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Understanding the hybrid high school student experience

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Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

UNDERSTANDING THE HYBRID HIGH SCHOOL

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

in Learning Technologies

by

Riley Leary

April, 2018

Kay Davis, Ed.D.- Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Riley Leary

Under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to

and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid High School education is a disruptive innovation that has begun to replace traditional

brick and mortar schools for many students world-wide. In addition to a traditional school model

are the traditional metrics by which schools are compared. These metrics have been achievement

data, success rates, and funding analyses. These metrics do not account for the lived experience

of the high school students, in the same way that the traditional model of education does not

account for the changing methods available for learning. This study is a phenomenological

analysis of the lived experience of high school students who have attended hybrid educational

programs. These programs utilize the digital advances available for learning by offering at least

half of their curriculum online, while maintaining face to face instruction during the rest of

curricular time. The premise of this study is that high school provides an *ethos*, or manifested

culture, for each student served. The questions used in nine interviews to understand this ethos

were created using research in the area of adolescent life satisfaction. The research resulted in

focus areas to be discussed: autonomy, engagement, social capital, and community

connectedness. Participants in this study age 18-20 recently graduated from four years attending

a hybrid program. The participants were introspective and detailed in their explanations of life

experiences during their time in hybrid programs, and how their ethos was shaped by

experiences in each of the areas of life satisfaction listed above. The interview analyses led to

four conclusions regarding hybrid high school student life. First, the hybrid program graduates

interviewed have a rich sense of community. These communities vary and most are members of

multiple communities. All feel a sense of belonging and are connected to groups beyond family.

Second, the hybrid program graduates are highly self-reliant. Participants pointed out that they

have relationships with people who are supportive, but that they are independently responsible

for overcoming life's obstacles. Third, these conclusions are intended to influence design of future innovational programs. Finally, the hybrid high school did serve as a disruptive innovation which had clear benefits for the adolescents participating. This study, in combination with additional studies focusing on specific program elements, could result in quality innovative programs that meet the needs of a changing adolescent population.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first online learning experience at the high school level was created in the mid-1990s, and today over 250,000 students are enrolled in virtual schools (Horn & Staker, 2011). This growth is due to two key developments in the history of education: distance education and digital learning. Distance education practices can be traced back to the mid-1800s when course materials were first mailed to learners (Matthews, 1999). Digital learning dates back to the 1960s and the PLATO project at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, which was used to deliver instruction on a handful of topics including advanced military training. It is at the convergence of distance education, digital learning, and the advent of the World Wide Web that the United States sits primed for a continued rise in secondary virtual school enrollment.

Currently, secondary school virtual school enrollment in the United States is handled by several different entities. In the 1990s, the first few pioneering programs were developed by school districts under federal grants and by states. One example of these is VHS, Inc. which began in Massachusetts under a federal grant with assistance by the Concord Consortium. VHS is categorized as a consortium run virtual school. Another example is Florida Virtual High School (FLVS), which began when two counties combined state funds. FLVS is categorized as a local area run virtual school. These types of programs are still common and now smaller districts and charter programs have been developed. These smaller programs, along with private entities, gained the most numbers from 2009 to 2014 (J. Watson, Pape, Murin, Gemin, & Vashaw, 2014). Some of these programs require students to learn course material purely online, whereas more tend to combine online learning with face to face instruction. Teachers of record tend to be based at a learning site where they facilitate virtual education and incorporate cooperative learning activities into these programs.

These two models of learning, entirely virtual as well as virtual combined with face to face, mark a disruptive innovation which is a significant departure from traditional high school in the United States. The differences and effects of these differences on student learning and experience are not yet understood. Because researchers predict a continued sharp increase in the use of virtual education at the secondary level (Horn & Staker, 2011), it is vital that these changes be analyzed from the students' perspective. Unfortunately, there has not been sufficient study of students' experiences with virtual education to understand how that experience may impact those students. Not only are their voices necessary to understand the virtual high school experience itself, but these perspectives must be analyzed with regard to the "ethos" of the high school experience. An "ethos" has been described in studies as a group experience, encompassing the physical environment in which that experience takes place as well as the intangible aspects of the experience (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Rutter, 1982; Thelen, 1974). Intangible aspects of the experience include group dynamics, emotions related to the experience, and underlying norms and values within the group. In 1974 the term "ethos" was applied to the high school setting by researchers and differentiated from previous studies of similar concepts (Thelen, 1974). These researchers identified the generic definition of the term, described as the underlying spirit of a culture and the underlying ideals that characterize life inside that group, and applied it to high school. Precursors of the term "ethos" were studies of group nature (Lewin, 1947), community dynamics, (Hall, 1916), and the emotional aspect of experience (Bion, 2003). To regard the high school experience as an ethos is a key assumption for this study. From this epistemological perspective, the ethos of virtual high school can be quite different from that of traditional high school, even though both descend from the same institutions historically.

History of the High School Ethos

The experience of traditional high school in the United States dates back to the 19th century. Originally an institution for the elite, high schools were developed as moral, civic, and career oriented institutions (Goldin, 1998). During that time, local government and families exerted extreme pressure to focus on the future careers of high school students, and the moral and civic curricula were lost under that pressure (Spring, 1994). High schools of the late 19th century, then, focused on preparing attendees for their future careers. The elitist nature of high schools had been challenged as well. Dating back to 1894, education leaders had been trying to avoid class-based education (Krug, 1964). Partly because this controversy continued during the expansion of high schools, by the late 19th century a differentiated curriculum was offered to serve the vocational needs of a variety of students (Spring, 1994).

The differentiated curriculum offered in the late 19th century helped shape Edward Krug's (1964) Social Efficiency Theory. Social efficiency is a term used to describe the responsibility of schools to produce human capital that would perform a future job well and get along with others in the workplace. These functions of high school were central to American public education in the 20th century, as schools met demands of the labor market for workers as well as the demands of students desiring jobs upon graduation (Krug, 1964). This emphasis continued throughout the century. It is still common for high schools to offer a variety of courses for college preparation, vocational training, and basic education continue to dominate public school curricula. Students must meet basic coursework requirements and standardized to graduate high school, however additional classes may be chosen depending on the students' needs and life plan. For example, a student may choose an art or music elective because that is a life goal or because that is a hobby. A student may choose a theater elective or even a high

school with a reputable theater program. There are currently multiple reasons for choosing class enrollment other than purely core academic progression.

The traditional high school experience goes beyond coursework. According to Springs (1994), high schools were developed amidst the expansion of the social role of schools in general Schools turned into major social agencies around the late 19th century, providing social services, teaching accepted behaviors, and becoming community centers (Spring, 1994). This expanded role of high schools addressed what G. Stanley Hall (1916), one of the premier psychologists of the time, considered a critical stage in the development of high school students. G. Stanley Hall urged proper socialization, development of a sense of cooperation, and development of a sense of social service to properly guide adolescents to adulthood. For the high school movement, this led to the creation of extracurricular activities in addition to classroom curriculum in the early 1900s.

Extracurricular activities in high schools began as a way to unify high school students and prepare them for participation in cooperative democracy (Spring, 1994). These activities continue to thrive in American high schools, and have been used to analyze assimilation levels and predict achievement of current high school students (Ekstrom, Goertz, & Rock, 1988). The introduction of extracurricular activities and their benefits was just one step in the portrayal of high schools as affecting more than academic achievement.

During this time, studies on educational achievement shifted to include extra-curricular components as well. At the end of the 1970s studies were focused on the context in which students learn (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Rutter, 1982), and by the end of the 1990s educational researchers were critical of studies that neglected extra-curricular factors (Slee, Weiner, & Tomlinson, 1998; Thrupp, 1999). Building on the work of Rutter (1982), Bryk and Driscoll (1988) studied high school as a shared life including teachers and students in a community

developing both emotionally and cognitively together. These researchers asserted that a high school can be seen this way because students and teachers share values, goals, and daily agendas. Further, students and teachers form relationships around these shared ideas. In their conclusion, these researchers point out that no aspect of high school life can be neglected when examining the high school experience. This all-encompassing perspective must be applied to virtual high school as well.

Background of Virtual Education

Secondary education underwent a technological overhaul starting in the mid-1990s. While the analysis of these additional influences of high school continues, the 20th century is marked by the introduction of digital learning. By 2008, virtual schools had reached the U.S., Australia, Canada, Finland, Israel, and United Kingdom. In Israel, a high school hybrid that blended virtual learning with face to face instruction began in 2000 as a reaction to sub-standard education at the secondary level (Mittelman, 2001).

In the United States, virtual schools at the high school level were developed beginning in 1994 with one program, and expanded in 2000 with seven new state programs, until it burgeoned with 30 state programs in 2007 (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Roblyer, 2008). In 1994, Utah began an electronic high school, the very same year the first Internet browser went live. As it is more popularly known, the Concord Consortium's Virtual High School (VHS) began offering courses in the United States in 1996 (Roblyer, 2008). Another important institution began that year in Florida; the Florida Virtual School (FLVS) began the first state-run virtual high school system (Barbour & Reeves, 2009). Teacher education specifically designed for virtual education began in Michigan in 2004. These programs grew in popularity quickly because parents and students exercised their right to adapt the high school experience to fit their needs (Zehr, 2000).

Between 2001 and 2005, virtual high school programs increased from a few significant programs to over 30 states with virtual learning available and a variety of entities offering those programs. In 2001, at least 12 states had virtual learning available in high school, and these programs could be separated by the entity offering each of them. There are state level programs, college based programs, consortium/regionally based programs, local educational agency based programs, virtual charters, and private programs (Clark & By, 2001). The students attending these schools are primarily rural students who could not access the curriculum otherwise, followed by suburban and urban students seeking to individualize their high school experience (Karlin, 2005).

The U.S. Department of Education began emphasizing the importance of virtual options in 2004 with its National Vision for Technology. In this document, The U.S. Department of Education presented a national vision for technology in which virtual schools and e-learning are represented as part of a strategy for achieving national goals. The following key goals include: provide every student access to e learning, enable every teacher to participate in e learning training, encourage use of e-learning options to meet NCLB requirements, explore creative ways to fund e-learning, and develop quality measures and accreditation standards for e-learning (Paige, Hickock, & Patrick, 2004). The biggest reason for this change was access to curriculum and qualified teachers for rural students. In urban areas, students are motivated by access to Advanced Placement courses, dual enrollment for college credit, independence, and flexibility (Bedard & Knox-Pipes, 2006). All of these motivations reflect John Dewey's (2004) ideologies about social equalization and human development to its fullest. Technology brings with it a new mode of delivery in the high school system, which is causing the latest reconstruction of the U.S. high school system.

At the forefront of conversations around digital learning are the same issues dating back to the origins of secondary education. In review, these are: the preparation of students for participation in cooperative democracy, the academic preparation of students for their chosen career paths, the socialization of students, and the adolescent development of students. Central to these issues has always been the question of whether equal opportunity exists for all students to develop fully in these areas. With these questions in mind, various research studies have been conducted to understand the needs of students in high schools. These studies, however, lack the ethos perspective. In order to truly understand the implications of this new educational trend, research must include all aspects of the high school experience. A phenomenological approach provides the open-endedness necessary to pursue all aspects of the virtual high school experience.

Problem Statement

Because previous studies have focused on the needs of students in traditional high schools or the needs of digital learners in higher education courses, there is a gap in the research related to digital high school students. The most recent meta-review to date was done in 2013, analyzing research trends in the area of blended learning. This study defined blended learning as partially virtual and partially brick and mortar experience (Drysdale, Graham, Spring, & Halverson, 2013). The analysis showed that 77% of research in this area was focused on higher education. Of those studies, 82% used quantitative or mixed methods to understand learner outcomes, compare programs, and inform funding. While these factors are important, there is a need to understand the lived experience of the learner in a secondary virtual program. This experience is not limited just to academic performance or quantifiable characteristics. To assume that the high school student experience can be fully understood with quantitative or otherwise

finite data is to make the same mistake highlighted by Roger Slee and colleagues (1998). Slee noted that this type of mistake "blinds us to the complex lives lived out in the classroom" (p.1).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to facilitate a phenomenological understanding of high school students' experience attending a hybrid high school. Also called a blended learning model, hybrid programs will be defined as those in which students access content online with some degree of autonomy simultaneously with learning in a brick and mortar setting (Staker & Horn, 2012). The hybrid model of secondary education is an answer to the growing initiative in the United States to use technology to achieve learning goals. Understanding the lived experience of virtual high school students will inform program developers of the complex nature of the learner's experience. Four major developmental areas for adolescents are autonomy, social capital, engagement, and connectedness (Bandura, 2001; Kagitcibasi, 2005; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Portes, 1998). Using these life satisfaction areas as a lens for understanding student perspectives will help program designers develop programs that cultivate more enriching and academically successful experiences. These students' experiences will enlighten program developers and elevate the level of experience in hybrid high school programs as the number of programs continues to grow to meet the needs of learners.

Research Questions

This study asks the following central guiding research question: *What are the lived experiences of students participating in a hybrid/virtual high school program?* To shape the work of the study and unpack the overarching research question, this study poses the following research sub-questions:

1. What were the experiences influencing their self-efficacy & autonomy?
2. What were the experiences influencing their engagement?

3. What were the experiences influencing a sense of connectedness & community?
4. What were the experiences influencing or influenced by their social capital?

Role of Researcher & Key Assumptions

This study is conducted with the assumption that the most accurate description of a high school aged students' experience comes from the students themselves. Interviews were conducted virtually with students considering this assumption. Beyond this, it is important to realize assumptions of the researcher that may affect the interpretation of student responses. The researcher views reality as subject to the interpretation of the individual case. It is possible for reality to be perceived as different things to different people. Also, the subject's interpretation of events may not be clear, particularly at the adolescent stage, so that themes were examined that were not explicitly recognized by the interviewee. For example, a student who is describing their social connections may not have examined the degree of reliance or shared values in those relationships, but may explain that they contact those friends quite often outside of class time for help figuring out how to solve problems. While the subject may not indicate that this relationship constitutes connectedness, the researcher would interpret that connectedness due to the behavior manifestations that are related to connectedness. Thus, what was implied by interview answers may be as important as what was actually stated. This assumption made it vitally important for the researcher to resist over-interpretation of interview responses. This was facilitated by noting behavioral manifestations of the themes found in the literature and focusing the analysis using only those behaviors justified by previous research.

This researcher has spent 18 years in the secondary school environment in various roles including teacher, intervention counselor, and administrator. As a teacher and an intervention counselor, the researcher has found students to be open to share life experiences, but not always

experienced at examining cause and effect relationships between these experiences and their own

personal development. Further, conversations in classrooms with a large audience tend to contain

descriptions of events only without interpretation or deep consideration, while conversations in

smaller intervention groups seem to make students more comfortable sharing insights. Still, the

small groups of intervention counseling have not yielded unguarded communication. Throughout

the years of discussions with teenagers, the most honest and candid responses have come during

one on one conversations. These private conversations have revealed traumas, allowed for

personal examination, and allowed adolescents space to analyze their experiences without

outside influence.

Delimitations of the Study

Research for this phenomenological study was gathered from a small group of nine

students participating in hybrid programs in the United States. While the participant experiences

were all composed of at least 50% virtual learning, their exact programs vary. The experiences of

these students may not be similar to other students in other hybrid programs. A single interview

with each student was the only data gathering strategy and may limit the amount of information

obtained specific to the virtual experience and its effects on personal developmental growth.

Phenomenological research involves an interpretive process at risk for researcher bias which

could affect the accuracy of the interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

Conceptual Framework & Definition of Terms

This research was framed by three conceptual areas. The first concept is the disruptive

innovation of virtual education and how this new model affects the ethos of high school. The

second concept is the ethos of the high school experience and how that ethos influences students'

quality of life during the high school years. The third concept is that there are specific areas of

life satisfaction that affect high school students which are: autonomy, engagement, community, and social capital. In an effort to provide consistency and clarity of concepts within this study, the following definitions are provided and grouped within the three main conceptual areas.

Terms associated with the disruptive innovation of hybrid high school.

- *Blended Learning:* Formal education program in which student learns in part from online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, pace and at least in part in a supervised brick and mortar location away from home (Staker & Horn, 2012). Used interchangeably with Hybrid

- *Brick and Mortar:* Physical building in which learning takes place under guidance of teacher of record (Setzer, Lewis, & Greene, 2005).

- *Digital Learning:* Learning that takes place online, with some student control over pace, place, path, and time (Staker & Horn, 2012).

- *Distance Education:* various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization (Holmberg, 2005).

- *Face to Face:* Learning that takes place in same physical location as teacher of record.

- *Full time:* Entire course load for graduation from high school is online

- *Hybrid High School:* Formal high school program in which student learns in part from online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, pace and at least in part in a supervised brick and mortar location away from home (Staker & Horn, 2012). Used interchangeably with Blended

- *Online Program:* work directly with students and deliver online learning services, but are not "schools." Online programs may include state virtual schools, districts, consortia, and other suppliers (J. Watson et al., 2014).

- *Part time:* Less than 100% course load for graduation from high school is online

- *Teacher of Record:* is an educator who is responsible for a student's learning activities that are within a subject or course, and are aligned to performance measures, including assignment of the student's final grade in a course (J. Watson et al., 2014).

- *Virtual Learning:* Learning that takes place online, with some student control over pace, place, path, and time (Staker & Horn, 2012).

- *Virtual School:* full-time online schools, sometimes referred to as cyber schools, which do not serve students at a physical facility. Teachers and students are geographically remote from one another, and all or most of the instruction is provided online (J. Watson et al., 2014).

Terms associated with the ethos of the high school experience.

- *Autonomy:* Student's perception of control over given situation (Fulton & Turner, 2008).

- *Community:* In relation to the social context of a school, (See Bryk) a sense of belonging (See Faircloth) to group that meets the student's basic psychological needs (Jasinski & Lewis, 2016).

- *Connectedness:* Student perception of being helped, liked, respected, and trusted (Haynes, Emmons, Ben-Avie, & Comer, 2001).

- *Engagement:* Academic engagement where academically student has sense of commitment demonstrated by active participation in academic outcome (Worrell, 2000).

- *Self-efficacy:* An individual's perception of his/her ability to perform adequately in a given situation (Bandura, 1982).

- *Social Capital:* Embodied in relationships between people, social capital is the ability to make things happen or take action as a function of those relationships (Coleman, 1988).

Significance of Study

By 2010, the National Technology Plan for the United States specifically noted blended instruction as an area of focus and supported research and evaluation of these types of programs at all educational levels. The original challenges to these online education programs still exist, and current trends imply several new challenges. Some of these new challenges include: how to design engaging learning experiences, how to fund programs, how to train highly qualified instructors, and how to maximize learning experiences in a new format (C.-S. Li & Irby, 2008).

The United States Department of Education has identified key areas of development necessary as the nation inevitably increases its commitment to online learning. These areas include accreditation, achievement metrics, and teacher development (Paige, et al., 2004). The number of programs in online education continues to grow (Vail, 2001), while the programs lack the information necessary to be highly successful (Roblyer, 2008). Research into the phenomenon of the virtual high school experience may provide information that can be used to inform all of the aforementioned issues.

Summary

In summary, this study focused on the lived experience of high school students who have diverted from the traditional model of a brick and mortar environment to one that involves a virtual environment. This study comes at a time when students are able to choose from more programs than ever before, and their choices affect what is offered in the future. The disruptive innovation of online learning has changed the landscape of programs available to high school students. The Department of Education and the growing number of virtual school programs both suggest that hybrid high school programs will continue to be developed. The development of these programs would be most effective if based largely on the experiences expressed by the students' own voices. This phenomenological study provides information that will enhance the development of future programs. Those voices will be heard in this study, as they relay their own perceptions of high school online.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The largest growth in the educational system worldwide is occurring in hybrid learning environments, in which students learn online in an adult-supervised environment at least part of the time (Horn & Staker, 2011). Because of this growth, online learning has the potential to transform America's education system. As more and more students choose to attend hybrid high school programs, focus is needed on their lived experience. This chapter identifies and analyzes the premise that the hybrid high school experience is a disruptive innovation and that innovation provides a unique high school experience. Next, this chapter explores the idea that the hybrid high school experience is an "ethos," or a set of physical and emotional circumstances that affect adolescent development. Finally, previous research on four particular areas of adolescent development and their relationships to both traditional and hybrid high school will be explored.

Historical Perspective of Hybrid High School

Since the first hybrid high school program was initiated in 1994 in Utah (J. Watson, Winograd, & Kalmon, 2004), this mode of secondary education delivery has grown. The US Department of Education presented a national vision for technology in the early 1990s in which virtual schools and e-learning were represented as a strategy for achieving national goals (Paige et al., 2004). Outlined in this vision were key ideas: provide every student access to e learning, enable every teacher to participate in e-learning training, encourage use of e learning options to meet NCLB requirements, explore creative ways to fund e learning, and develop quality measures and accreditation standards for e learning. Globally by 2008, virtual schools had reached Australia, Canada, Finland, and United Kingdom in addition to the U.S. (Roblyer, 2008). In the United States, by this time virtual secondary education exploded with 30 state programs. Teacher education specifically designed for virtual education began in 2004 in Michigan. While

no significant difference has been found between virtual and traditional models for higher education, there is a lack of research for high school student success (Roblyer, 2004). To date, programs include students using a virtual classroom to take surveys and quizzes; engaged in collaborative discussions in discussion forums, wikis, and blogs; and working in collaborative online groups to share knowledge and demonstrate knowledge (Waldron, 2014). Use of internet resources, discussion forums, and other 21st century learning tools have sparked new excitement for learning (Waldron, 2014). Today, the National Center for Educational Statistics (Kena, et al., 2016) shows hybrid high schools as the fastest growing programs in the nation's education systems.

Hybrid High School as a Disruptive Innovation

One area of focus for this research is the perceived differences between the blended-learning of a hybrid high school and a traditional high school experience. The hybrid model offers a new model for how education can be delivered. This model is sufficiently different from previous delivery models and as such should be considered a disruptive innovation (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013) requiring deep understanding in order to make it successful. While first used to describe technological advances in business, the term disruptive innovation was applied to education by Christensen himself in 2013.

As applied to technological advancements, Christensen identified a critical decision to be made by business managers. These managers must decide whether to confront change and adapt practices to maximize client potential, or to ignore change and rely on their niche of client base to carry them into the future (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000). This forced decision making is what led the original authors of the term to use the word "disruptive." While the word carries a negative connotation, however, the results of facing this challenge need not be negative.

Researchers in the field of disruptive innovation advise that a careful analysis of the current practices and the ability to change one's own practices lead to improved tools and systems (Christensen, 1997; Tellis, 2006). Some researchers identify the ability to embrace technological and business change "visionary" (Tellis, 2006). The ability to keep up with technological advances requires a different type of innovation than the ability to keep up with changes in business itself, however (Henderson, 2006). These differences led to a variety of strategies identified for dealing with disruptive innovation from 1997-2010. What these strategies have in common, however, is that they all rely on an awareness of the client experience and use that awareness to change their processes (Slater & Mohr, 2006).

Researchers have barely begun to identify the parameters of the hybrid education innovation, predict elements that might make it successful, and understand its impact (Hadderman, 2002). Current educational consumers are in a transition period where brick and mortar institutions are the traditional delivery method, purely virtual programs are considered by some to be the future, and the blended, hybrid model falls between these extremes. As society progresses through innovative ways to learn, data is constantly gathered to determine the effectiveness of each model (Education; Huett, Huett, & Ringlaben, 2011). It is important to ensure that a large part of that data consists of student voices and their own perceptions of their experience with these models (Rice, 2006). Markides recommends more research to analyze education as a disruptive innovation (Markides, 2006) so that future programs could be designed to maximize learning. Subsequent to the identification of educational programs as disruptive innovations, however, the analyses of their components has focused largely on higher education (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011).

Phenomenological study of the student experience will provide a better understanding of the mindset of today's high school student (Nuttall, Shankar, Beverland, & Hooper, 2011). Reality does not exist without the interpretation of the subject's mind, therefore a phenomenological approach to understanding the virtual high school experience is the best way to access and understand the true lived experience (Dilthey & Jameson, 1972; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Hybrid High School as an Ethos

Before the second area of focus can be examined, the existence of the hybrid high school experience as an "ethos" of adolescent life must be accepted. The relationship between a student's high school experience and the overall life satisfaction of the student has been well established (Rutter, 1982). Historically, the high school experience has encompassed more than academics- since its inception it has been characterized as the heart of the community, as a morality builder, and as a counseling center (Spring, 1994). The significance of the high school's role at the center of the adolescent life can be marked clearly by the amount of time spent there, as is the central theme in Michael Rutter's studies (Rutter, 1982). Rutter and his team examined what they call the "ethos" of secondary education- the idea that school is much more than academics to the staff and students. Their theory states that this ethos affects the well-being and success of every child and that longitudinal studies of these effects are needed to determine what type of ethos is effective and in what ways (Rutter, 1982). In this study, the ethos of the high school experience will be examined phenomenologically. The phenomenon of the hybrid high school experience is represented, then, by the accumulation of experiences such as online conversations, online research, online completion of schoolwork, as well as in person relationships, facilitation, and testing. The effects of the high school ethos have been documented

in relationship to drop out rates, adult incarceration, college aspiration, and identity itself (Arum & Beattie, 1999; Bryk & Thum, 1989).

The high school ethos influences students during their adolescent years and in their adult years. Penelope Hawe and colleagues addressed the whole school ethos in their study of adolescent development (Hawe et al., 2015). In this action based study researchers applied a whole school change process to identify effects on risk behavior of students grades 10-12. Particularly for girls, results revealed a significant decrease in risk behaviors when the school environment was changed. The specific changes utilized included student empowerment by increasing opportunities for input and participation. Professional development of teachers was also included and focused on the relationships formed with students. Another study by Arum and Beattie connected the schooling environment to eventual incarceration of students later in life (Arum & Beattie, 1999). Arum and Beattie point out in their conclusions that high school can be thought of as a defining moment in an individual's life. Decisions made and coping skills acquired during these years affect the overall outcome of an individual's life (Laub & Sampson, 1993). These studies highlight the ethos of high school as vitally important to the outcome of a student's life.

Studies converging on whole school ethos change have revealed direct relationships between ethos and a sense of safety, connectedness, and self-value (Hawe et al., 2015). These same studies show corresponding behaviors change when the high school ethos changes. These behavioral changes include risk behavior, health management, and participation in extra-curricular activities. The ethos of each high school is quite different and must be cultivated to have the most positive effect possible on adolescent life. These studies leave little doubt as to the existence or the importance of the high school ethos. Lacking from these studies, however, is an

understanding of the ethos as perceived by the students themselves. In addition, studies have not connected the major themes of adolescent development to virtual program experience. This study will address the lack of virtual student perspective. In order to do this, interview discussion will encompass four major themes for adolescent development during high school: autonomy, social capital, engagement, and connectedness.

Hybrid High School and Adolescent Development

The second area of focus in this study is about the expected personal growth of adolescents during their high school experience. Literature exists that identifies life satisfaction as related to the high school experience and elements of the high school experience deemed important by adolescents themselves. In one longitudinal life satisfaction study of high school students, researchers found eight themes that were particularly salient to the perceived happiness of those students (Suldo, Frank, Chappel, Albers, & Bateman, 2014). Of these areas, those that have repeatedly been studied in relationship to the high school experience were: confidence as influenced by autonomy granting, social capital, engagement, and connectedness/community (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014; Collibee, LeTard, & Aikins, 2014; Davis, Chang, Andrzejewski, & Poirier, 2014; Dogan & Celik, 2014; Juang & Silbereisen, 2002; King & Gaerlan, 2014; McLaren, Schurmann, & Jenkins, 2015; Shogren, Kennedy, Dowsett, & Little, 2014). As a result of this research, these themes were further investigated to inform this study and will be discussed in this chapter. Research on the emergence of these themes in virtual high school is limited, and will be included within each section.

Autonomy and self-efficacy in high school. Autonomy and self-efficacy are important variables in the life of an adolescent. Confidence and self-efficacy are internal variables affecting

the high school experience. Confidence is linked to autonomy because, during adolescence, it is built by a cycle of personal beliefs about one's ability (self-efficacy) and successful experiences utilizing autonomy (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Therefore, in order to examine the internal variable of confidence for adolescents, research must be focused on autonomy. Autonomy has been shown in longitudinal studies to affect adolescent development (Allen, Hauser, O'Connor, 1994; Bindman, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2015; Renaud-Dubé, Guay, Talbot, Taylor, & Koestner, 2015). In these studies, negotiating autonomy between adolescents and parents was proven to be a milestone task, and failure to do so has been linked to depression, hostility, and poor social skills. This further elevates the need to examine adolescent autonomy for the purposes of this study.

In the contexts of the studies mentioned above, autonomy is defined as the adolescent's independence in action or thought (Allen et al., 1994). While this plays a part in the determination of adolescent confidence, the ability of the adolescent to be successful in this independence is defined as self-efficacy. Throughout one's life, beliefs about the ability to do things result from beliefs about one's control over outcomes in general (Berry & West, 1993). The degree of self-efficacy significantly affects adolescent confidence as well (Ford, 1992).

Another effective way to define autonomy is to examine when it can be observed. Adolescents are being allowed autonomy as they are expected to finish assigned schoolwork satisfactorily, as they make social connections, and even as they take care of basic needs outside of the home. Each assignment grade influences a student's perception of his ability in a subject area. A student who regularly is granted autonomy over these tasks and gets positive feedback will develop confidence in the areas to which the task relates. For example, a child whose parents do not oversee study habits for a math test will build more confidence if he receives an excellent

score than a child whose parents dictated those study habits. It is therefore important to study the student's perception of autonomy in order to understand how successes and failures influence his perception of his own ability. In the area of social autonomy, an adolescent who relates great satisfaction in school relationships is developing confidence about the ability to make friends post high school. This important development during adolescence about one's ability to have personal agency motivates adolescents to set goals, persevere, and ultimately achieve what is needed in order to succeed in life. For these reasons, self-efficacy is another variable of utmost importance to high school student life satisfaction. For this study, it will be important to ask questions that examine the autonomy granted to interviewees and their ideas about their perceived self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is closely related to autonomy and must be defined as well. Bandura defined self-efficacy as an individual's perceptions of his/her ability to perform adequately in a given situation (Bandura, 1982). Although self-efficacy is usually referred to in terms of specific domains (i.e., math self-efficacy), generalized self-efficacy is a global sense of competence across various domains. According to social-cognitive theory, individual's perceptions of self-efficacy affect many aspects of their lives including goals, decisions, and effort (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). Bandura focused further study on how self-efficacy affects performance and determined that a person with the same knowledge and skills will perform a task in accordance with his/her self-beliefs (Bandura, 1993). This relationship holds true for children ages 10-15 who are in a stage of development of ideas about self-efficacy. This belief in their ability to accomplish goals proved to be even more of a predictor of career goals and success than academic achievement (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). In this study, self-efficacy was broken down into three areas: social efficacy, self-regulatory efficacy,

and academic efficacy. Social efficacy relates to adolescents' beliefs about their ability to make friends, influence people, and feel comfortable in social situations. Self-regulatory efficacy explains teenagers' beliefs about their ability to manage time, and to do what needs to be done instead of what they may want to do. Academic efficacy is defined as the belief students have about whether they can complete schoolwork effectively. These three types of efficacy come together in a child's overall belief in his ability to influence his commitment to any program or career venture.

The first of three types of efficacy as described by Bandura, social-efficacy, is influenced by what James S. Coleman calls "social capital." Like physical capital and human capital, social capital is a commodity that can add value to its beneficiary. Unlike those types of capital, social capital is neither physically tangible nor embodied entirely in the abilities of its person. Social capital is defined by Coleman is the ability to make things happen or take action as a result of relationships, and is embodied in the relationships between people (Coleman, 1988). Social capital is vital to the understanding of social efficacy because they are both in the most influential stage of development during adolescence, and they are both directly affected by beliefs around relationships at that point. Social capital can be increased if a student understands how to add pathways by adding relationships, and how to navigate the norms of different social settings to his benefit. Both of these abilities are affected by the child's belief in his abilities socially. Beside social-efficacy, however, social capital is greatly influenced by cultural capital (DiMaggio, 1982) and social class (Lareau, 1987). The social category a child finds himself in in high school influences his social identity and social-efficacy (Eckert, 1989) as a part of the self-image building process. The status and/or stigma associated with the child's culture outside of school also influences social capital, and therefore social-efficacy. In sum, social-efficacy is a

belief about one's social ability that is greatly affected by social capital, cultural capital, and self-image.

A second type of efficacy according to Bandura, self-regulatory efficacy, not only plays a part in determining the overall capability image of a child, but predicts positive and negative emotions during adolescence (King & Gaerlan, 2014). Studies show that self-control positively predicts academic emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and pride. These same studies determine that a lack of self-control influences negative emotions like shame, anxiety, hopelessness, and boredom. These emotions in turn had a significant impact on engagement, disaffection, and perceived achievement for adolescents in schools.

Beliefs about the third type of efficacy as defined by Bandura, academic efficacy, were considered in one longitudinal study focusing on children in grades 6 and 9. The analysis provides support for the reciprocal relationship between beliefs and school grades (Berry & West, 1993). This was concluded because better capability beliefs in grade 6 correlated with higher grades that year, and students with higher grades by grade 9 had even more positive beliefs about their capability. This was true for students of all ability levels and across gender. Because academic success is a preeminent theme by which programs are judged (Boyle, Bradley, Chalk, Jones, & Pickard, 2003; Chang, Shu, Liang, Tseng, & Hsu, 2014; Kozma et al., 1998; R. Smith, Clark, & Blomeyer, 2005; Tuckman, 2002), it is important to include this research in determining the overall importance of self-efficacy in a student's life. Bandura also studied self-efficacy as it relates to online learning. In 2002 Bandura claimed that self-efficacy to use the internet will result in increased internet use and more satisfaction with internet learning, but these have not been clinically observed (Bandura, 2002).

Much of the previous research focuses on efficacy as it is related to achievement. However, in addition to raising achievement level, beliefs about self-efficacy can broaden a child's perspective on academic and career paths (Holden & Moncher, 1990). This wider perspective also influences the child's dedication to learning new tools necessary for a given career, and their willingness to stick to a career path when he encounter's challenges. This relationship plays into Carolyn Dweck's social cognitive theory of self-determination (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Children with equal abilities will choose a mal-adaptive "helpless" response instead of a healthier "mastery oriented" response to challenges if they have internalized a positive belief about capability and an intrinsic motivation system. This relationship is important as it relates to the high school student's capability to lead a successful and fulfilling life. But in order to understand what is fulfilling to the students, one must analyze their efficacy in the three areas mentioned. An understanding of the students' beliefs about their own efficacy will also augment the understanding of their life goals, or lack thereof.

An adolescent's beliefs about self-efficacy cannot necessarily be measured by achievement data, and these beliefs are constantly shifting due to the amount of autonomy granted by adults in the adolescent's life (Meeus, 1995).

During this stage of identity development, research has shown that parental autonomy granting greatly affects the child's belief in his/her ability to handle situations independently and successfully (Fulton & Turner, 2008; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Juang & Silbereisen, 2002). Fulton and Turner asked college age students about their perception of their parents' warmth and autonomy granting during adolescence. Both boys and girls reported that they felt empowered when given choices about behavior at younger ages, as long as that autonomy was coupled with warmth and support when needed. In addition, both boys' and girls' grade average correlated

with the degree of autonomy they were granted and the parental warmth they were given. Researchers concluded that perceived parental authoritative behavior affects the students' perceptions of control later in life. When coupled with warmth and caring, autonomy granting and parental beliefs about a child's capability are large determinants of that child's self-image in these areas. Ginsburg and Bronstein narrowed these types of parental behaviors to surveillance of homework, reactions to grades, as well as over- and under-controlling family style. In this study, fifth graders and their parents were surveyed. Researchers found that early homework surveillance which tapers off by adolescence made children feel confident about their ability to self-regulate. Also, less controlling family arrangements were beneficial to children's autonomy as long as they were coupled with caring and support. These results were closely replicated in 2002 by Juang and Raner. In their study, Juang and Raner that these same qualities were effective in inspiring self-confidence and achievement, while adding that parents who engaged in active discussions about academic goals and achievement had children with strong beliefs in their personal agency. Questions in this study focused on the students' perception of their parents' beliefs will strengthen the understanding of their own beliefs.

Peers can also help shape a child's beliefs about capability (Meeus, 1995). Furthermore, because adolescence is a time when children are drawn from family to friends to form attachments (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), the influence of the social circle cannot be ignored. The social bonds that adolescents form affect self-efficacy beliefs as well as feelings about independence (Schunk & Meece, 2006). In adolescents with low autonomy, friendship quality has been proven a protective factor (Collibee et al., 2014). Close personal friendships, particularly those with less conflict and more intimacy, can provide social engagement that

compensates for lack of control over situations. For the purposes of this study, students will be asked about their friendship quality as a way to delve into their beliefs about capability.

The study of self-efficacy in online learning environments is relatively new to the construct. In 2008 a review of the research available included studies of self-efficacy with regard to computer use in general due to the lack of studies relating online learning to self-efficacy (Hodges, 2008). Hodges found that self-efficacy related to online activity followed the same cycle Carolyn Dweck explored: people who had positive experiences with online activity felt more self-efficacy and continued using the internet. This internet use had nothing to do with the amount of previous experience; the continued use was directly related to the quality of their experience. In designing hybrid educational programs, it would be prudent to consider the quality of experience and how the self-efficacy of the learner is affected. At this point in history hybrid high school is a choice for students, not an obligation (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Bedard & Knox-Pipes, 2006). Feeling a lack of self-efficacy about their ability to navigate a hybrid program could cause less students to enroll. Therefore, it is important to understand how they feel about their efficacy in these programs.

By 2015 studies began to focus on internet-based self-efficacy (IBSE) as a construct (Darrow-Magras, 2015). A review of the literature by Darrow-Magras still showed a lack of understanding about this construct, however. Darrow-Magras did a phenomenological study focused on high school age students who chose online learning after failing in the traditional program found that relationships between IBSE and continued online learning, satisfaction, and persistence followed her expected patterns. Students who had the most trepidations about learning online due to low quality experiences with either online learning or learning in general in their past reported lower IBSE. Those who reported lower IBSE also had less satisfaction and

less persistence in learning online. When investigating these relationships for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that IBSE is affected by more than the hybrid program itself. Characteristics of proactive, self-regulated learners include self-confidence, high self-efficacy, initiative and perseverance (Artino & Stephens, 2009; Zimmerman, 2012). Self-regulated, high-performing learners take responsibility for learning outcomes, have an awareness of academic shortcomings, and utilize adaptive strategies to mitigate deficiencies (Artino & Stephens, 2009; Zimmerman, 2012). Questions must be included that identify students' perceptions of their ability to self-regulate, how much control they feel they have over their learning outcomes, and their ability to adapt when confronted with challenges in general. These questions will set up a deeper understanding of the students' feelings of IBSE and their feelings of self-efficacy around the hybrid high school program.

Engagement in high school. A review of studies up to the year 2004 revealed a deficiency in the area of student engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). By this time, researchers agreed that engagement should be separated into its dimensions, and that engagement was an important aspect of high school aged development, as well a variable related to achievement. However, researchers also agreed that engagement was malleable and subject to the interpretation of the students themselves. These researchers put out a call to understand engagement from the perspective of the learners themselves. Indeed, it is essential to understand how the students themselves categorize not only their engagement levels but also how they see their engagement manifested.

In order to understand a student's engagement in a hybrid high school program, the program must be thought of as a context for adolescent development. The idea that engagement may affect achievement is well studied, but studies have shown the relationship between

engagement and achievement as well as the relationship between engagement and adolescent development (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Li & Lerner, 2011; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Wang & Eccles, 2012). The idea that engagement in school is tied to adolescent development suggests its larger meaning in the context of the adolescent life. Therefore, it is essential to consider engagement in school not only academically but personally as well.

　　In addition to contextualizing engagement within adolescent development, it is important to identify what is meant by engagement before delving into studies identifying relationships between engagement and the school context. Eccles and Roeser (2011) put forth the idea of school as such a context in a review of research findings from 2000 to 2011. Within this context multiple connections, both personal as well as systemic, exist between student and school. Personal connections can occur with peers, teachers, or other staff. Systemic connections include those with academic content, extracurricular activities, or classmates. Because engagement is so multi-faceted, there are many ways to identify this construct. As a construct, researchers differentiate types of engagement by their focus as well as by the type of engagement, and by focus as well as by dimension (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). Areas of focus of engagement include connection to teachers, connection to students, academic engagement, and school connectedness. These are important focus areas to use in interviewing hybrid high school students about their experiences. Different types of engagement are referred to as dimensions and include behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Behaviors related to the dimensions of engagement have been identified, such as attendance, acting out, and perceived effort. These behaviors provide salient conversation points from which to analyze engagement within a hybrid high school program.

Behavioral engagement is a particularly relevant type of engagement according to this definition. Researchers identify behavioral engagement in some studies by behaviors such as attendance data, problem behavior, and perceived effort at school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). In another study, disengagement was identified via behavior like disruptiveness (Finn & Rock, 1997). These types of behaviors may indicate differing levels of engagement among hybrid high school students. Behaviors would be highly relevant concrete topics of discussion for interviewees as they would help identify the level of engagement each student felt within a hybrid high school program.

The relationship between academic achievement and school engagement can be used as an indicator for another type of engagement- cognitive engagement. Research confirms a predictive relationship between academic achievement and cognitive engagement (Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). Studies by Li et al. (2010) demonstrated that cognitive and behavioral engagement are positively correlated to grade point average. Also in this 2010 study, Li et al. showed that academic success was also related to self-reported academic competence. Developmental processes during adolescence play direct roles in the experience of the school context. Within the school context, students develop motivational patterns related to engagement in school both academically and extra-curricularly. Students who are cognitively engaged are motivated to join social groups, clubs, or teams. These students are also motivated to participate in class discussions. Therefore, participation in such areas is an important indicator for understanding the cognitive engagement of hybrid high school students. Another important indicator is academic success, because the student's degree of cognitive engagement is expressed by his/her academic achievement.

A third type of engagement, emotional engagement, has been studied in regard to intrinsic motivation and relatedness. Historically, studies indicate that emotional engagement and intrinsic motivation are positively correlated, and that these variables manifest in the form of participation in the activity being studied. Adolescents' ability to engage in school via participation in multiple school based programs may significantly increase success in school. This analysis is called the participation-identification model (Finn, 1989, 1993) and uses withdrawal from school relationships and school activities to identify emotional disengagement. Therefore, questions in the area of participation and achievement can be expanded into discussions about engagement in this dimension as well. Engagement in school becomes self-motivating (intrinsic) when it is connected to future goals (Deci & Ryan, 2008), making it an important factor not only for high school life satisfaction but also for the student's satisfaction the future as well. Relatedness is a construct derived from theories of attachment. Students experience relatedness in a class when they have relationships with trusted teachers and a sense of belonging (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The more a sense of relatedness a student has, the more emotional engagement he/she will experience. Girls in school tend to exhibit a sense of relatedness at school more than boys, but is slightly more correlated with achievement for boys. More recently, studies have found a direct correlation among relatedness, emotional engagement, and achievement (Park, Holloway, Arendtsz, Bempechat, & Li, 2012). Engagement not only predicts achievement in adolescent years, but also is a mediating factor between that achievement and student preparation for a career (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). Therefore, this study attempts to examine students' perceptions of engagement as well as how they believe their level of engagement affects their role in a hybrid high school program.

In addition to the type of engagement, the construct has been developed regarding the different relationships involved. In 2016, a study of adolescent students identified student-teacher relationships as one element necessary for student engagement, but cautioned that this analysis was limited (Quin, 2016). Quin (2016) recommended that further research focus on high school as a context for the development of adolescents and multiple factors be considered within this context. Quin also cited the lack of student perspective or elaboration as a limitation of the study. As a result, in this study, engagement is one of several aspects of the school context to be discussed and engagement will be explored through the lens of the students themselves.

Despite all of the studies defining engagement and establishing its relevance, engagement in online learning as a field of research is relatively new. With studies dating back to 2002, focus primarily has been on issues of interaction and emotional distance when learning is separated by distance (Picciano, 2002). While a hybrid program offers more face to face interaction than purely online learning, the interaction is limited when compared to traditional programs, and the interaction online is qualitatively different. These differences and their perceived effects must be investigated. Assumptions about online learning were that there was less emotion involved and this would naturally cause less engagement, and that online interaction was not sufficient to promote personal engagement (O'regan, 2003; Picciano, 2002). Interestingly, these same studies showed that online learning had high levels of emotion tied to it, and that online interaction provided more of a sense of presence than expected. O'regan studied the emotions tied to online learning and found that there existed a high level of fear and anxiety, as well as excitement over the new experience and inability to foresee outcomes. These emotions transformed into extreme pride when learning was accomplished, or extreme frustration if the student could not navigate the program. This study binds the emotional

engagement to online learning to the self-efficacy beliefs and outcomes discussed earlier in this chapter. Picciano's study of student interactions and their performance in online courses showed a direct relationship and surmised that online learning allows for a highly variable degree of interaction depending on the learner's choices. Picciano suggests that the degree of engagement in learning is up to the student's themselves. This would be true of a hybrid program, as well, as students not only choose how often they chat, post, and speak during sessions, but also choose how many hours they spend in face to face sessions.

A thorough investigation of engagement must also address personalization of educational experience. Personalization is a byproduct of online learning highly related to engagement. Many studies have shown that the incorporation of computers into an educational program increase the facilitator's ability to personalize the program (Cooper, 2001; Gardner, 2000; Mariani, 2001; Mupinga, Nora, & Yaw, 2006; I. Yapici & Akbayin, 2012; Ü. Yapici & Akbayin, 2012). These same studies report that personalization is one of the primary benefits reported by students in online and hybrid programs. Personalization consists primarily of adjusted content and pacing for the student. Students themselves report high levels of satisfaction with the level of personalization afforded in online programs (I.Yapici & Akbayin, 2012), but also report that some degree of face to face interaction is favorable (Chandra & Fisher, 2009). The face to face element was deemed critical by student's in Chandra and Fisher's qualitative study because they preferred having specific questions answered in person rather than online.

Studies on engagement in online learning have been largely qualitative but not phenomenological. Little is known about how students perceive the differences in personalization and their effect on the overall learning experience. Hybrid learning has been highlighted as an advantageous mix of that personalization and face to face interaction. It will be

enlightening to ask students how they sense the mixture of interactions has affected their experiences and how engaged they have felt in a hybrid program.

Community/Connectedness in high school. The fourth theme of adolescent development to be investigated in this study is that of connectedness within a community of learners. McMillan and Chavis defined the term *school community* in 1986, characterizing it in terms of caring and supportive interpersonal relationships, and opportunities to participate in school activities, and opportunities to participate in decision making for the school. In addition, McMillan and Chavis included shared norms, goals, and values as elements of school communities.

During the early years of its analysis, the idea of school connectedness came from studies focused on achievement. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) studied the effectiveness of elementary schools, using 14 previously identified elements to mark that effectiveness, including clear mission, tightly coupled curriculum, instructional leadership, and the opportunity to learn. The opportunity to learn was defined in terms of amount of content covered and the student achievement scores on that content when tested. Hallinger and Murphy examined whether two schools with dramatically different social contexts would show differences in effectiveness. The results clearly identified the importance of context, not only as directly exhibited by measures of effectiveness, but also indirectly. For example, one aspect thoroughly examined in this study was high expectations. Student whose parents or school projected high expectations had more academic success; however, researchers found that these expectations were mediated by the method used to share them. Different schools had different ways of conveying these expectations, which indicated a different context in which the students received those messages. This context influenced how the message was received. A school could broadcast its

expectations every morning, for example, but students could perceive those either as sincere messages or idle rhetoric. Teachers could support the message indirectly by demanding high quality work, or nullify the message indirectly by accepting low quality work. Students could support or nullify the messages in their own talk. What was lacking from this study and similar studies was the voice of the students themselves. In order to find out more about the indirect ways school messages are influenced, and the way that students receive messages, research must focus on asking the students to explore these themes. This communication between the student and the school affects how connected the student feels. The environment created with this message, whether it be one of high expectations, inclusion, or cohesiveness defines the community for the student.

These studies based on the relationship between community and achievement led to further evolution of what it means to be a school community. Adopting McMillan and Chavis' definition of school community, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) concluded that the social context of a school characterizes it as a specific community, which has great influence on the school's effectiveness. This uniqueness places even more importance on the perceptions of the students themselves, and also suggests restraint against generalization. Recommendations from this study included cautions against generalizing effective school models, because the context of a school community is so specific to the body of students served by that school. This is another excellent reason that students must be asked to relay their interpretation of the school community. What a school community is for one student may not be exactly what it is for another. The translation of the system and its people may be quite different from student to student, and therefore have different effects.

Research and studies develop a sense of what constitutes a school community, while continuing to document the fact that a sense of community affects achievement. In an achievement comparison between public and private schools, (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) found that the strong sense of community engendered in private schools has the most influence on the success at those institutions. This study focused on elements of each type of school that impacted its sense of community, and researchers identified shared goals and values as highly influential. Another study framed high school as a social context in which young adults focus on similar goals and shared values (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Bryk and Driscoll (1988) also cited a shared agenda and strong interpersonal relationships as additional elements of the high school community. A review of literature for this study revealed a growing body of research characterizing schools as communities and purporting the influence each communal nuance has on student life. Even more striking, this researcher cites a limitation of quantitative methodology to truly understand that influence. Qualitative methodologies had not emerged as reliable sources of information thus far, and their omission left a hole in the understanding of how the unique community of each school influenced the success and satisfaction of its students. It is important to find out how students themselves characterize the community based on the school's mode of communicating and the type messages sent by the school, as well as how those messages are interpreted by students. Does the school send a message of acceptance and encourage participation? How is this message communicated? This type of message is particularly relevant when studying a hybrid high school program, as these students are not part of the general population and may miss invitations that are advertised in areas they never travel (school cafeteria, main campus bulletin boards, or announcements).

One result of these investigations is the realization that school communities are affected by the communication of norms and values, as well as the systems in place that afford opportunities for connection. Large school size is a logistical issue that has been found to affect many aspects of student life (Cotton, 1996). The size of the school had a significant effect on the following elements of school community: social behavior (participation), belongingness (engagement, community), and student attitude (caring, relationships). Therefore, it is important to find out how students themselves characterize the community of their school and whether they feel it has been influenced by size.

Another aspect of school life related to connectedness is personalization (Royal & Rossi, 1997). Royal and Rossi (1997) showed that school community was an important influence on student life, but also that the degree of communal feeling at a school depended in large part on students' ability to personalize the experience. By 1997, The National Association of Secondary School Principals, was highlighting *personalization* of the high school as a key challenge for school reform (Licklider, 1997). Personalization of the school experience in this study was characterized by responsiveness to individual needs, which may consist of additional help on schoolwork, clarification of project requirements, or a unique pedagogy suited to a particular learning style or interest. A student may require information about events, or recommendations for clubs relating to a hobby. These needs come in a variety of forms, but share one major condition; in order to meet these needs, one must understand students as individuals. Personalization is not possible if one does not know the person. The opportunity to know students' individual needs returns the discussion of community to school size, communication, and relationships.

School connectedness can be defined as a byproduct of personalization. One study that focused on six individual high school students examined how schools can personalize their programs to fit the needs of students. Students interviewed identified personal attention, small community that engages everyone in discourse, and innovative academia among positive education reform initiatives. These three themes should be explored to understand the phenomenon of a hybrid high school experience (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997).

 In addition to personalization and communication, school communities are strengthened through interpersonal relationships, as they increase a sense of belonging in a school community (Osterman, 2000; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). This sense of belonging has been shown to influence motivation and success across all cultures and sub-cultures in schools (Anderman, 2003; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Maulana & Opdenakker, 2014; McLaren et al., 2015; Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Wentzel, 1999). In 2015, a panel of psychology and education experts cited sense of belonging as a developmental function required for healthy students who are ready to learn (Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles, 2015). A shift in education reform to include the *whole child* began at that time, which gave more emphasis to schools' attention to emotional needs during adolescence. As adolescent emotional development became linked to school success, more studies began to focus on how to meet the emotional needs of each child. Sense of belonging and connectedness to a community were increasingly cited as essential criteria for high school student success.

A sizeable body of literature supports the that a sense of community can have significant educational benefits (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Jasinski & Lewis, 2016). Sense of community is often described as a feeling of *connectedness* (Townsend, 2005) or a sense of belonging (Jasinski & Lewis, 2016) that meets the individual student's "basic

psychological needs" (Schaps 2015, p. 31), which, in turn, is said to lead to benefits ranging from improved academic achievement to ethical and altruistic behavior, social and emotional competencies, and the avoidance of problem behaviors. Because a sense of community is subjective, exploring it with the students in question is the only way to truly understand how it feels to them. Areas of exploration should include interpersonal relationships, the accessibility of personalized experience, messages received about school culture and values, and a perceived sense of belonging.

Social capital in high school. In addition to the analysis of social capital as related to self-efficacy by Bandura, it is useful to analyze the origins and implications of social capital as a separate concept. The first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital was produced by Pierre Bourdieu, who defined the concept as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1985, p. 248). The ability to secure benefits through trusted social networking results, according to Alejandro Portes, results in many life altering consequences (Portes, 1998). These include direct benefits from each specific social network, a change in norms related to social networks, access to opportunity, and changes in social stratification. Examples of direct benefits of a high school social networks would be help understanding homework from classmates, self-esteem from having a group of like-minded individuals with which to relate, or special clothing related to club participation like leadership sweatshirts or math club t-shirts. Students may change norms when moving from one social group to another. One change that could particularly affect their future development would that of high risk behavior. A student who has joined a group with delinquent tendencies may adopt those norms and put himself at risk. An example of opportunity access in high school are

college tours attended by members of certain clubs or groups. These colleges may not have been considered by students prior to their exposure via social groups, and students outside those groups may never consider them. Another example of opportunity access may be college access granted to players on sports teams. Again, the opportunity to attend college may not be offered or considered by a student who is not out on the field. Changes in social stratification affect development for two reasons: they allow access to more affluent networks with more opportunities, or they limit access and opportunity.

Studies of social capital related to high school show that it does have an effect on the achievement of students academically (Collins, 2009). Collins used the factors of reading scores, socioeconomic status, parental involvement with education, and parental engagement with schools to look at the effects of social and cultural capital among groups. The results show that social and cultural capital does have an effect on the educational achievement of non-mainstream students in the United States. Other studies focus on social ramifications of social capital such as bullying. A study of adolescent age schoolchildren in Poland revealed correlations between bullying behaviors and social capital. The study analyzed the behavior from victim, bully, and bystander perspectives and found that the dominating influence of bullying was delinquent behavior in big cities where bullying index showed the highest dispersion. In smaller towns and rural areas, the neighborhood social capital becomes an important protective factor, and this factor is highly correlated with the school climate. Researchers concluded that strong social bonds in the community are supportive for school climate and can reduce the level of bullying at schools. The identification of social capital as an importance influence on school age development has even led to programs which build social capital before students even enter school (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017). One such program involves

playground groups facilitated by adults aimed at bridging the transition into formal schooling. These bridges are focused on building social capital among the playgroup in the hopes that this will increase their ability to succeed in formal school social settings.

Historically, studies relating virtual education and social capital have focused on how virtual schools can correct already existing deficits in social capital. For example, studies have focused on using virtual schools to enhance learning opportunities of disabled students, at-risk youth, and rural students with less programs available for academic advancement (Dennison, 2012; Horn & Staker, 2011; Oliva, Lytle, Hopper, & Ostrove, 2016). There is a dearth of studies that examine the development of social capital and the effects of that development for students already in virtual school programs.

Summation

Up to now, the primary focuses around educational programs are achievement and funding (Roblyer, 2008). The virtual and hybrid models have been proven to offer economical alternatives to traditional education (Roblyer, 2004; Staker, 2011; J. Watson et al., 2014). In order to take advantage of this economical alternative, however, a new system must be imagined that breaks with traditional funding and systems in place. The programs of the future may not resemble what current societies have understood education to be, and in the fervor to identify the parameters of a new educational system, student voices could be ignored if researchers are not vigilant. The purpose of this study was to ensure that student perceptions are recorded for future conceptions of new educational programs. These new models must be mapped with particular concern for their impact on students like those in this study.

Although important, achievement cannot be realized without an understanding of how the program is received by its students. There is simply no lasting achievement without student commitment, and identified in this literature review are key areas of adolescent life that influence that commitment. The themes that emerged as imperative to understand are the *autonomy*, *social capital*, *engagement*, and *connectedness* felt by the students. Therefore, in addition to questions about how students experience hybrid high school in general, questions pinpointing how these themes are observed by the students will be asked.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study explored the phenomenon of the hybrid high school student experience through the lens of the ethos of the high school experience. This chapter explains the methodology by which this phenomenon will be investigated. First, the role of the researcher will be explored in order to understand the need for a phenomenological approach. Methods and analysis procedures are presented including human subject considerations, means to ensure validity, and plans for reporting findings.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of high school students in a virtual learning program. In order to investigate this experience, the central research question was:

- *What are the lived experiences of students in a hybrid high school program?*

Considering the Rutter model (Rutter, 1982) for expected adolescent development as part of the ethos of the high school experience the following sub-questions guided the study:

1. What were the experiences influencing their self-efficacy & autonomy?
2. What were the experiences influencing their engagement?
3. What were the experiences influencing a sense of connectedness & community?
4. What were the experiences influencing or influenced by their social capital?

Role of the Researcher

The phenomenon being investigated was the lived experience of adolescents participating in a hybrid high school program. The researcher has had 18 years as a secondary teacher and recalls her own experiences in high school. While studying at the doctoral level, the researcher also has experienced various virtual strategies and considers herself to be quite familiar with the benefits and challenges of online learning environments. These experiences did influence the

researcher's interpretation of student perceptions.   The researcher attended a traditional high school program and was involved in extracurricular activities. High school was all encompassing and the center of development experiences. Collegiate education provided further developmental support. In addition to these experiences with education, the researcher eventually chose a career teaching middle school. From this educator's perspective, secondary schools provide essential experiences far beyond academia. After teaching for over 15 years and becoming very involved in educational technologies, the researcher enrolled in a hybrid doctoral program. Technology has never been a stumbling block- software has either been intuitive or attainable through study. As a result of these experiences, this research was conducted from a perspective that secondary education is developmentally important, and that combining technology and education is a positive way to move forward in our society.

Bias and reflexivity. Clarification of researcher bias was one way to minimize threats to the accuracy of interpretation of this qualitative study. Without proper reflexivity, the familiar world of the classroom, student, and virtual education could improperly influence the interpretation of data gathered as well as conclusions of this study. The process of reflexivity is not, however, meant to eradicate this influence. The intent of reflexivity is to recognize the influence and reflect upon its effects (Koch & Harrington, 1998). For the purposes of this study, personal reflexivity was practiced in the same way it was used by Turner (de Sales, 2003) in accordance with Gadamer's (Gadamer, 1971) theories on social development. Gadamer argued that, in order to know others, one must first know themselves. Once one understands themselves they can be open to meaning as interpreted by others. Turner used these theories to develop a study understanding the hopes of Australian youth. In that study, the researcher was completely open to the meaning of experiences as a product of the individual's reality. In this study, the

researcher uses the same method of personal and epistemological understanding in order to facilitate an understanding of the subjects' perspectives. Dowling (Dowling, 2006) referred to this as epistemological reflexivity. This type of reflexivity is in perfect accordance with the researcher's belief that reality is whatever the subject believes it to be.

The specific experience being explored in this study was, however, not an experience this researcher had. It is the epistemological belief of the researcher that the reality of any phenomena lies in the mind of its experiencer. Along with constant reflection, the researcher keeps this belief central while results are analyzed. This experience is unique in the mind of each individual subject. The researcher maintained focus on the descriptions and interpretations of the subjects' experiences in order to understand their meaning. The descriptions and interpretations offered by this group of adolescents were taken at face value as much as possible. Because of the researcher's strong epistemological belief that reality is subjective, a phenomenological methodology was used for this study. This belief is what led to the research question itself, and the desire to understand the hybrid high school experience from the students themselves. Although the researcher may have ideas about the phenomenon based on previous experience, this study was focused on the understanding of *the subjects'* ideas about the phenomenon.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach. The specific type of design was phenomenological, the basis of which is found in the work of Edmund Husserl. Edmund Husserl was a German philosopher and is credited with the ideation of phenomenology. Husserl believed that, in order to understand an object, one must understand the experience of working with that object (Husserl, 1970). The external objects themselves or external occurrences are inconsequential compared to one's experience with them. Therefore, the only way to understand

a phenomenon is to seek to understand the perspective of someone involved. Husserl also taught that causes or ramifications of phenomena were unimportant. Again, he asserted that the only reality was the phenomenon itself. Husserl learned this perspective in part from his teacher, Franz Bentano, who believed in the lived experience of phenomena, that one constantly has an internal dialogue with the world around him (Lester, 1999). The methodology of phenomenology is an attempt by an outside observer to capture that internal dialogue and understand what it means to the subject.

Moustakas (Moustakas 1994) describes the interview process needed for phenomenological studies. Guidelines include involving questions focused on efforts to understanding the phenomenon, sufficient time for exploration of subject responses, and possible follow up interviews to ensure the researcher is able to arrive at an interpretation which closely aligns with the subjects actual meaning of the experiences.

Sources of data. The primary source of data were students who graduated from a hybrid high school program between 2015 and 2017 located in the United States. This time parameter was chosen to ensure that their memories of the hybrid experience were relatively fresh in their minds and not influenced by college or workplace activities. A sample of 9 individuals was recruited for participation. Exclusion criteria included students who did not graduate from the program; those who participated in the program for only part of their high school experience; those who are still in the program or are under 18 years of age.

Purposive sampling process. Recruitment for the study involved a purposive sampling process. The study was briefly explained on social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn with an appeal for volunteers. Snowball sampling was then used to add additional subjects based on referral from the initial contacts made using social media. The advertisement

on social media explained briefly the purpose of the study, and requested contact information for hybrid high school graduates. The post also offered the researcher's contact information be given to possible participants. Any perspective participants were asked to refer additional candidates who met the inclusion criteria for the study. All participants were asked to self-report that they met the criteria for participation.

For graduates who responded to the initial invitation, a follow up email included more information about the study and the logistics of participation, as well as clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Graduates who met the criteria were sent the informed consent and provided with an interview guide that explained the purpose of the study, the setting and expectations of the interview, and addressed any potential confidentiality concerns. The guide included a paragraph identifying the general research question and the meaning of a phenomenological study. Researcher contact information was provided.

Human subjects considerations. This research qualified as exempt research and was approved by the University's Graduate Schools Institutional Review Board. (Appendix A). The subjects of study were adult volunteers who were recent graduates of a hybrid high school program. These subjects could have been nervous, seeking to answer "correctly," or anxious about the use of their shared information. In order to alleviate these strains, interviews were casual and took place online per the subjects' request. Finally, the scope and purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to each participant, both in writing and virtually during the interview. The researcher expressed that the goal of the study was to understand the experience of the subject as deeply as possible.

In order to minimize the anxiety of evaluation, the researcher kept confidential all names of participants as well as the school program being studied. The focus of the study was to

gain an understanding of any young adults' experience in a virtual high school program; the aim

was not to evaluate or describe any entity in particular. In order to protect individual and

program identities, subject interview transcripts were assigned a neutral identifier and kept

separately from the names of actual participants. All transcripts and recordings records were kept

in password encoded databases on the researcher's home network only.

Data collection strategy. The primary data collection strategy was the acquisition of

phenomenological interviews. To this end, questions were semi-structured and reflected the

interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants chose to have interviews conducted virtually for the sake of convenience. In their

descriptions of their experiences, participants explored the meaning of each experience and

characterized that meaning for the interviewer (Husserl, 1970). The questions were open ended

to allow the participant to explore the meaning of each experience fully.

Interview questions. The interview protocol was developed initially by the researcher

based on a review of literature. The specific interview protocol and questions target four areas of

discussion, based on the conceptual framework for this study: autonomy/self-efficacy, social

capital, engagement, and connectedness/community (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Bradshaw et al.,

2014; Collibee et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2014; Dogan & Celik, 2014; Juang & Silbereisen, 2002;

King & Gaerlan, 2014; McLaren et al., 2015; Shogren et al., 2014). The researcher compiled a

list of specific questions based on these areas, and then developed the questions as open-ended

probes more appropriate for a phenomenological study (see Appendix B for question list). These

questions were used for the initial interview, with follow up questions used only as necessary to

stimulate further exploration of each topic.

To establish content validity for the interview instrument, the researcher asked two educators in the field of secondary distance education and two educators in a traditional high school setting to examine the instrument along with the operational definitions from the literature review. This analysis was used to determine whether the items indeed allowed for exploration of the themes intended to explore (Cassell & Symon, 2004) and to ensure that questions were appropriate for the purpose of the study. Once the interview questions were validated, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a young adult who has experienced a virtual program for their high school completion. Because this is a phenomenological study, efforts were focused on rigor and trustworthiness by adhering to strict protocol for data collection process instead of using a measure of reliability.

Interview process. Interviews were conducted over approximately two months between June and August, 2017. These interviews were offered virtually or at a neutral location of the subjects' choosing, however all subjects chose the virtual interview modality. Interviews were conducted using *GoTo Meeting* online software and recorded for later transcription. Each interview took between 2 to 3 hours.

Data analysis. Analysis of interview data began by creating a transcription of each of the participants' recorded interview sessions. The researcher used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand and relay the students' experiences (Aanstoos, 1985). This methodology is best used with a small number of cases, so that deep conversations and careful translation can be made. IPA relies on subjects' understanding and ability to communicate their perceptions, and the researcher's dedication to uncovering those meanings (S. G. Smith, 2009). The full text of each interview was transcribed verbatim, carefully organized, and analyzed for structural and textural composition in order to synthesize meanings. Two additional tools were

used to support the analysis process to ensure adequate rigor of the analysis. HyperTranscribe was used to transcribe the recordings into text documents and HyperResearch was used to document the coding process. An initial codebook was developed considering the conceptual model of high school ethos (author, year) defining the four areas of autonomy/self-efficacy, social capital, engagement, and connectedness/community. As transcripts were coded and participant meanings were understood, emergent themes were identified. An external reviewer was then asked to review the codes. The peer review of coding allowed the researcher to see places where similar codes could be combined, and code groupings could be adjusted to best reflect their meaning.

The exact IPA process followed the method of Aanstoos (Aanstoos, 1985) described below.

1. Each interview transcript is read in its entirety to get a general sense of the whole.

2. Once the sense of the whole has been grasped, the researcher goes back to the beginning and reads through the text once more with the specific aim of discriminating 'meaning units' from within a psychological perspective and codes the transcript considering the phenomenon being researched.

3. Once each additional transcript is coded, the researcher then goes back through all of the coded transcripts to further make sense of the phenomenon under study and adjust the codes as additional themes emerge.

4. The researcher then synthesizes all of the coded meaning units into a consistent statement regarding the subject's lived experience.

Means to ensure study validity . For qualitative studies the terms credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability are essential criteria for determining strength of the research (Lincoln, 1985). In order to maintain credibility and dependability, the researcher followed the described protocols and constantly strove to understand subject perceptions. Part of a scrupulous attempt to understand students' voices involves recognizing the researcher's own bias. While it cannot be eliminated, the researcher must identify bias to sustain neutrality as well. Prior to data gathering, the researcher documented assumptions as an attempt to bracket personal biases. Personal beliefs are preconceptions that may or may not be true for the subjects of this study. It is vital to set these aside during the interview process as well as for analysis in order to ensure the researcher's neutrality and the study's credibility.

Consistency or dependability can be increased with rigid adhesion to protocol. Each interview was conducted as similarly as possible and analyzed according to the same procedures. The researcher was careful not to lead the subjects into answers and observed a consistent wait time appropriate to encourage full and thoughtful responses. The researcher was also careful not to indicate approval or disapproval of responses with comments, gestures, sounds or body language. All interviewees were free to express as much of their experience as freely as possible in response to the interview protocol, and while elaboration was encouraged, the researcher took care not to lead elaborations in any particular direction. The researcher interpreted responses with fidelity. This was achieved by reading and rereading transcriptions, careful bracketing, and follow up questions which ensured the most accurate possible interpretation of remarks. A peer reviewer was involved during the analysis process to ensure reliable interpretation of each interview. In addition to validating interpretation of the interview responses, the peer reviewer

helped identified codes that were so similar that they could be collapsed together, and codes that could be combined into groups. This process resulted in four groups of codes categorized as "themes" in the interpretation portion of this study. These four themes were similar to, but not exactly the same, as those identified in the literature review.

Applicability or transferability is upheld by understanding the narrow scope of this research. These findings are not intended to describe the experiences of a wide population of virtual students. It is understood that these are particular students with particular backgrounds in a specific virtual program unlike any other. While it is essential to hear their voices on the subject of virtual high school, and they have insight not widely available, this insight is limited to their unique consciousness.

Summary. This study will provide insight into a disruptive innovation in the field of education. The results of this investigation may provide a blueprint to design more effective learning programs in the age of digitization. Potentially, this self-reported data could influence future students in their choice of educational program and how they manage that choice. The phenomenological approach described in this chapter ensured that the experience of participation in a hybrid high school program is understood from the perspective of the learner. Results, implications, conclusions and recommendations are presented in the next chapters.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study focused on individuals who had experienced at least 50% of their high school program online. Findings begin with a description of the nine participants, followed with the thematic analysis of the interviews, and then moving into interpretation of the interviews using codes grouped by theme. The themes used for interpretation emerged from the IPA process and peer review. Codes were grouped that had extremely similar meanings and these groupings are referred to as themes.

Participant Descriptions

The nine participants included five women and 4 men. Fictitious names were assigned to protect subject identity. Each participated in an interview held online using Go to Meeting software. All were ages 18 to 22 and met the inclusion criteria of having recently graduated a hybrid high school program. Interviews occurred over the course of 6 weeks in mid to late Summer, 2017. Table 1 shows the participants' varying program types and current academic status.

Table 1

Individual Participant Fictitious Name, Make up of Hybrid Program and Current Status

Participant	Gender	Virtual Learning	Face to Face Learning	Current Status
Audrey	F	Public, school organized	Public, at local school	Armed services
Bailey	F	Private online program	Part of private program, at program offices and computer rooms	Private University sophomore
Daniel	M	Public, District Organized	Public, at continuation school location	State University sophomore

(Continued)

Evan	M	Self-assembled from free, private organizations	Home schooled by parents	Private University sophomore
Grace	F	Self-assembled from free, private organizations	Cooperative (Coop) Program of families	Private University freshman
Wyatt	M	Private online program	Part of private program, at program offices and computer rooms	Working
Hudson	M	Combination: private, junior college, public district organized	Combination: private, junior college, public district organized	Private University sophomore
Whitney	F	Private online program	Private spiritual group location	Recently graduated high school
Sam	F	Public, school organized	Public charter program	Private University sophomore

The first of the five women interviewed was Audrey; She is an eighteen-year-old army private who joined the military to fund her higher education. She moved from Colorado to the Los Angeles area as a high school freshman, and targeted her hybrid program because it was part of a well-respected traditional high school. Her original plan was to transfer to the traditional campus as soon as there was space, but ended up finishing her entire high school career in the hybrid program because of the perceived rigor. She spent more than half of her time on campus regardless of the 50% requirement because her mother works at the school. Audrey knew many staff members because of her mother at the school based public hybrid program.

The second interview was with another woman, Bailey, who was forced to attend a hybrid program because of health issues that began during middle school. She originally tried to work with her local high school to work independently when she had to miss school, but felt that the school was not amenable to independent study of any kind. Bailey and her mother felt they

had to scramble to find programs, and a mostly online search led them to a private hybrid program. Her days were a mixture of working online from home, seminars, and working online in a computer lab at the program headquarters. Bailey has had a semi-professional singing career, but performances tapered off during her high school time and now gone completely. Bailey always felt college bound, and is currently in her second year at a private university.

Daniel was one of 4 men participating in the study and the first male to be interviewed. At the time of interview, he was in his second year of college, but did not always feel college bound. Daniel struggled in middle school and that was the motive for trying a hybrid program for high school. Daniel heard about the hybrid program through a family friend when he was discussing his issues in middle school. He was restless, the class clown he says, and had a negative attitude about the quality of the education offered to him. Daniel tends to change his focus depending on outside influences, one example being a documentary he watched with his dad that got him interested in medicine. Another example is a visit to a senior living center that got him volunteering with elderly residents. His current focus is still medical, although he is feeling a slump in his progress. His grades in college are average and not high enough for his chosen career. He is also not clear about which type of medical career he'd like to pursue and this lack of focus seems to be confusing Daniel.

Fourth to be interviewed, Evan, combined home school with online school to create his own hybrid experience. Evan remembers always being social and athletic, meeting people often through intramural basketball games. Indeed, Evan has attended dances at several local high schools and has several different circles of friends. He gave up basketball because he says he always knew he could not make a career out of it and it was just a high school age hobby. Evan applied to at least seven colleges and did not get into his top choice, but he is happy at his current

university. Evan has kept busy throughout his high school and college years, holding down at least one job while getting high marks without sacrificing social time.

Grace is a woman who attended a cooperative or "coop" hybrid program, where several parents in her rural area took turns as the face to face teacher. The children all utilized the same online learning programs for the virtual portion of their education. The parents organized festivals, parties, and hang out days in addition to face to face classroom time. The virtual programs were always free, organized through various school districts and organizations. Grace was a basketball star in her community, but she never considered basketball as a future. Grace's parents taught her that education was her only choice for the future, and she was also talented in math and science. Grace is now attending a veterinary college as a freshman. She is younger than most in her veterinary program, citing college credits earned concurrently during high school as the reason she is "ahead" of her peers in school.

Sixth, Wyatt, has just finished high school but has not yet applied to college. He intends to go to college but missed what he calls "decision deadlines" and feels confident that he will go when he is ready. In addition to his private hybrid program, Wyatt spends a lot of time working and a lot of time with his church group. A talented musician and actor, Wyatt is involved with productions put on by his church and continues to assist with productions put on by his hybrid program. Wyatt currently resides in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Wyatt describes a degree of responsibility he feels to grow the hybrid program. He participated on student council, attended events, and encourages others to do the same. He says this obligation is because he feels stigmatized by society for having gone through a non-traditional program. Wyatt spent time explaining that he found active, socialized, and dynamic peers in his hybrid high school. He feels

the amount of shy or disenfranchised youth at a traditional high school would be similar in proportion to their size.

The seventh participant, Hudson, is a male who constructed his high school experience from online courses to face to face courses he found online. As a high school freshman, his mother would guide him in finding and making these choices, but by the time he was senior aged he was completely independent. Hudson wrote his own transcripts and was admitted with a full scholarship for engineering at a state university. He had several other acceptances but chose the university for its reputation and the scholarship. Upon entering college, Hudson found that his high school choices put him far ahead of his freshman peers. He entered university with 82 college credits and was exempted from many prerequisite courses. Hudson is extremely proud of this accomplish and feels he streamlined his education without compromising rigor. He feels that he was able to focus on his two passions, mathematics and engineering, and skip more general classes irrelevant to his path in life. Hudson does not feel smarter than his freshman peers but does feel more prepared. Most of his face to face experiences during high school were offered through local colleges, so he feels comfortable with the college system. Hudson is extremely reflective about the education system and its effectiveness for college preparation. His experience in writing his own transcripts and explaining his readiness at college interviews has left him feeling completely validated in his choices.

Whitney was the eighth graduate interviewed and attended a private hybrid program that included a spiritual component. She is not currently attending college and does not know if she will be doing so soon. She grew very close with people in her hybrid program and still attends alumni retreats. She speaks to friends who attended during her time in high school as well as friends who are younger. Whitney does not feel an aptitude in a particular subject area, but

mentioned that tends to find resources online to help her learn in areas where she struggles. She also travels great distances to see people from her program that have moved away, one recent trip was to a friend's house in Canada. Whitney lives where her hybrid program is based in the San Fernando Valley. At eighteen years old, Whitney just finished high school last June.

Last to be interviewed, Sam, attended a public hybrid program run by her local charter high school. As a competitive gymnast, Sam's plan was to use her flexible schedule to train and gain a full scholarship to college through gymnastics. An injury in her sophomore year forced Sam to rethink those plans. She immediately switched her sport to rowing, remembering a conversation with gymnast friends about how rowers always get scholarships, and was awarded a full ride to an out of state college as a rower. Sam expresses pity for athletes who continue to focus on sports in which they have no future (she claims they do not recognize the talent necessary compared to their level of talent), and although abandoning gymnastics was difficult for her there was never a question in her mind that her sport was a means to an end. Rowing served Sam just as well as gymnastics at getting her money for college. Whether for gymnastics her first two years, or rowing her second two years, Sam spent mornings on the school site and afternoons training. Fridays, she would train all day. She says she has excellent memories of high school and is feeling very successful in her second year of college.

Thematic Analysis

Interview transcript analysis resulted in four major life satisfaction themes. Table 2 shows the total frequency of coded passages for each major theme. The first theme was a *sense of belonging* to one or more communities. Participants attributed their sense of belonging to a variety of communities, including the high school program. The details shared in interviews revealed clearly identifiable *reasons for participation*, *descriptions* of each community, and

effects of *community involvement*. These three subcategories were therefore used as codes within the theme *sense of belonging*.

The second theme involved *social structures with supportive relationships*. Participants varied in the number of relationships they had established during their high school years, but each did report significant supportive relationships. They expressed having enough social capital to feel both in control but also were willing to accommodate friends. In addition to a code within this grouping for s*ocial capital*, codes were also established for *identifying relationships*, *nature of relationships*, *how relationships were established*, and *longevity of relationships*, in order to fully understand the implications of these relationships for the participant.

Table 2

Thematic Group Coding Results

Theme	Frequency of Codes within Theme
Sense of Belonging	316
Social Structure	265
Personal Growth	508
Affinity for High School Program	194

The third theme focused on participants' *sense of personal growth* through their high school years. Participants attributed personal growth during high school to challenges, achievements, and reflections on both. These three categories were therefore used as codes within the personal growth theme. In addition, codes were used for *response when challenged*,

and *feelings when challenged*. The significance of these codes is that participants had strong

feelings of fear and hesitancy but overcame those feelings in most cases with self-reliance.

Finally, the last major theme involved participants' *affinity for the hybrid program* they

attended and explained their specific personal experiences.   Participants all described this

affinity and were very specific about which aspect of their experience they found beneficial.

Thus, a code was set up as *affordance* to identify that aspect of the program. In addition,

participants were very clear about why they felt each affordance was beneficial. For this reason,

reasons for engagement in curricular program, and *effects of curricular engagement* were used

as the final codes within this thematic grouping.

Theme 1: Sense of belonging. As shown in Table 3 below, participants described a

variety of communities in which they felt a *sense of belonging*.

Table 3

Theme: Sense of Belonging Codes

Sense of Belonging Codes	Frequency Coded
• Communities described • Reasons for joining • Effects of community involvement	91 118 107

These communities include the hybrid program itself, athletic programs, neighborhoods, spiritual

groups, and other extra-curricular groups. Participants identified the communities by explaining

reasons for joining, so those reasons are discussed simultaneously. For *sense of belonging* and

reasons for joining, findings are organized by type of community. This organization is for ease

of discussion. Subsequent interview questions revealed the *effects of their community*

involvement on participant life satisfaction as are described in the last section of this thematic

grouping discussion.

        Communities described and reasons for joining. These two codes have been grouped for

discussion below because they were discussed together by almost every participant, and each

type of community is discussed separately for coherence.

Table 4

Codes: Communities Described and Reasons for Joining

Sense of Belonging Codes	Frequency Coded
• Communities described • Reasons for joining	91 118

All participants described a *sense of belonging* to more than one community. These communities

included the high school program itself, spiritual communities, and extra-curricular communities.

Interactions between the members of these communities were formal and informal, depending on

the group. All participants could identify group members and a rapport with group members.

Reasons for joining these communities could be clearly identified, and usually included a

fondness for the activity of the group as well as fondness for the other members of the group.

Audrey, for example, explained her community membership as having "friends with similar

goals" and viewed her participation as "going back to my little safety bubble."

        Extra-curricular communities. Communities were offered as part of the hybrid programs.

Participants felt that there were many opportunities to join school groups, and based their degree

of participation usually on how busy they felt. Most participants kept very busy schedules, and

those who had extra time sought membership in school groups. Whether they joined school

groups or not, they could recall advertisement of these groups and knew where and when to meet. In Audrey's program, organized groups were advertised this way:

> October first usually they have this thing called Club Rush where at lunch they have every single club make a booth and like advertise a club so people can sign up and everyone like walks around and looks at the different clubs. It's like a big day and like the lunch is an hour long.

She identified large clubs, some with rooms full of members, that she joined depending on whether she was available or not. Several participants described hybrid school governance opportunities, for example Wyatt was president of his student council. Several participants feel that a common misconception about virtual programs is that they are full of anti-social introverts. Daniel addressed this misconception by explaining that "it's an actual school that's going. And has the organizations and it's giving up the offers to go to different engagements and if you want to play soccer you can play soccer like their activities are very wide for such a small little school." Bailey was careful to point out that her program "wasn't just like completely online schooling- like you had the opportunity to go in and join clubs and do like they had like PE, yoga classes and stuff like that." Bailey even pointed out that her sense of belonging "was pretty dependent on the school organizing stuff." Whitney's program offered events like dances, festivals, and retreats. According to Whitney, she would attend all events she could in her free time. Many participants mentioned that their daily schedules were busy, and they like it that way. As a consequence, however, they would join and seek out communities when, according to Wyatt, they were "looking for something to sort of fill my time and something just sort of get invested." In most cases where they had free time, they chose their groups based on interests and where they had friendships. In other cases, participants had hobbies that they could pursue from inside a fixed community. Wyatt plays music, for example, and this hobby led to his affiliation with a spiritual community where he was in the band. Audrey had been a member of jazz band

and choir in middle school, so she sought out those clubs in her hybrid program. Bailey is a

singer and did so in high school as well as semi-professionally outside of high school.

Hybrid program communities. Most participants could identify the hybrid program as a

community itself. They felt that sense of belonging because of the small size of the programs and

the shared experience. Bailey described the hybrid school as "our common ground," and said that

she "pretty much knew everyone in my graduating class." Participants definitely felt that their

programs made efforts to form community. In most cases this advertising was done with daily

audio announcements, emails, and posters around campus. These efforts to form community

were noted by participants. Whitney explained that she attended dances organized by the

program and feels she made close friendships that way. Audrey noticed that "they did have

seminars, which was partly to make us feel like a group." Even the nature of the programs seems

to have afforded a community feeling, as Sam describes in her classroom when she says it is

"such a small classroom so you have that more like personal time with them." In addition to the

small class size, Sam feels that she had a more personal relationship with her program

community because "it was a smaller group so they have a close relationship you know it's more

personal and we were there for four years." In Sam's hybrid program teachers kept their students

for all four years of high school. Another reason cited for connectedness was the curricular

design. Whitney felt that she developed a closeness with classmates because her program

emphasized group work, and noted "a lot of times it can be like it was like a group project or

something and then you know just everybody starts talking because of that."

Several participants ascribed their sense of belonging to the dedication of program staff

that Evan describes as the "reaching out of professors." Bailey states that teachers "always

seemed like so much more willing to help than my teachers from actual high school," and a

"teacher who was always willing to meet if I needed to." This gave her "a sense that the teacher was available," and made her feel connected. Daniel described that teachers and students were more connected than he felt in traditional programs to the degree that "they were not just being the teachers and students and just like I was saying earlier it was like everyday life and they were willing to share their stories and just communicating," even noting a particular teacher, "Miss Stacy, which was a teacher I really liked she would take us to six flags." Wyatt described the same type of personal connection to a teacher when he said, "he was an incredible teacher and director and he cared about the students and he was honestly like a friend to us- he would invite us over to his house to play video games or something or he would you know hang out to see a movie with us." Wyatt extended this dedication to all staff and students when he explained that, in his program, "people there are so invested."

Another reason for their connectedness to the programs was a sense of pride they felt stemming from the rigor they perceived. Evan "thought it was good quality and so like high level and that means you want to represent and be up be a part of the organization." Audrey said her pride for her program was due to a "stronger sense of academics than I think most high schools have." She stated that her program's decathlon team was highly ranked and that she appreciated seeing other students studying at tables during lunch time. Evan identified the same sense of pride this way: "You have a sense of accomplishment a sense of pride and you feel like it's a good place and the quality of education is good because it was hard earned."

Athletic team communities. Athletic teams were, in some cases, connected with the school program. In other cases, these teams were independent of the school program. Almost all participants in this study were members of athletic teams at one time or another, and most were constantly involved in sports. Hudson played basketball, Sam was a competitive gymnast, Bailey

was on the school wrestling team, Whitney was an equestrian vaulter, and Gracie ran cross country. Hudson explained that intramural basketball games provided opportunities for him to meet friends from various areas creating a web of social communities as well.

Spiritual communities. Spiritual communities were described in six out of the eight interviews. These communities were described as places to relax and enjoy similar age peers in a casual environment. Wyatt explained that his church group was "a place where I didn't necessarily feel like I had to do anything you know I could just go and just have a good time with some people that I met there and it's just you know interaction with cool people." Bailey, while explaining how she met the challenges of high school, depended on her spiritual community as a "really awesome church community that I would fall back on a lot."

Effects of community involvement. Connectedness to the hybrid program community was perceived very positively by participants. That connectedness manifested as pride and personal attachment. For example, this connectedness made Bailey feel pride as she described her message to those outside of her program: "this is a very supportive environment and it's so much better than where I used to be and you all should know about it." Evan also described the effect of community involvement as something

> you feel like you belong to and it is a small group that you did it <graduated high
> school> with and it was kind of personalized in the sense that you had like a one
> on one tutor type relationship with your teacher and were taken care of that way
> and also because you thought it <the program> was good quality and so like
> high level and that means you want to represent and be a part of the organization.

Sam explains that "there's a sense of pride" as a result of belonging to the hybrid program. The sense of pride and personal attention they felt as a result of the rigor and staff behavior had positive effects on their perception of that community. Wyatt described this same sense of pride and affection as he described his program as

a really great program and people that are there are truly invested in what they're doing from football all the way to drama. It's a growing school as in the people that are there are actually involved not just the faculty but the students and people that are there tend to not just come for school.

Another effect of feeling connected to the program was a desire to do well. Gracie explained that she tried her hardest because "our friends were all there so we wanted to do good and like impress teachers and they were all awesome." The friendships which bound participants personally to their program were perceived very positively. Whitney explained her affection for her program this way:

> they're like a second family a lot of the people there especially you know since I've been there all of high school and I know a lot of people through the online class I also went to a lot of the local classes later on my last two years of high school so I definitely have several close friends there.

For Whitney, the positive feelings the resulted from the program are ones she's hoping will last forever. She explains:

> I hope they (friendships established through the program) go on for a very long time. Yeah even my friend who I was talking about who moved in Canada you know I'm visiting her soon. I like saved up all year she visited last year because she moved two years ago and I saved up all year to get a ticket to visit her and I leave next week.

Indeed, some participants continue to feel connected to their hybrid program community. When Whitney was interviewed she'd just returned from a retreat of program alumni.

Theme 2: Social Structure

The *Social Structure* theme includes perceptions of social capital, relationships established during high school in which that social capital was demonstrated, and reasons these relationships felt important to participants. In analyzing the history of these important relationships, participants identified their origin and plans for maintaining these relationships long term.

Table 5

Theme: Social Structure Codes

Social Structure Codes	Frequency Coded
- Social Capital - Nature of relationships identified - How relationships were established - Longevity of relationships	41 144 46 34

Social capital. Participants appeared modest about their social capital, but when pressed to describe how they interact with peers revealed that they made independent decisions when it felt necessary. If the participant wanted to attend a particular event or make a social plan, they all felt they could do so. They also felt that they were perfectly willing to follow others' plans and that this decision depended on the situation.

Table 6

Code: Social Capital

Social Structure Codes	Frequency Coded
Social Capital	41

While Audrey initially described "mutually trying to make friends," she identified a particularly close friend who pursued her friendship for many months. He had been in her classes and continuously tried to talk to Audrey. The fact that she was not the initiator of the friendship did not make Audrey feel less in control of the situation. To the contrary she felt she had control over when and how the friendship might start. Indeed, Audrey actually felt as follows:

> I'm kind of a leader. Like, in my female friend group that I have like on
> campus I'm like I'm the one who makes the plans and I'm the one who
> figures out what we do because no one else does things they're kind of like
> "I don't know"

Bailey described her social capital as entirely dependent on the situation. For example, she described herself in her church group this way:

> I also became kind of a follower especially like in my church kind of friend
> group because I was so new to that community that I just kind of I wanted
> people to like me and so I just kind of did what was normal and like what
> people wanted to like impress people.

Bailey continued to describe this desire to be liked and its effect on her behavior. At work, she felt uncomfortable being a leader because she was one of the youngest employees. In her high school program, she described herself generally as someone "caught up in wanting people to like me." Interestingly, however, Bailey's actions told a different story. She described her transition from traditional education to hybrid education as having a positive influence on her social capital. Bailey described the relationships at her hybrid program as more supportive and said she felt less like a "follower" at school. Bailey explained that this sense of social equality came directly from teachers who treated her with respect and caring.

Daniel described himself as laid back when it came to Social Capital- he explained that he was content to let others make plans but could easily convince his friends to follow his lead as well.

> also probably adapt based on your goal like if there's actually something
> you really want to do you know then you might take a leadership role like
> 'I really want to go just see that movie or whatever' but if you know I
> didn't care you just like. (Daniel)

Daniel explained that part of the reason he was flexible about his social capital was to avoid attention:

> I more like to work behind the scenes I don't I don't like the attention that much but I like things from behind and it's not like you feel like you have. A lack of a better word the power in the relationships but you only exert like you know necessarily exert it unless something really makes it that matters to me.

He further explained that he did not like the responsibility of making plans for a group, but described himself as too "lazy" for that and noted that making the decisions was not worth the effort of making the plans. The work necessary to make things happen in his social groups was only worth the effort if Daniel felt strongly about wanting to do something. Thus, his choice of control was not seemingly related to leadership ability, but rather related to the effort he chose to exert.

Whitney also felt that she adapted her leadership level to each situation. When asked whether she tended to initiate friendships she said she "had a lot of people initiate conversations with me I've also initiated lot of conversations." When asked to describe why there was a difference in her behavior, Whitney explained,

> I think that depends on the group I'm and there are certain groups where I definitely feel like I'm the leader and then there are like certain groups where I definitely feel like I don't know more timid and less able to lead.

She further explained that, in some groups, she felt she had the skills to be a leader. One example was her sports team. In other groups, she did not feel old enough to be a leader. One example of this was her church group.

Gracie was anxious that describing her social capital would "seem braggy," and identified herself as a leader in social circles. She identified her leadership skills by explaining that she did not think about what classes her peers were choosing when scheduling her hybrid school career, but only considered her aptitudes and goals. Gracie identified instances where these decisions took her away from friends she would otherwise have leaned on for social

support and saw this as a strength. She identified herself as "shy" but clarified that she was "talkative once you get to know me." She did not feel the urge to make conversation with people with which she did not feel common interests. In contrast, Sam described herself as "shy" but felt regret about that label. Sam explained that she "could be a leader eventually" but that it took quite a while for her to be comfortable enough to do so. Gracie also attributed her lack of purely social relationships to a tight schedule. She traveled to basketball tournaments at times by airplane, taking online courses from her grandparents' house in one town while playing basketball for an intramural team located two towns away.

Wyatt displayed the same reluctance to admit his leadership skill as Gracie and Sam. When asked to describe his own perception of his social capital, he instead relied on others' assessments:

> I would I probably lean more toward more towards being a leader but I
> don't I don't like to say that about myself if that makes sense I mean that's
> just what people say.

Wyatt feels that making plans for his social group is mutual and that, although he comes up with the ideas, he is just as willing to follow others' ideas for an activity. Wyatt does express his independence socially, however, when explaining how he chooses social groups. He is very attuned to the attitudes and interests of his friends and expresses the very clear desire to only associate with groups whose attitudes and interests he shares.

Hudson's social capital was evidenced in his ability to move between social groups, extend friendships through basketball the same as Gracie, and build a wide social circle:

> I say it's kind of situational because a lot of times it was like my best friend
> would be like 'hey there's this dance and a girl needs a date at her private
> school' and I didn't know her right but she's like 'she needs a date and I
> heard that you play us in basketball and stuff. (Hudson)

It is obvious that Hudson feels like a leader and that this feeling came from his basketball career:

> And sports is just a really great atmosphere because it puts you on a pedestal where everybody recognizes you don't know if they've seen you at games or whatever.

Because of basketball, where he had the opportunity to travel to several towns and make many friendships, Hudson said "it was never really a struggle to socialize." He displayed the same modesty as Gracie in describing his social capital, saying, "I don't want to toot my own horn."

Relationships identified and nature of relationships. Every participant chose to mention family relationships when describing people that were integral in their support system**.**

Table 7

Code: Nature of Relationships Identified.

Social Structure Codes	Frequency Coded
• Nature of relationships identified	144

Daniel described his mother as "always looking over my shoulder to see how I was doing," and although he did not feel she had the systemic knowledge to help him succeed, he did feel that her constant watch made him sustain his efforts. Audrey has a step-mother that she felt kept a watchful eye on her progress. Gracie's mother was "her support system" and she often still calls home to explain her stressors and release negative energy. Evan felt that his mother "was always there" for him, but also credited his siblings for being "a very strong support system." He explains that his brothers and sister were

a huge influence on me just because like I said they're a lot braver so I feel
as though, you know, if they want me to do something too then I think it's a
good thing and that they're not going to say it unless it's very honest. (Evan)

Hudson describes a time in his high school years where he felt he was in over his head. He

turned to his mother to explain he felt overwhelmed, and she relived some of the pressure. He

had always been very independent and only used his mother as a sounding board up until that

time. Hudson felt that being able to tell his parents he needed help was important in his

development. "They had raised me to be a pretty independent kid," he said. "And being able to

tell them that I was feeling a bit out of control and having them guide me" was a huge relief.

Sam would similarly go to her mom when she felt overwhelmed. She, too, was careful to point

out that her mom would not solve her problems or take action on her behalf. Instead, she felt her

mom's role was "she would just listen" and sometimes offer advice.

Like I would let her know because we were close what was going on or
something but usually just like she gave me advice sometimes but she
wouldn't do anything I guess but I just figured it out (Sam)

Participants had a variety of relationships generated from their variety of communities.

Among these relationships a parent was always included. Some participants detailed

relationships with other family members like an aunt or siblings. Additionally, participants could

identify peers that they considered friends outside of their family relationships.

Many participants described relationships with peers in their hybrid classes. Audrey

explained that these friends would "make sure we sat together in every class," and that by the

end of her first year

I ended up knowing that at least five people in each of my classes that I would
talk to every day like so a lot more social I feel so like really that.

Audrey explained that her closest friend was one she met in classes and they often worked

together during the study hall face to face meetings. Her closest friend was in one of her classes

the first year:

> One of my best friends he was still in [name of program] and he is he still
> there to this day because he's only a junior he took one class with me on
> campus and then he took to me so I would lean on him a lot like especially in
> that class (Audrey)

She described the importance of this friendship in pushing each of the girls

toward their goals, and explained

> she's like I'm really close with her now me and my best friend both that we
> talked about everything like. Because over the past two years we've always
> been in her room and when we've gotten really close and like I knew she was
> pregnant before anyone else I knew who the dad was because he was also on
> the other campus and that I knew they were dating the whole time I was in the
> program but no one knew, you know? Like I visit her still and I just talked to
> her on Facebook last night (Audrey)

Audrey also describes strong relationships she had while participating on the wrestling team,

explaining that not only their shared interest but also the support they gave one another was a

strong source of friendship. She explains that she continued with the wrestling team even when it

got difficult

> like a lot of people encouraged me on a lot and even like I almost passed out
> on a toilet but the captain of the team like she got one of the ice packs and I
> said I should put it on my head and everyone like even the guy who I ended
> up liking would come up every minute and ask are you OK like you're good
> and after a few days you get used to it and they will be really nice and friendly
> so that was like really cool and you want to go back no matter how hard it got.
> (Audrey)

Hudson developed a friendship with a friend who he could rely on to understand what he was

going through at school and in sports:

> my best friend and he was quite the academic and he understood my pain and
> he helped me through it just because he saw all the time that I spent doing it
> at

Several participants described close friendships with staff at their hybrid program. Bailey described "wonderful woman like I still talk to her to this day," whom she credits with giving Bailey the inspiration to apply to colleges she thought were out of reach. Bailey's math teacher was more than just a teacher to her, as she describes:

> my math teacher was also my main teacher. I already had kind of like a relationship with her like when I first unrolled in the school she was the one who like set me a welcome email and was like comfortable asking her like teacher questions you know. And so she was just like all around a really great person that I got to be close with. (Bailey)

Bailey describes these relationships as being motivational and supportive.

Many participants described relationships established through sports teams. One of Evan's closest friends was a wide receiver on his football team. Whitney explained that not only were teammates significant in her high school years, but coaches as well:

> She's definitely been like a role model for me as far as just being independent and you know figuring things out and not giving up.

Wyatt remembers fondly his "baseball league buddies," while Sam describes supportive wrestling team members, and Sam portrays her gymnastics teammates as key players in her recovery after she was injured. In each interview, participants described feelings of reliance on their relationships for support. Some participants described their own role as supporters in relationships. Participants also explained that, in each relationship, common goals and interests were important. Audrey points out that she sought "friends with similar goals," and Bailey explained that these relationships "definitely gave (me) the inspiration" to succeed both in school and sports. Gracie explained that, although she felt she had only a small number of friends, their relationships were deep ones: "I have very few close close friends that I could say anything to and have heart to hearts but those ones I keep obviously very close."

The nature of these relationships was one of support without intrusion. Evan explained:

> I don't think I could've gone very far without you know my parents saying same kind words about how they talk to you and things but they would not do things for me

Evan goes on to explain that his dad is his "rock" and his mom "always finds methods and gives me advice," but Evan is the one to take the necessary action when he is challenged. In a discussion about how her parents helped her find her true interests, Gracie explains "my parents they never you know accepted that kind of stereotype." Gracie ended up playing basketball avidly and excelling in math and science. She is now a veterinarian and was explaining that she did not think she would have ended up pursuing those goals if her parents and had not ignored typical gender stereotypes. She explains how her mother avoids taking action on her behalf, opting instead to provide support and let Gracie be responsible for getting herself through challenges.

> That's where mom becomes a sounding board like she wants to come pick me up and fix my problems because I'm upset but she knows that's not really what I want I just need someone to talk to. My mom allows me to be strong by not doing too much and knowing I can handle it. (Gracie)

Hudson describes the same type of support from his mom,

> In my family she's a huge base for me just like this big resource that I can tap into whenever I need it instead of you know instead of them helicopter parenting.

Sam had this same type of relationship with her mom, explaining that "It was like just usually me like having trouble with like a skill she would just listen because she really can't help."

The nature of the relationships established during their high school years also was described as a stepping stone in development. The support of a church group, a cooperative

learning group, or a team provided a safe place from which to grow. Gracie described it this way:

> Coop is a huge one I think if I didn't think I actually would be like socially inept. The coop was huge and doing that as a stepping stone to junior college was huge.

Hudson explained that he learned to have deeper relationships as his friendships developed throughout high school years, and he said, "And then the biggest thing was all my friendships started with just like time together and then they became stronger and real relationships." Whitney explained a relationship with her gymnastics coach that developed her independence as well when she said, "She's definitely been like a model for me as far as just being independent and you know figuring things out."

How relationships were established. In every instance, relationships were established in face to face meetings over time. None of the relationships described by participants came from online communication or online class participation.

Table 8

Code: How Relationships Were Established

Social Structure Codes	Frequency Coded
• How relationships were established	46

Some of the relationships were generated through common interests, when both individuals took the same classes or played the same sport. This was highlighted as a motivator for some participants to attend more of these events. There was a dynamic described wherein participation

in social situations depended on both *who* would be attending as well as *what* the activity would

be.

For middle school, Sam was in a traditional program she felt was large and impersonal. She

credited her social structure in high school to the program by saying,

> it was a lot smaller so like it was like you're kind of like you're meeting the
> people in your class and you see them every day like you're in the same
> classroom with them every single day so I guess like that maybe that was it
> like I just got closer with.

Whitney describes the dynamics of the face to face classroom that led to relationships by

saying, "a lot of times it can be like it was like a group project or something and then you know

just everybody starts talking because of that." Audrey met one friend in math class, another in

jazz band, and finally her closest friend

> and I would sit next to each other in our class rooms so we would really hang
> out like five hours a day at school because we would sit next to each other for
> periods a day.

Many relationships were established outside of the school program, but still were

established face to face. Sam knew her neighborhood families well and explained that

> my neighbor and I have been like best friends since I was really little and they
> have like all their friends too so we all hang out with them as well.

Similarly, Whitney's parents had children that she considered close friends because "we had

been friends in childhood and so I had stayed friends with her." Audrey also met friends of

friends by staying on campus outside of class time. She described lunch hours where friends

would introduce her to people she didn't know and they would end up forming social circles.

Whitney also explains that many friends were established through sports: "Also like sports and

stuff too I've made a lot of friends in sports because I travel a lot for that." In addition to

classes and sports, participants made and sustained relationships at work and at church.

Longevity of relationships. Participants either described desire to maintain relationships

long term, or could give evidence to show that relationships established during high school years

was indeed continuing long term.

Table 9

Code: Longevity of Relationships

Social Structure Codes	Frequency Coded
• Longevity of relationships	34

Whitney says that

> I hope they (friendships established through hybrid program) go on for a very
> long time. Yeah even my friend who I was talking about who moved to
> Canada you know I'm visiting I like saved up all year she visited last year
> because she moved two years ago and I saved up all year to get a ticket to
> visit her and I leave next week.

Wyatt describes how he continues to spend time with friends made during his hybrid high

school years:

> It's just us hanging out you know about a group of like twenty or thirty of us
> you know out playing games and definitely like all those connections were
> through like places that I you know they were just like they were all through
> like friends that I made during high school.

Audrey is in college and uses technology to stay in touch with her closest friend from hybrid

high school:

> Yeah I just messaged her last night about what I'm doing because my plans
> changed a bit and she was like oh come visit as soon as you can I miss you
> already.

Bailey explains that relationships made with school staff can be enduring as well, when she describes her counselor as a "wonderful woman that like I still talk to to this day."

Daniel. Daniel did not describe interest in maintaining friendships from his hybrid years. He described caring staff with whom he communicated while there, and one teacher in particular who coerced him to join group activities. Daniel felt the staff "absolutely dedicated their time" but did not form lasting relationships with them. For the most part Daniel was independent. He viewed his mother's interest in his education during that time this way: "my mom was always trying to be involved in my studies which was really annoying to me and she still tries." Daniel did not feel the hybrid program made a difference in his social choices (versus traditional high school), explaining "Granted I found the kids that I kicked it with like probably the same kids I would have kicked it within high school." Instead, he identified himself as a loner by nature, willing to make his own decisions or follow others depending on the situation, and says he continues to "float in and out" of social groups in college.

Theme 3: Personal Growth

Participants noted that challenges and achievements during their high school years helped them to emotionally develop. The frequency with which they discussed areas of this growth are shown in Table 10 below.

Table 10

Theme: Personal Growth Codes

Personal Growth Codes	Frequency Coded
• Challenges • Achievements • Feelings when challenged • Response (action taken) when	51 37 68 128

challenged • Reflections after challenge	224

They had what several described as the same fears that any high school age person would have in response to challenge, but could identify actions taken that developed their sense of ability to meet challenges in the future. Each challenge seemed to be met successfully and used as a learning experience. Each achievement gave subjects tools to use for future success. These stories will be told by subject, to maintain the flow of their experience from challenge to outcome to reflection.

Sam. Sam was on her way to college with gymnastics scholarships when she fractured her foot. She described feeling scared and hopeless at first, but quickly forming a plan. Years before Sam had been talking to teammates about the percent of rowers that get scholarships to local college (Sam did not want to go far away for college so her choices were limited) in contrast to the percent of gymnast that achieved that goal. There happened to be a rowing trainer at the gym next door to her gymnastics gym, and the girls joked about switching over. When she fractured her foot, after the fear and hopelessness, Sam knew she needed a way to college. She remembered the jokes and went to the gym next door to talk to the rowing trainer. Sam is now at college on a full scholarship for rowing.

Sam describes feeling "stressed out" at the thought of losing her ability to get to college. She thought to herself, "Okay, I'm out for the season," at first but was "pretty upset" and "cried a lot" when found that her injury would also leave her too far behind in her gymnastics career to be a scholarship candidate. She expressed a degree of desperation about the commitment that proved fruitless, saying, "there would be no point continuing if I wasn't going to college I mean it was thirty hours a week."

Despite the fear of losing her future plans, Sam repeatedly explained that she "had always done things on my own," and described times when she needed to learn a new gymnastics skill and spent hours figuring out a way to make it happen. Using the same philosophy, she set her mind to finding a new plan "like figuring out a new skill" in gymnastics. She specifically remembered that she could achieve new skills in gymnastics only when she "went back and kind of tackled it," so she did not let herself back down from this challenge. She remembers

> There are good days bad days obviously like one day I would have no idea
> what to do and I would be like so upset and some days like ideas would come
> easier and I would just be happier about the future. (Sam)

Once she began to reflect on ways she'd tackled challenges in the past, she remembered the conversations joking about rower scholarships. Describes the swiftness of her actions once she thought of a new plan:

> So I decided to start going to that gym my senior year as soon as my foot was
> better and then actually that same week I tried out for a rowing team and then
> I got on the rowing team and then three months later I got recruited to San
> Diego State on a full rowing scholarship.

Bailey. Bailey's struggles were academic. She was intimidated by mathematics and needed high level courses, to pursue engineering in the armed forces. Her family could not help- no one in her family had taken mathematics at the level Bailey was challenged. She explains that at first, she felt hopeless and ready to give up. Next, she explains how she created her own learning plan using free online tutorials to supplement where she struggled. Finally, Bailey describes her mathematics scores her junior and senior year as evidence of her achievement. She is also currently serving in the armed forces as an engineer.

When she first began hybrid high school, Bailey explains, "I was scared." Bailey imagined that teachers "were just not going to accept me," and that she would not be as successful as she needed to be to get into a good college.

> I was scared I had a lot of fear- my both my older sisters went to really good
> schools and I was scared to be like the one who didn't. (Bailey)

She thought, at first, that acceptance would help her deal with the fear. She explains that she told herself

> like I'm probably just going to have to go to community college but I need to
> be okay with that and I would be very happy if I could just be okay with that.
> (Bailey)

This, she explains, was only her initial reaction to quell the fear enough to allow her to move forward. Bailey visited a counselor at school to find out what the requirements would be to go the colleges she liked and soon decided on a simple plan:

> I'm you know gonna work extra hard you know I'm going to do good in
> school and see what happens. The counselor was just a really great woman
> and she told me to keep trying and don't let that acceptance be an excuse.
> (Bailey)

Indeed, Bailey did well enough in her hybrid program to get into a private university she'd targeted, and continues using the same tactics when challenged today. She described another story about getting coursework accepted at her current university. Bailey told herself everything would be okay if she did not get the university to accept the coursework and resigned herself to repeating at least a year of language classes. At the same time, however, she went in to advocate for herself, armed with research and transcripts proving her case. Bailey got the university to accept all her coursework and saved herself a year of additional classes. She relates the challenges and recognizes her pattern of behavior so that now, "looking back I just don't really know how else I would have handled things it's just my way."

Hudson. Hudson's struggle was also academic, but it was not the coursework that challenged him. Rather, Hudson struggled to choose courses that would best set him up for his college goals, write his own transcript to prove he'd chosen well, and get accepted to a college on scholarship. Hudson spent his high school years anxious about his classes- he felt they were worthwhile and rigorous, but he worried that because he assembled them from so many sources his overall transcript was too unique to be compared in the traditional college application system. He also constantly worried about writing his transcript himself, which he had to do in order to apply to colleges. He also had to juggle obligations to his family. Hudson describes many instances in college essays and interviews where he defended his high school work, and is now on a full honors scholarship for petroleum engineering at the University of Texas.

 Hudson describes his feelings early in high school as "insecurity," when faced with choosing his classes.

> I think the biggest one (challenge) for me culminated out of my whole
> structure of school which was picking my own classes, picking my own
> times, picking my sports…(Hudson)

He would experience insecurity again and explained that "it made me so nervous" when writing his own transcripts and preparing for college admission interviews.

> Trying to get academic organizations to respect your work and to say 'Hey
> this transcript looks good' by basically making a transcript is a big deal
> because you know your counselor at your school does it for you normally
> and when I first started it's like 'will they accept this?' you know it's hybrid
> online school so how will they look at this and say quantitatively 'Hey,
> Hudson as compared to another student deserves to go to our school?'
> (Hudson)

Part of the reason Hudson felt such insecurity is because his instinctive response to challenge is "comparing myself to my peers of course comparing myself to my college classmates." Hudson dealt with the insecurity of not knowing whether his transcripts would earn him acceptance to

college for his entire high school career. He described disappointment when he was not

accepted to Stanford, crying and believing he had not planned correctly and had played too

much basketball when he should have been taking more classes. Hudson feels that "asking for

help is a big skill," and learned to do that during his high school years. He also feels that he has

always had a tendency to "just keep moving forward" when faced with challenge. According to

Hudson, this helped him continue to mature.

 In reflecting on his academic history, Hudson felt he had taken steps toward

independence along the way that prepared him to defend his choices. His mother had chosen

classes for Hudson when he was beginning middle school, then slowly began included him in

those choices until

> by my high school year I was kind of figuring it out for myself you know I
> think it's a good skill to have and I'm not trying to toot my own horn but it's
> like my parents would help me with miscellaneous things not so much what
> courses I'm going to take you know or what should I take (Hudson)

Hudson feels these stepping stones to independence had a big influence on his personal

development. He describes a turning point in seventh grade

> when I started realizing like hey you can go faster or slower if you want but
> if I keep you know my dad always said keep going with math as you can with
> math was best you can with sciences and I enjoy it so I just kept going with
> it. (Hudson)

Hudson feels that this point was he began to feel independent and in control of his life, and that

feeling continued to develop in high school years. He would apply that sense of independence to

planning coursework, writing his transcripts, and juggling life as the head of the household on

many occasions. He explains that there were times that his mom would need groceries while his

dad was out of town for work. Hudson, with no driver's license, would get himself to face to

face classes and pick up the groceries on the way home. He remembers that his dad had faith

him and knew what he was doing. Hudson explains that "things just needed to get done, and I was busy but I knew it was up to me to do them."

Looking back, Hudson can see that he developed faith in himself and his abilities, as well as self-reliance.

> I really had to trust myself when I was writing it and it was hard to trust myself really because I had chosen all these courses and now I had to believe they would actually accept this community college coursework in the same way they would accept A.P. course work or whatever so I think that was the biggest challenge. (Hudson)

It helped boost his confidence that colleges did accept his transcripts very favorably. He did not get into Stanford, which was his first choice, and this brought a small resurgence of the doubt he'd felt throughout high school. At the same time, though, other acceptances arrived and Hudson "gained that confirmation that I am who I am and I've done the work that I can and it will be good enough." He also thought that the fact that he put the coursework together was significant. When explaining how college acceptance felt, Hudson says "that's a great accomplishment I love it but I think it I think it says a lot more to *how* I got it you know." After being accepted with honors to the University of Texas he was relieved and began to feel that his scholastic choices were "justified," but after having been in the program a while he now feels "there's huge sense of gratification now I mean I definitely feel more confident now."

Hudson is very clear about the lessons he learned for scheduling a busy life as well. He learned that he can communicate his feelings to his family and not be judged. He also learned how to plan ahead, delegate, and sometimes do things "just well enough" instead of perfectly. At first, he says he "freaked out because there was just so much busy work I mean I was kind of a perfectionist at the time." But he describes his parents as a "lifeline" during this time when "everything just fell from underneath (me)." He explains that he began to check in with his

parents about his workload, and get their feedback about whether he was taking on too much in school as well as at home. His parents sometimes told him his load was appropriate, and sometimes took part of that load away. He feels that their balance of guidance and noninterference was crucial to his personal growth, saying "my parents gave me the tools necessary to orchestrate my own life." In addition to self-reliance, he has learned to adapt in this way:

> I'm less of a perfectionist I think the more work that comes and the less you try to perfect each one and now I'm just doing so much that I can't give that much attention to each little thing. That's just a skill you have to learn. (Hudson)

Hudson continues to focus on finding this balance and continues to believe in his ability to meet challenges head on. He believes it has "become an issue of try your best but once and have a life you know."

    Daniel. Daniel struggles academically as well as personally. He described a search to figure out his goals and maintain the effort required to achieve those goals. He is excited when talking about raising his grade point average during years where his focus felt clear. He has reflections of lessons learned when talking about his grade point average during years where he lost focus. These same struggles continue for him in college.

    Daniel describes scholastic struggles such as waking up on time, missing deadlines, and attributes deficits to a

> maturity factor growing up it was like 'I don't have time to waste,' and then second was that I was just tired of being chewed out by my mom as well and my professor.

His initial feelings when challenged are annoyance and a need to avoid action. But that avoidance is what Daniel relates to a missing maturation. He knew at the time that he should not be wasting time, but continued to miss deadlines. Daniel describes the first year of high school:

"It was like all easy the all fun and games at first." After realizing high school brought a tougher set of challenges than he was used to, Daniel lost motivation and his grades suffered. The way he describes it, "I kind of lost my foundation my footing." He began waking up late, missing school, and doing poorly in classes. The reason Daniel allowed his situation to deteriorate, as he sees it, was because "the moment I started losing control I would freak out inside." Daniel would procrastinate, using his time to worry and predict terrible outcomes. He describes his time spent predicting outcomes as "fuel that never actually got the car moving."

Eventually, Daniel found himself watching a documentary on television with his father one day which explained a cancer epidemic in America. Having family members with cancer, Daniel was immediately interested and decided he wanted to help. This desire to help others "sparked my interest in wanting to help people like my family" and motivated Daniel to assert himself in school for a while, raise his grade point average, and volunteer at a local medical center. His volunteer work was rewarding:

> So for a whole year basically it was neat being around the environment like helping other people and seeing the patients (Daniel)

The time spent at the clinic also helped Daniel feel better about himself:

> It turned out to be like one of my places to ease out of like my own skin I guess I was able to get an escape from reality because it was my getaway. Some people have the woods near their backyard of Narnia but the hospital became my Narnia (Daniel)

These achievements were rewarding to Daniel, but his motivation waned after about a year and his grades dropped again. It was not until his own anxiety and depression got extreme that Daniel decided he wanted to help others who struggle with mental issues. His renewed focus and subsequent grade improvement is motivated by a desire to be a psychologist. Daniel explains that "having that goal is what allowed me to propel my G.P.A. from a three point three to three point

seven eight." At this point Daniel volunteers at a senior center, and says that time spent there

reminds him that "I really take life for granted a lot and it humbled me out." Daniel reflects on

the fact that each period of motivation is preceded by a desire to help others, but that each is also

temporary.

> Daniel understood how to make the necessary changes, claiming what he need was

>> eventually just growing up and to be like you should probably start doing this
>> and adjusting your schedule to meet that deadline.(Daniel)

but this realization was not an impetus for long term change. Daniel explains how he

had the same challenges in middle school that manifested themselves throughout

high school:

>> In that school as well and I had to struggle to meet certain standards and then
>> you know I'd keep struggling so I wouldn't say it was the first time this
>> problem occurred like you know but it was the first time this problem
>> occurred. (Daniel)

At times, Daniel highlights his development, while at other times he expresses regret that he

continues these struggles in college today. For example, Daniel says, "I became successful in this

program but yes maturity did have a major part in that and starting to see things differently."

While later in the conversation he states that he still lacks "self-discipline" and recognizes a

development of a tactic that he calls "going for the easy way out."

> Daniel explains that his biggest accomplishment to date: "but using my resources is my

specialty. There is a way of like getting people to help you." He notes that, in past challenges

have scared him saying, "I will put on a front like I don't care but secretly it's killing me." But

instead of learning to take action Daniel has learned to get others to take action for him. He has

also learned to "work the system." Thinking back now, Daniel can see that he began learning to

do this in middle school, saying he saw himself "doing the same thing and finding the same

loopholes in traditional school." He says he was "always trying to find a quicker way of possibly

of doing something" in high school as well. Daniel can describe the height of this discovery

during high school:

> So one day I was able to look around and go okay, like I got it, I can kind of
> just work it, and I know eventually that can be bad as in like you're not
> probably going to learn anything, but you're figuring out how to get by and
> learning the system. So that's what general education was for me. It's more
> than in how to work the system. Not that I was really taught anything about
> that. But when I was trying to understand what they wanted to teach me what
> you learned was how to figure out how to get that right answer- not so much
> what the right answer was. (Daniel)

Daniel says, "eventually it became easier and easier to just get around stuff," and that he still

uses this skill today. He is currently supposed to be finding a place for him and his college

roommates to rent. He says he spends his time predicting the many different things that can

happen that will leave him homeless, while complaining to his roommates so that they will do

the work needed to find a place.

Gracie. Gracie tells the story of leaving basketball behind and focusing on science with

nonchalance at first. It is only when pressed for details and emotions that she expresses her sense

of loss and fear. Leaving a sport for which she had natural talent and a big reputation left Gracie

wondering whether she would let her parents and siblings down or embarrass herself. That, in

addition to losing a pastime that once made her so happy, was a turning point in Gracie's

maturity. She would later use that growth experience to remind herself in college how strong she

truly is. The youngest of her class because of the advanced credits she accrued in high school,

Gracie now faces the fear and anxiety but knows she can conquer this challenge as she

conquered her transition from basketball.

Gracie feels sad, can remember crying in the face of her challenges, but has always

known she "had to just do whatever it takes" to achieve her goals. She explains that she learned

this from parents' and grandparents' examples. Gracie would hear stories about her

grandparents' busy lives, hard work, and dedication from the time she was very young. Her

mother also had stories of struggles from which Gracie took advice. She says that her mother

always believed Gracie was more capable than she had been as a girl, and was a good listener. It

helps that "I never doubted what I wanted to do." Gracie's initial sadness when she realized

she'd need to give up basketball for academics was similar to her sadness recently in finding that

she is the youngest veterinary student in her class. She still handles the sadness by crying, then

will call her mom, and then

> you just kinda have to do it and you're sad but you just do it and once I set
> my mind of what I want to do it's kind of like 'well, that's what I'm gonna
> do.' (Gracie)

Gracie has always remembered being this way. When asked about her high school

years, Gracie explains

> each challenge you face is kind of like 'yes I'm so sad' or you know
> sometimes even crying about it like super sad about it but then I would tend
> to let it out somehow whether it's praying going to my mom and having a
> talk. (Gracie)

After these talks Gracie always remembers recommitting herself, aligning her focus,

and moving forward. When the challenge was leaving her basketball career behind,

Gracie says she directed her energy partly into less time consuming intra-mural

sports and partly into the new academic courses. When the challenge was leaving her

family for college, Gracie took the same approach. She cried and talked, and then

moved. Now that the challenge is being a young veterinary student in a challenging

new environment, Gracie does not see this situation as any different than those she

faced in high school. She believes that her method of facing challenge is "just part of

growing up."

Theme 4: Affinity for the High School Program

During questioning about life satisfaction during their high school years, it became evident that respondents were particularly satisfied with elements of their hybrid program itself. These elements are reflected in the summary of codes in Table 11 below.

Table 11

Theme: Affinity for Program Codes

Affinity for Program Codes	Frequency Coded
• Affordances of hybrid model • Reasons for curricular engagement • Effects of curricular engagement	21 62 111

There were specific affordances of the hybrid model that participants felt were positive aspects. Other engaging aspects of the curriculum were not exclusive to a hybrid model of education. Also, when considering how engaged they felt with their academic material, participants realized there were specific reasons for and effects of that engagement.

Affordances of the hybrid model. The affordances attributed to the hybrid high school model are reflected in the affinity program codes listed in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Code: Affordances of the Hybrid Model

Affinity for Program Codes	Frequency Coded
• Affordances of hybrid model	21

One affordance of the hybrid model mentioned was the availability of high interest face to face classes. Audrey felt that she had the option each year to add jazz, American Sign Language, or

yoga depending on her interests. She did not feel like those classes were ever full and she noted

that this was because they were not core online classes. Audrey felt that the required core classes

online could accommodate the necessary high numbers while the face to face classes got smaller

sets of interested students.

Some participants felt that the addition of face to face meetings in a hybrid model was

important. This component allowed for a gathering place- a campus where social interactions

could occur by chance. Audrey described how she encountered her set of friends:

> One girl I got super close to that I didn't know before this year we met through
> a mutual friend at lunch because we didn't we don't have anywhere to sit for
> lunch so she looked over at all like she kind of like gathered everyone she
> knew (Audrey)

A common sentiment that was voiced was a sense of caring and commitment on the part of

program staff. Participants felt that this benefit was directly caused by the small number of

students and the hiring of high quality people. Bailey felt this sense of support was in contrast to

her previous traditional school:

> After having that talk with my advisor and like feeling a lot more supported
> through the hybrid high school than I did through like regular public high
> school like I felt like I wanted to succeed.

In discussing what he appreciated about his program, Daniel explained that it was

> Classroom size and when you go into a facility are smaller so you get that
> more one on one direct experience that contributed to his satisfaction because
> it meant that he could "have the teacher focus more on you and still get
> diversity.

For several participants, the structure of the hybrid program was similar. Bailey explains

it this way:

> They like would assign you to an advisor who was your main teacher and
> there was you know all the different teachers for different subjects and they
> like specialized in their subject but then also alphabetically you were
> assigned to one teacher who would be also like considered your teacher and

took in the questions about everything and made sure you were on track or
didn't need anything.

Sam felt the flexible scheduling was essential for her gymnastics career, so that she could leave everyday by 2:00pm to get to training. Sam also explained, "our school was basically our homework," meaning that she could get all of her studying done while she was on campus and have nothing left to do at home. She contrasted this to the traditional model:

People who are going to traditional class and they go to school for like seven
eight hours a day and they come home then they have more work. (Sam)

In summing up her satisfaction with the program logistics, Sam said she had, "everything that the traditional kids have but we have more freedom." Whitney felt that the online nature of the hybrid program was beneficial to her ability to take risks. She explained that she was more outgoing in class discussions, because, "it's easier to be more confident like virtually."

Finally, some participants felt that the ability to add online courses specifically allowed them to accrue college credits faster and enter college "ahead" of the rest of the pack. Evan was able to enter college "more further along than freshman" who had attended traditional high school. Gracie felt that "that was the beauty in it we could pick and choose you know" so that she could take classes more relevant to her chosen career path. Gracie felt this allowed her to "get ahead start" in veterinary school. Hudson also thought this was a big advantage:

I knew I wanted to be either engineering or business and I basically just took a
math every single semester and now I see I don't have any more math to take for
my undergraduate degree and everything transferred I mean it was just more easy
in my opinion because if you clear all the unnecessary junk out of the way and
you can focus on what you want to do for your life. I can't believe the whole
nation is that already doing this. (Hudson)

Hudson feels the "resources" were better outside of the traditional system, and he chose his online and face to face classes to meet his individualized needs. He even considered professors based on online ratings and student comments, taking into consideration whether each course he

took was necessary for him to truly understand (difficult but high-quality teacher) or only necessary as a prerequisite to something else (easy teacher doesn't have to be high quality). Hudson explains why having more transfer units helps him his freshman year of college:

> I'm performing better because I don't have as much stuff going on in my head and I think I can take fewer classes. I transferred the whole calculus sequence and the whole chemistry sequence. I could focus on the real stuff you know and understand it like understand chemistry. It's not hard.

Wyatt's mother did the same thing for him. He explains how he felt about choosing from several online programs when he says,

> when you have almost all the resources in the world you really get to really really get to pick the best and my mom she was able to like look into each thing in like pick what she thought best suited me. (Wyatt)

   Reasons for curricular engagement. Participants cited reasons for curricular engagement as shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13

Code: Reasons for Curricular Engagement

Affinity for Program Codes	Frequency Coded
• Reasons for curricular engagement	62

   Some participants were engaged with their curriculum because of their career goals or interests, others were engaged by a staff member, while some felt engaged because of the program's rigor. In the last case participants found themselves proud of their affiliation with their program and they were motivated to meet that perceived level of performance. In all of these cases, the motivation is intrinsic and self-driven.

Motivated by the nature of the program. Bailey felt that the structure of online classes required

her to become her own motivator:

> I had to like learn to be my own motivator and so I kind of had to like take
> that like to a next level than you would in normal school and so I think that a
> sense like that like I had to learn to be more engaged and like I had to teach
> myself to be engaged in the online classes or else you know I would I would
> just fell out of school like I wouldn't actually learn anything.

She had always been focused on college, so she was also engaged because of her goals. But

Bailey also felt that the

> stakes were raised when you went virtual to where there was a risk that you
> wouldn't succeed and that caused you to be like oh no I'm not because It was
> no longer just an automatic path that kids walked.

The nature of online classes, according to Bailey, meant that she had a choice to learn and that

she would have to learn independently. This caused her to feel that it was "motivating in the

sense that it was riskier." She also felt that online learning removed some artificiality of

traditional school.

> These people don't see me face to face like they can fail me it's no longer
> about me being like 'oh please raise my grade' it's now like it's actually the
> quality of the work I turn. (Bailey)

Evan also felt that online classes required a higher level of performance, and said that is because

he "really had to own" his work. Both described the work as standing on its own and being

scrupulously judged by a highly qualified professor. Gracie explained that, inversely, she felt

professors could sometimes have preconceived notions of student abilities.

> And not fitting a preconceived notion of what people think about you in an
> online class was a motivation too. (Gracie)

Motivated by goals. Audrey's goals for the future stemmed from seeing her older

sister fail in her eyes.

> I had a fear because I have a sister who's twenty-six and she's basically the opposite of me like she's done a lot of bad she has two kids she's been divorced twice already and she did really back in high school so I kind of saw that I was like I need to make sure I'm exact opposite make sure I like go places instead of just failing. So that was also a motivator. (Audrey)

Audrey says that, with this example in her mind, she became her own motivator and engaged herself with class material. She did not do this right away- at first, Audrey did well but didn't feel she was learning enough. By her junior year of high school, however, Audrey describes herself as extremely engaged and learning everything she possibly could learn. Evan believes college and career are common motivators for high school students:

> You are stressed but I think it's because you realize the importance of your own situation and getting ready college and career.

Hudson also felt that his goals motivated him, so that he was taking classes as a means to get to college.

> It was like it always felt like I was doing something more than just a high school course and now it's very encouraging.

Whitney knew she wanted to use math and engineering one day, and explained, "I knew who I wanted to be and I knew what I had to do to get there so just motivated me." Sometimes their achieving their goals meant participants had to endure less than motivating classes. Wyatt had a very difficult time sitting through or understanding math. He explains that "it helped to know there was a light at the end of the tunnel with math," meaning that he would eventually be finished with required math courses. But his difficulty did not un-motivate Wyatt. To the contrary, Wyatt knew that math was "something I had to get through, so that just made me want to get in there and do it."

Motivated by staff. Daniel felt motivated to engage with classes when he was focused on curing cancer and when he decided to be a mental health professional. Each time the engagement increased his academic performance.

Daniel also attributed his engagement to specific the staff at the school.

> There were a few subjects like history that I was really engaged with and specifically biology and physics because of the teachers I had at the time. So those two Miss Daisy was my biology teacher Ms Projek my history teacher were amazing individuals who both are young.

Daniel felt that these teachers wanted him to learn. He mentioned one teacher that was so engaged with his topic that Daniel couldn't help but become interested. He described others like this:

> They would sit down and be like let's go to Starbucks and you can get that subject down. So that allowed me to basically become engaged because it wasn't just like I had to do it myself. It was more like I'm doing this because she's also very passionate. (Daniel)

He also felt that younger teachers were "more vulnerable and open" which allowed him to be more open to learning. Daniel likes to have deep conversations and connected with a few teachers this way. He says that the more open teachers were to these conversations "the more engaged I would feel." In summarizing his level of engagement over the high school years, Daniel describes it as a "combination of being engaged with the teacher and engaged with the subject."

Motivated by rigor. Evan explained that, upon entering his hybrid program, he was motivated "because I knew that some of the coursework was extremely difficult." He says that something about the level of difficulty increased his desire to learn. Evan feels that the combination of caring teachers and high-level curriculum made him want to succeed.

> They were just really understanding a lot of the time but still you're talking to a professional about something that they're very good at teaching and that was a

huge motivator to me to understand it because I knew that I would not be able
to snow my way. (Evan)

Evan also related face to face meetings with his desire to succeed. These meetings made him feel

personally connected to the teachers and he stayed engage because "she knew me personally and

would know if I was not paying attention." Hudson was specific that the rigor of his program

motivated him to engage, because, as he puts it, "I loved the challenge." He described the

challenge itself as its own reward.

Motivated by self-respect. Gracie explains that, because she had known many of her

hybrid classmates for many years, she needed to be respected for her performance in classes. She

also felt this need was part of her faith.

It goes back to our faith like shining you know being a light for Christ has a
lot to do with it because we didn't want to be just another student trying to be
engaged was a big part of school for us. (Gracie)

Gracie calls this motivation "feeling like you are giving your best." Hudson had an idea in his

head of what the average American high school student might achieve, and imagined himself in

competition with that image:

You are competing with your image of what you thought average American
youth was achieving is if you think about it. You were always paranoid that
you weren't comparing. So, you're almost like competing against your own
expectation of like what kids who went to a public school even were. (Hudson)

Effects of curricular engagement. Participants related specific feelings related to their

curricular engagement. The frequency with which this was discussed is reflected in Table 14

below.

Table 14

Code: Effects of Curricular Engagement

Affinity for Program Codes	Frequency Coded

• Effects of curricular engagement	111

There was a sense of pride in their self-discipline as well as for academic successes. At times, there was a sense of commitment regardless of whether they enjoyed a class. Each participant could identify positive outcomes related to their engagement in curricula. When asked to reflect on the benefits of engagement, Audrey says "I am proud that I made the friends that I did," and that "I got straight A's." Bailey says, "I never really believed I was going to get into college until I got my first acceptance letter." According to Bailey, her sense of pride grew throughout high school, until

> toward the end high school I was really like proud of myself for like getting into college and you know kind of succeeding.

Daniel explained that he felt "regret" for the times he did not feel motivated to succeed in classes, but he also feels that "college preparedness is what came out of the time when I was engaged." Gracie is modest about her achievements, but will admit that getting into college on early admittance with 57 credits "was probably not something everyone could do." Hudson, after worrying throughout high school about his transcripts, felt that when "I got accepted to college I could show them the letter and it's all instantly justified." He identifies a sense of security that he felt for the first time subsequent to being accepted, and attributes that security to spending many years self-motivating and engaged. Hudson says that his reward for all of his hard work was "feeling just as capable" as everyone he met in college. When asked what she thought she got from her engagement in high school, Whitney said

> I would just say that it just really helped me become a more mature person and kind of be ready for adulthood.

Whitney also says that working hard in high school and attending she thought was a rigorous program better prepared her to handle college courses. Wyatt remembers a particular class for which he had to self-motivate

> I did it and ended up being a really fun class but I was it was probably the most challenging high school class ever had and it was an honors class and. It just required a lot of time a lot of diligence and I heard of I heard people that have done it before that said it was a really difficult. (Wyatt)

According to Wyatt, he is proud of his accomplishment and felt he learned more because of his perseverance. Wyatt also credits the staff of his program for engaging him in extra-curricular programs. He was in the drama club and several performances required extra time and dedication on the part of students and staff. Because they modeled that level of engagement, Wyatt feels he learned "how to invest in people how to care for people that you are leading in some capacity and it was really beneficial." When describing the feeling he was left with after high school, Wyatt says he was proud of "what we're able to do because people are so invested."

Summation: Life Satisfaction Themes

Participants' stories emerged from research questions based on life satisfaction during the high school years. The themes that surfaced along with these stories were not always direct answers to the original research questions, but provided deep insight to their perception of their life experience during this time. Questions about personal growth were answered with stories of challenges and independent action. Discussing engagement revealed an intrinsic motivation for each participant. When asked about social dynamics related to their social capital participants talked about friendships, leadership, and support. All participants described a web of communities to which they felt a sense of belonging. These responses resulted in a new perspective on the original research questions, which were grouped according to themes from literature, to organic themes grouped according to what participants felt was important.

Conclusions and implications regarding these interviews are explored in depth in the next chapter. Participants revealed a deep awareness of their personal growth and the ethos of their high school years. Each participant could define communities around which this ethos was based, and how they used their intrinsic motivation to work through difficult challenges to reach their goals. Their ability to identify strong communities, their self-reliance, and the role of engagement, were revelations in this research and will be the focus of the study conclusions.

Chapter 5: Study Conclusions and Recommendations

Secondary education programs that utilize technology are becoming prolific. Virtual and hybrid programs are being developed faster than researchers can investigate their effects, and they are being designed without an understanding of design elements that most benefit adolescent contentment. Adolescent satisfaction is a key element to future success and cannot be ignored. In contribution to the lack of information available, this study was developed to investigate the perceived elements of life satisfaction that students experienced. Nine students were interviewed and asked about community participation, autonomy building experiences, and engagement in several areas of academic life.

Conceptual Framework

The emergence of technology in education has led to programs that are disruptive innovations to the traditional school model. The traditional school model has been analyzed in terms of its ethos and components of adolescent life satisfaction, but these new innovative programs have not been analyzed in the same way. Previous studies of life satisfaction during secondary education years points to an ethos of school life (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Hawe et al., 2015). This ethos is different depending on the culture created at the school and the student engaged in that culture (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Thelen, 1974). Though different, the ethos of secondary education pervades adolescent life and impacts life satisfaction for students (Rutter, 1982). The ethos of secondary education, for these participants, is a complex web of challenges and achievements from a variety of spaces in their lives. Instead of the all-encompassing ethos of the school itself, as described by Rutter in *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (Rutter, 1982), these students describe an ethos that spans home, school, and extra-curricular life. These developmental spaces described by subjects include a variety of communities, both educational and not, that sometimes

overlap and other times do not overlap. These Hybrid school graduates each display a distinctly different ethos because their lives are such different webs of experience. This study provides a deep analysis of the ethos of the newest form of secondary education- hybrid education. Situated within the stream of research regarding the ethos of education, this study uses that lens to examine the most innovative trend in education.

Summary of Methods

Recent hybrid high school graduates age 18-20 were interviewed to gain a phenomenological understanding of their lived experience. These participants were interviewed virtually for an average of two hours each. These participants included male and female, private and public programs. Interview questions written for the nine participants of this study were focused on the areas of life satisfaction as identified by two key studies (Dogan & Celik, 2014; Suldo et al., 2014). These questions centered on the areas of community, autonomy, engagement, and social capital. Because the questions were open ended and the interviews designed for deep understanding of participant perceptions, themes that emerged were authentically important for participants. Over the course of many analysis sessions, codes were applied and code groupings were formed. This analysis led to the conclusions below.

Summary of Findings

Nine hybrid graduates provided extensive insight to their experiences during adolescence. Thematic analysis revealed four major areas within which codes were grouped. These themes included *sense of belonging, social structure, personal growth,* and *affinity for high school program.* Participants communicated a sense of belonging to several types of communities and seemed to have strong ties as well as a sense of reciprocal respect for other members of those

communities. These communities were not restricted to those arranged through the hybrid programs they attended. Instead, many of the communities to which they belong were sought outside of those programs. The social structures described were products of the variety of communities, and participants conveyed a sense of autonomy within these relationships. Participants were all very descriptive of various relationships, and discussions illuminated a mutual rapport that allowed these adolescents to act independently. Most used close relationships as sounding boards, and then acted on their own behalf when challenged. The challenges described in interviews also revealed a sense of personal growth during their time in hybrid high school. The personal growth described was commonly attributed to independent action and reflection on successful strategies. Several participants identified mentors during adolescence who supported them with ideas but who resisted taking action on behalf of the student. These participants all relayed a sense of independent control over their future. This future, for all participants, was defined by a clear self-determined goal. Additionally, participants could define elements of their hybrid experience that facilitated their personal growth and achievement of their goals. These deep reflections by hybrid program participants pinpoint key elements to include in future hybrid programs.

Study Conclusions

In connection to the literature, interview questions centered around areas of adolescent life satisfaction (Suldo et al., 2014). Each area of questioning led to interesting conclusions related to participant experience. When asked about their degree of autonomy as a factor in contributing to life satisfaction (Bindman et al., 2015), participants revealed high levels of self-reliance. When describing engagement (Bilge, Tuzgol Dost, & Cetin, 2014), participants attributed their sense of engagement often to intrinsic motivation tied to their specific goals.

These reflections indicate that future hybrid programs must be designed to scaffold opportunity for autonomy, allow for the participation in community, and engage students in the accomplishment of their goals.

    Conclusion 1: The hybrid program graduates interviewed have a rich sense of community. The nine subjects each described various forms of community. There may or may not be a physical environment for each community, but the boundaries can be identified by members. For example, the athletic communities described in interviews are clearly defined by fields or gymnasiums, while the spiritual communities often met at different homes and parks. Both types of communities were clear to participants as environments characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships, and shared norms, goals, and values). These defining attributes are significant in life satisfaction according to Dogan and Celik (Dogan & Celik, 2014). The communities described by participants certainly fit criteria set forth in literature, such as McMillan's in the Journal of Community Psychology in 1986 (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). McMillan identifies a community based on a member's sense of the right to belong, the reciprocal influence between the member and the group, the reinforcement (in the sense of need fulfillment), and the shared emotional connection. When questioned about community involvement (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988), participants described multiple communities that provided important bonds during their adolescence.

    In addition to associating with multiple communities, some participants directly addressed a misconception they felt exists about non-traditional students. Wyatt, Hudson, Bailey, Sam, and Daniel explicitly described this misconception. Each of them feel that non-traditional students are characterized as "isolated" (Bailey), emotionally dysfunctional (Daniel), less prepared for (Wyatt) or somehow less of a participant (Sam) in society than traditional students.

Daniel considered his own preconceptions about non-traditional students incorrect once he'd attended himself.

> I used to think when I thought home school or virtual school of this lonely kid geek who didn't want to go to school or some kid who got kicked out of school because of violence or hard times or some learning problem or something like that. But I've been to continuation school and regular school and now this and these kids come from all over like this one kid came from [private school name] and the youngest was in sixth grade and they're just like all kinds of kids and I had no idea how many there were or how it worked (Daniel).

Wyatt engaged in two study groups, a theater program, a church group, and a work community. One of the study programs he attended had fewer social opportunities because it was small and new. Wyatt took it upon himself to take what he'd learned from his other non-traditional school and apply it at the smaller program so that "those kids could benefit." He explains "I wanted to hang out with those kids because they needed someone and I like changed things there and that's good." Wyatt feels "the school would have been different without me there," because he initiated activities and study groups that connected students. Wyatt felt this was important because "just because we are in virtual school doesn't mean we are all awkward and stuff." Hudson and Grace both worried that college institutions would not view their courses as worthy of acceptance and felt vindication when they were. Both describe feeling awkward when explaining their non-traditional education to current peers and point out that their path was "way more efficient (Hudson)" and allowed them to "get so much more done (Grace)" than other students. All of the participants in the study worked in addition to attending school and had friend groups among fellow employees. All of the participants had neighborhood friend groups. Three participants were members of spiritual communities. These types of communities added to the participants' feelings of belonging. In some cases, like Audrey's, this sense of belonging to the wrestling team made her feel more a part of the school program itself: "it was really cool

yeah and that would really have to me you feel like a part of the school I mean you're not just a part of the school you kind of are in the school like you're creating what they're putting out." In others, the engagement to multiple communities is intentional and "the reason for that is because I just see it as that being where a lot of like the choice comes in do it where like I want to I want to hang out."(Wyatt) For several participants, engagement in sports communities "gave me self-confidence," (Sam) and "a whole group of friends outside of school." (Hudson)

The communities described by participants certainly fit criteria set forth in literature, such as McMillan's in the Journal of Community Psychology in 1986 (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). McMillan identifies a community based on a member's sense of the right to belong, the reciprocal influence between the member and the group, the reinforcement (in the sense of need fulfillment), and the shared emotional connection. There may or may not be a physical environment for each community, but the boundaries can be identified by members. For example, the athletic communities described in interviews are clearly defined by fields or gymnasiums, while the spiritual communities often met at different homes and parks. Both types of communities were clear to participants as environments characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships, and shared norms, goals, and values). These defining attributes are significant in life satisfaction according to Dogan and Celik (Dogan & Celik, 2014).

Conclusion 2: The hybrid program graduates are highly self-reliant. Amidst their web of communities, the students in this study are met with the same challenges facing most adolescents. These students have a similar approach to solving challenges, however. Regardless of the challenge, these graduates have a mindset of "can do," and move forward with either skills they already have or skills they learn specifically to meet the challenge at hand. They do not rely

on others to lead the way, but use supporters as a sounding board only and do the leg work themselves.

This self-reliance was evidenced by their response to challenges as well as how they characterized relationships. Audrey explained, for example, that she faced her academic challenge "one day at a time," and although she was afraid she would not succeed because "it was like teaching myself" she "hit it harder the next year" and succeeded because she "knew what I needed to do now." Audrey "made friends with similar goals" but when even they distracted her she recalls telling them "stop distracting me I need to get this done." Audrey characterizes her step mother as a demanding influence but is very sure she would have figured out the steps she needed to take with or without her step mother's watchfulness. Bailey's academic progress was also challenging, but she committed herself to "do well in my classes and see what happened" when she worried she would not get into college. Bailey spoke to a counselor at her mother's suggestion and got information as well as "inspiration," but in discussing her acceptance to a major university it is a major source of pride for Bailey that she feels she accomplished this on her own. Both Daniel and Sam explained that they do not see their families as particularly savvy when it comes to the educational system or academics. They describe various teachers, counselors, and friends from whom they gleaned information; they attribute their achievements to actions they took independently. Hudson describes his mother as a key relationship as he moved through adolescent years. He describes her role early on as the person in control of his education, but Hudson's mother steadily gave him control until in high school he felt that

> by my high school year I was kind of figuring it out for myself you know I think
> it's a good skill to have and I'm not trying to toot my own horn but it's like it's
> more it was always a little bit more like they would it would help me with

miscellaneous things not so much what courses I'm going to take you know or what should I take because mom taught me how to do that already. (Hudson)

Hudson describes his high school years as the ones where he "truly felt independent because I just felt I had control over something" because he chose his courses and developed his own transcripts. Hudson's parents became listeners, at times providing assistance he categorized as "details," and Hudson became autonomous.

According to Suldo et al., (2014), adolescent life satisfaction is due in part to the adolescent's self-reliance. Further research in the area of adolescent autonomy has revealed that autonomy should be granted progressively (Bindman et al., 2015), so that children have a sense of achievement after each challenge they face independently. This sense of achievement is vital to their positive sense of self (Fulton & Turner, 2008; Meeus, 1995). The adolescents in this study reflect the positive influences of autonomy granting and successful independent problem solving.

Conclusion 3: The hybrid program graduates are intrinsically motivated due to their goal orientation. These participants share an intrinsic motivation for educational achievement- and have a wide variety of goals. Out of the nine participants, eight describe higher education as their ultimate goal. Bailey's goal was entry into the armed services with a technical specialty, and she gave her interview from basic training in the army. From the eight participants whose goal was some sort of college, six have achieved that goal. One (Wyatt) has postponed his college applications, and the other (Whitney) says she plans to begin applying to schools. The participants do not share identical goals or paths to achieve those goals, but they all have goals.

These participants pursued their education with intention. Each had specific ideas and ambition, which worked intrinsically to motivate them to achieve. Sam designed her school experience around gymnastics by choosing a hybrid education because she knew she was

talented enough to receive scholarships, and when she was injured she re-designed her experience to continue pursuing higher education. Hudson designed his entire academic course load from the time he was in middle school around engineering because he knew he wanted a career in that area. Grace pursued her goal to get into veterinarian school so vehemently that she is two years younger than her colleagues. Daniel is most proactive when he internalizes a goal as well. Daniel's highest grade point average, that he calls one of his proudest accomplishments, came shortly after deciding to help others in a medical career. Daniel explained the ineffectiveness of external motivation, saying "my mother is always trying to get involved with my studies she still tries actually it is so annoying." He credits his achievements instead to "a maturity factor" that helped him "grow up and see things differently." When asked whether his teachers or mother influenced his development or the achievements that came with goal setting, Daniel says no. Instead, Daniel feels that outside influence "just gets me annoyed" and is a barrier to his self-motivation. He connects his successes, including college admission, to goals he set himself.

Along with autonomy granting, parental support of goals and achievements in support of goals is a contributing factor for academic success (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). As in many of these stories, adolescents who determine goals for themselves early on enjoy more engagement in both curriculum and community (Hill & Wang, 2015). Hill and Wang explained that parents should support but not direct goal identification, so that adolescents are take the lead role in determining their path in life. In the supporting role, parents should offer help and support but not direct the process of goal realization.

Conclusion 4: Hybrid programs as disruptive innovations provide benefits to students.
As a disruptive innovation, hybrid high school programs must adapt to the needs of their clients

or they will not be chosen by future students. Key considerations for the participants in this study were community connectedness, autonomy, and goal orientation. The dialogue in these interviews has demonstrated that students are already involved in communities inside and outside of their programs. Interestingly, these participants addressed the idea that students of hybrid programs are disconnected from society as a myth that bothers them. Wyatt felt that "society thinks we are all introverted or awkward," and Evan specifically asked that the study reflect "the reality that we are probably more involved in stuff than most high school students." Because their involvement is made up of such a variety of groupings, these graduates felt that the flexibility of their hybrid program schedule was an essential element that should be designed into all programs. Students of hybrid programs "don't need more ways to be involved" (Audrey) than traditional students, because they feel they have "plenty of opportunity" (Bailey) to join groups that already exist. Some of those programs are school related like the athletic team at their brick and mortar school, while some are non-school related like the local theater group. What is innovative about the hybrid model is that there is greater opportunity to be part of non-school related communities than the traditional model offers. Another innovation of hybrid education centers around autonomy. Programs provide opportunities for students to successfully meet challenges independently. Graduates interviewed identified challenges as opportunities to learn and grow personally. They described relationships as support structures but were not dependent on those relationships for help when challenged. Finally, participants felt their programs were strongly connected to academic goals such as math, engineering, and science. They felt prepared and engaged in their curriculum because of this close connection. As they primary reason for curricular engagement, goal orientation is essential to maintaining this engagement.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Hybrid Programs

Participants implied that their engagement, autonomy, and community participation were affected by their hybrid program organization. These graduates attach their feelings of engagement to the programs' ability to help them reach their goals. These participants' goals were academic. Therefore, the attributes of their programs that provided engagement were rigor, ability to narrow the focus of their coursework, and help planning for college application. In addition to an academic pathway, it would be beneficial for future programs to build pathways toward additional goals. Future programs would engage more learners this way. These pathways would consist of strong courses in all subject areas, from humanities to engineering. In addition to traditional academics, hybrid courses should include pathways with less traditional courses like business and the arts.

These participants also focused on their autonomy as a key tool for handling challenge. They implied that this autonomy gave them confidence and allowed them to mature differently than students of traditional programs. These participants felt that they were challenged because of the rigor in their programs and they felt that their work stood on its own merit. Because of these two factors their work had to be even stronger than students in traditional programs, according to participants. Future hybrid programs can capitalize on the independent learning nature of their design in order to foster the personal growth described by these graduates. Because this independence was largely fostered at home, these participants may have had an advantage in this area of growth. Future hybrid programs should build this independence by scaffolding opportunities to learn the tools necessary achieve it. The first year of a hybrid program should include direct instruction in areas like internet searching, where to get subject specific help, and how to use the program platform. The second year of a hybrid program should

include direct instruction relevant to the students' goals. For example, those who are college bound should get instruction on building transcripts and the application process. Those students who have identified non-academic goals, like theater for example, should get instruction or counseling specifically identifying the steps to take that give those students the best chance of success. Simultaneously, students in their second year should be monitored to see that they are using the skills taught them year one as they are challenged in their classes. By the third and fourth year of a hybrid program, students should be using their year one and two skills independently to move toward their goals. Any students still having trouble meeting challenges independently should be counseled regarding ways to move forward, but the students themselves should be taking the steps identified in those counseling sessions.

Participants in the study implied that they benefitted greatly from taking part in communities inside and outside of their hybrid programs. Those who took part in communities offered by the hybrid program did not find it difficult to find out about and join those groups. They actually heard about things like school teams and clubs the same way traditional students at those locations found out- they heard through word of mouth or saw information when they were on site. It did not seem like hybrid programs need to build any special means of communication or any special communities. These students had no trouble joining groups already in existence, and using communication that was already established. For those groups joined outside the hybrid programs, participants required flexible scheduling. They identified the flexibility of their programs as the key reason they were able to do this. Future hybrid programs, then, need not apply funding or manpower to build communities specifically for hybrid program students. Instead, future programs should take care to maintain their flexible scheduling, and streamline their coursework to allow students free time.

Implications and Recommendations for Families

The participants in this study implied that they were able to take advantage of a hybrid education because someone in their lives got information about this disruptive innovation. These participants did not know about hybrid education prior to encountering a situation that they did not feel could be addressed traditionally. Bailey fell ill and was absent so much that her traditional school discouraged her from continuing there. Daniel's behavior got him sent out of his traditional school. Audrey could not get into the traditional school of her choice and needed to be close to her mom's work. At some point in their struggle, a friend of relative told these students that there were non-traditional choices, including hybrid programs. As the number of educational opportunities continues to grow, families should seek information about innovative programs. In addition to seeking information, families should identify those choices that emphasize multiple pathways toward their goals, scaffolded independent learning, and flexible scheduling.

Implications and Recommendations for Scholarship

Implications of this study must be further examined in comparison to more qualitative and quantitative data about hybrid secondary education. The value of this research exists in its ability to add to the body of knowledge, and is not intended to stand alone. Future research should be focused on methods for hybrid and virtual programs to facilitate growth in the areas of community, autonomy, and engagement. For example, data is needed that clarifies whether programs should emphasize their own community building or emphasize the allowance of time for students to pursue communities outside of the program. It is unclear whether the communities established through the programs themselves are worth the resources required to maintain them. Participants in this study did participate in some hybrid program communities, but certainly were not reliant on those communities for their sense of belonging. In many cases, participants sought

their own communities outside of the program. A future consideration for school administrators planning educational programs will be how to use resources and as demonstrated in this study, students didn't rely on the programs providing opportunities. Is it still the role of educational programs to provide community building opportunities, or are their resources better used for other things? Another issue that requires further investigation surrounds the autonomy building for adolescents. Scholars must identify methods of independence building that are effective. Programs already in existence should be analyzed for their degree of success in this area, and students surveyed to find out what type of activity increases their sense of self-reliance. Research should also be done in the area of parent promotion of self-reliance. While the benefits of autonomy and the general progressive nature of autonomy granting has been identified, actual methods have not been proven by research. The need for proven methods in this area will increase with the number of alternative educational programs. Also required for future study is the ability of some students to form goals and maintain focus based on these goals. Research is needed to pinpoint the best time during adolescence to form goals, and what activities will enhance their ability to do so. As part of the work on intrinsic motivation and engagement in school, investigations into goal setting for hybrid education will improve the ability of students to succeed.

Study Validity and Delimitations of this Study

Nine hybrid graduates provided extensive insight into their experiences with hybrid programs ranging from private to public to community school. Both genders were represented and their goals varied as would be expected with this target age group. Still, this study speaks to the experience of these participants only. While deep in insight, the study cannot be used to generalize beyond these student voices.

Qualitative research is by nature interpretive and specific strategies were employed to reduce the potential impact of researcher bias. These included processes for validation of the interview protocol; a rigorous interpretation process including use of a peer reviewer to ensure reliable interpretation of the phenomenological interviews; and most importantly researcher reflexivity. Each conversation was analyzed while keeping in mind the preconceived notions of the researcher, who is a secondary education teacher and virtual student. Participants were very communicative and insightful, and their perceptions were easily differentiated from researcher bias, however. Any previously held ideas about adolescents and hybrid education were replaced with genuine descriptions by these participants.

Closing Comments

Within the ethos of their adolescent education, students' life satisfaction depends on the effects of developmental areas such as autonomy, social capital, engagement, and connectedness. Digital education at the secondary level influences all of these same areas of life for students. Using these elements to understand the educational experience allows consideration of the whole child. Using the educational ethos as a lens for understanding hybrid high school experiences in this study indeed illuminated specific commonalities. These graduates are self-reflective, independent, goal oriented, and connected. These and future clients in educational programs are beginning to understand the multitude of options available for reaching their goals. They also understand the costs and benefits of traditional programs versus digital programs. Their families are more willing than ever before to consider non-traditional means toward getting educated.

Perspectives like those considered in this study will inform and enhance future educational options.

The insights shared in this study are intended to be a stepping stone in the development of rigorous, fulfilling, innovative educational programs. The success of these programs is ultimately determined by the satisfaction and success of their clients: the students. During adolescence an ethos evolves which plays a key role in future successes, and this ethos is greatly influenced by the academic program adolescents choose. Because society is dependent on the successes of each generation, there is nothing more important than cultivating excellence in education.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

PEPPERDINE

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: May 05, 2017

Protocol Investigator Name: Riley Leary

Protocol #: 17-02-516

Project Title: Understanding the Hybrid High School Experience: A Phenomenological Study

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Riley Leary:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions by Theme

<u>Autonomy</u>

1. How much autonomy do you have?
2. Do you usually conquer tasks that at first seem insurmountable?
3. Did you feel you had the ability to succeed in a HHS before you began?
4. Did you make the decision to attend HHS yourself?
5. Had you been successful in school before HS?
6. To what degree do your parents help you complete school tasks, study?
7. Have you made friends? How did that happen? Did you initiate?
8. What goals did you set for yourself for HS?
9. How did you know whether or not you achieved the goals? Did you?
10. What happens for you when you hit a road block?
11. A time when you used initiative?
12. What were your grades like before HS? How did grades in HHS differ? What do you attribute your success/failures to?
13. What are your greatest achievements?
14. What is your perception of your own ability to perform in HHS?
15. How easy was it/did it seem to make friends?
16. How comfortable were you/what was your most uncomfortable time in the HHS program?
17. How do you feel about your ability to tackle computer/internet issues?
18. A time when you felt pride? Hope? Engaged? Shame? Anxiety? Hopelessness?

A. Tell me about a time when you came up against something you weren't sure you could do in HHS.

What feelings did you experience? How did you respond? Who helped? What past experiences/learning did you utilize? Was this the first time you felt this way? Did you succeed in solving the problem? How did you feel afterward?

B. What would you say was your greatest achievement in HHS?

C. What was the most uncomfortable thing/time/occurrence in the HHS?

D. Can you compare your feelings of self-confidence before and after HHS? To what do you attribute any differences?

<u>Social Capital</u>

(Questions #7, 15 above)

19. **What relationships have developed in HHS? How did these come about? Who initiated?**

20. How are social spaces different in HHS than in traditional setting?

<u>Engagement</u>

21. What was your GPA in the HHS? Why do you think you got that GPA overall? (also speaks to autonomy/self-efficacy)
22. Was the HHS program related to future goals?
23. What effect did technology have on the relationships you developed personally?
24. How personalized was your HHS experience? In what ways? What effect did this have on your experience?
25. How engaged in school did you feel?
26. How did the mixture of interaction types (face to face, chat, email, posting) affect your HHS experience?
27. What percent of your time did you spend thinking about HHS? Working on HHS? Planning for HHS?
28. Did you ever think about curriculum outside of class? While doing other things?
29. What personal connections did you make? With staff? With peers outside of class?
30. What systemic connections did you make? With curriculum? Extra-curricular involvement? Peers during class?
31. Did you ever act out? Have attendance issues? Vary your effort?
32. Describe your typical role in class discussion.

A. Describe the most significant personal relationships you found in the HHS.

Did interaction types affect the relationship? How? Did you interact in class? Outside of class? How did technology affect the relationship?

B. How engaged did you feel/Describe a time you felt particularly engaged with HHS.

C. How did you do in the HHS? Why?

<u>Connectedness/Community</u>

33. What opportunities have you had to join school organizations? Make decisions for the school?
34. What opportunities have you had to have supportive/caring relationships as a result of HHS?
35. How would you characterize your school? Norms? Values? Where did you get the idea about what characterizes your school?
36. Did you go to pep rallies, games, dances, join clubs? Why or why not?
37. Did you feel a sense of belonging to the school, program, or sub-group?

A. Tell me about any student groups you joined at school.

Did you have opportunity? Did you feel like a decision maker, leader, follower? How did you hear about the group(s)? Difficult or easy to get information/feel a sense of belonging?

B. Tell me about events you attended for the school.

       Did you have opportunity? Did you feel like a decision maker, leader, follower? How did you hear about the group(s)? Difficult or easy to get information/feel a sense of belonging?

C. How would you characterize your school? Norms? Values? Where did you get the idea about what characterizes your school?