lines representing spectrums, time representations