

EXPLORING THE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGING ADULTS
WITH INVOLVED PARENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Laura Dean)

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in student development. Increased parental involvement in the lives of college students demands that higher education professionals engage in important discussions about the role of parents at the post-secondary level (Carney-Hall, 2008; Hamilton, 2016; Wartman & Savage, 2008). A growing discussion on the student-parent relationship in college demonstrates a need for higher education professionals to consider what parental involvement and the role of higher education professionals encompasses on college campuses (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cullaty, 2011; Dunn, 2015; Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Merriman, 2007; Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). This study helps to expand and clarify the changing landscape of parental involvement on college campuses and how parental involvement impacts identity development for emerging adults with involved parents.

This qualitative study was conducted at a large public research institution located in the southeastern United States. Research design was informed by phenomenology and utilized semi-structured interviews to collect data from 10 participants. Participants brought in self-selected artifacts which served as the starting topic of the interview. Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000;

Arnett, 2015) served as the conceptual framework to situate this study. Four phenomena central to understanding parental involvement in higher education also provided context; the phenomena include educational policies that encourage parental involvement at the K-12 level, the media's coverage that publicizes overbearing parents, access to technology and media, and rising post-secondary education costs (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Data were analyzed using qualitative methods, which revealed four themes that represented a developmental progression of identity development for participants. First, participants articulated that parental involvement provided them with a sense of security and stability, which led to the second theme, gaining independence. Third, participants also began to view themselves as adults, and finally, they learned to envision their own adulthood apart from their parents. Through the themes participants expressed that they want, expect, and appreciate frequent parental involvement, and that this involvement helps to facilitate their development, rather than impede it. Implications for practice and future research provide additional guidance to higher education professionals.

INDEX WORDS: College students, Emerging adults, Identity exploration, Identity development, Higher education, Parents, Phenomenology, Student development

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to:

My mommy, who died August 2016. She was and is my biggest supporter. She believed in me and loved me unconditionally until her last breath.

My daddy, who passed away when I was nine. His dream was for one of his children to graduate from college. He would be proud to know that I have three degrees.

My grandmother, who had an unmatched work ethic and served others graciously.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Increased parental involvement in the lives of college students demands that higher education professionals engage in important discussions about the role of parents at the post-secondary level (Carney-Hall, 2008; Hamilton, 2016; Wartman & Savage, 2008). This paper will help to expand and clarify the changing landscape of parents on college campuses and the relationship to those working on campus. The rise in parental involvement is due at least in part to several societal phenomena taking place at a macro-societal level; this calls for a reexamination of identity development in college students who continue to maintain a close relationship with parents from high school to college. The phenomena include 1) educational policies that encourage parental involvement at the K-12 level and loop parents into their child's life in college, 2) the media's coverage that publicizes overinvolved parents who interfere in their students' lives, 3) access to technology to stay connected and communicate frequently, and 4) rising post-secondary education costs, all of which compound the current landscape of parent-child relationships (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Together, these phenomena help situate the discussion for how students maintain relationships with their parents and how those relationships impact the students in their undergraduate education experience and their individual development.

Current research and articles about parental involvement provide conflicting reports about parent-child relationships in college. Some argue that the negative ramifications of intense parental involvement impact areas such as student development, psychological well-being, and

use of prescription medicine for anxiety and depression, as well as recreational drug use (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; LeMoine & Buchanan, 2011; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schifffrin, Liss, Miles-McLean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2013). Others discuss the positive aspects of parental involvement and attachment on development, such as facilitating autonomy, being a source of emotional support, increasing social competence, and assisting with psychological well-being, while also distinguishing positive involvement from over-parenting and helicopter parenting (Cullaty, 2011; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Kenny & Rice, 1995). However, there are other voices that call on higher education professionals to become better informed about parents and the role they play in their child's life (Donovan, 2014; Dunn, 2015; Kohn, 2015). A report published by the Association for the Study of Higher Education on parent and family engagement in higher education calls on us to remember student-parent relationships by stating, "given that students do not stop growing once they reach 18 years of age, the student-parent relationship does not cease to exist; therefore, parents and families continue to play a role in students' development" (Association for the Study of Higher Education [ASHE], 2015, p. 38).

While there is a growing body of knowledge about parent-child relationships in college focused on areas such as attachment, adjustment, sense of belonging, career development, autonomy, and independence, minimal research exists on parent-child relationships and student development (ASHE, 2015; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Taub, 2008). Additionally, this study is contextualized by Western ideas of individuation, separation, and notions of autonomy that should occur when an individual is an emerging adult and entering college. In his writings, Ogbu (1981) challenged researchers in different disciplines, including education, to allow different identity and cultural groups to determine what is best for them in terms of development,

autonomy, and relationships such as those between a child and their parent. As we consider these ideas, phenomena of the last 30 years warrant further discussion to expand the understanding of the context for current parent-child relationships and student development in college.

Societal Phenomena Impacting Higher Education

The rationale for discussing student development and parents arises from the continued relationships between students and parents in college years. Today's parents have a higher level of interaction and involvement with campus personnel in comparison to past generations, and those interactions and involvement occur more frequently (Keppler, Mullendore, & Carey, 2005). Prior to the twenty-first century, interactions between parents and students in higher education were minimal compared to the current landscape, where frequent parent-child connections extend into and through emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015; Renn & Reason, 2013). Previously, parents expected the college to act *in loco parentis*, both a formal and informal relationship between parents, students, and the institution. Formally, it was a legal relationship where faculty and higher education professionals literally stood in the place of parents, when appropriate, once a student was enrolled (ASHE, 2015; Lake, 1999; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Additionally, it served as doctrine to insulate higher education from "scrutiny in the legal system" (Lake, 1999, p. 1) specifically in the realm of rules, regulations, and discipline. It also was considered to be,

as much, if not more, a college/parent affair than a direct college/student relationship. In other words, a parent sent a "child" off to college-entering into an agreement with the institution - and delegated certain supervisory and disciplinary powers in the process. (Lake, 1999, p. 4)

Faculty and higher education professionals were entrusted to keep an eye on students under their purview (Wartman & Savage, 2008). It was once the prevailing approach to working with students, but has been dismantled to some extent due to court rulings in favor of student independence (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Informally, *in loco parentis* still exists as some recent court cases have ruled that college and universities have a duty to their students (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Additionally, some laws have been amended to allow parents to have more access to their students' information; this may curtail a crisis or dropout, which can be helpful for a student's autonomy, emotional support, social competence, and psychological well-being (Baker, 2008; Cullaty, 2011; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991, Kenny & Rice, 1995; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Now, many parents stay firmly involved throughout their child's college career, and with higher expectations, due to several cultural shifts (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Parents and students tend to remain connected now through cell phones, texts, video chats, and portals that allow students to give their parents access to their child's information. Parenting styles have changed in recent decades, with higher levels of involvement compared to previous generations (Carney-Hall, 2008; Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Students go to college with a different, closer relationship with parents now, and our current societal culture reinforces the continued heavy involvement of parents in their children's lives (Carney-Hall, 2008).

This extended connection looks markedly different from previous generations and creates an evolving environment for all invested in higher education (Cutright, 2008; Keppler et al., 2005). The shift is due to societal phenomena including, but not limited to, education policies around parent-school interactions and access, the media's portrayal of parents, access to

technology for constant parent-child communication, and increasing post-secondary educational costs that may often warrant financial investment from parents. These societal phenomena impact relationship dynamics of parents, students, higher education professionals, and the institution (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cutright, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). This section will briefly unpack these societal phenomena, followed by a cursory overview of student development. Together, the discussions of societal phenomena and of student development demonstrate the importance of an expanded discussion on student development and what role parents may play in development in college.

How Are Some Parents Parenting and Why?

The nature of the parent-child relationship has changed in a dynamic manner from previous generations. From these changes, “emerges the growing phenomenon in the college student’s experience” (Scott & Daniel, 2001, p. 84). From the kindergarten to 12th grade perspective, “good” parenting is defined as being involved, being engaged, volunteering, asking questions, and being present (Wartman & Savage, 2008). In a 2016 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 89% of parents and families in grades kindergarten to 10th grade reported high levels of school to family communication through newsletters or emails, with similar numbers for in-school parental involvement opportunities such as parent-teacher organizations or attending school or class events (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017). By 2026, enrollment in higher education is projected to increase by 14 percent to 19.3 million degree-seeking undergraduate students, up from 17 million in fall 2015 (NCES, 2017c). Compared to years past, parents spend more intentional time with their children in their elementary, middle, and high school years (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Because of the continued relationship between students and their parents, as well as the current definition of

“good” parenting, the parent-child relationship extends into college. The current parent-child relationship is not merely defined by the continuity of the relationship itself from high school into college, but by increased communication, a high frequency of contact, and both parent and child sharing the details of everyday life occurrences.

In higher education, incongruous messages are communicated to parents about how they should interact with their child in college. As the college search process begins, parents are invited and often required to participate. Some information targets parents specifically in areas such as financial aid and programs such as orientation (Carney-Hall, 2008). Once students begin taking classes on campus, the concept of separation-individuation is encouraged for students, which emphasizes separating from parents to achieve autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Mattanah, Hancock, & Bland, 2004; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Without a clearer understanding of the role parents play in college, mixed messages around parental involvement can ensue, causing confusion where “tensions arise when practitioners committed to promoting student development and independence are faced with the task of determining what information should be shared with parents, or questioning whether they should communicate with parents at all” (ASHE, 2015, p. 46). Higher education professionals can help set the tone for parental involvement on their individual campuses.

How Do Students See Their Parents?

Often, we hear or read negative information about parents with children in college (Joyce, 2014; Lythcott-Haims, 2015; Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2012; Schiffrin, Liss, Miles-McLean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2013), but current research and articles suggest another narrative needs more exploration (Donovan, 2014; Fusch, 2016; Kohn, 2015; Taub, 2008). For example, Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) suggest that helicopter parenting, also known as

“parenting involving hovering parents who are potentially over-involved in the lives of their child” (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012, p. 1177), does not have a positive association with parents granting their children autonomy and with appropriate levels of school engagement. In contrast, Taub (2008) asserted that parental involvement may support student development. While each individual child-parent relationship is different, many of today’s students view their parents as a source of affirming and unconditional support (Cullaty, 2011). This support encourages autonomy and provides students with the confidence to make their own decisions. Additionally, the support can lead to enhanced adjustment to college, increased academic success, and higher retention rates (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The emerging narrative acknowledges that some parents will “arrive” to school with their children, and this may help students to be successful in ways that support their development. Many of today’s parents have been involved and invested in their child’s education from an early age due to K-12 educational policies that encourage parental involvement and access to information. The phenomenon of involved parenting does not appear to be changing any time soon. As higher education professionals, should we take into consideration what might be best for the student?

Educational Policies

How parents parent and how students see their parents are shaped in part by educational policies regarding parental involvement. Because the idea of parental involvement in higher education is generally murky, if a philosophy exists around parental involvement, it may vary by institution, department, or individual. At the K-12 level, a definition and standards outline parental involvement expectations. At the secondary level, parental involvement is defined as, the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring—

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Department of Education, 2004)

In 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act, went into effect (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) made an indelible mark on elementary and secondary education accountability in areas such as school choice, teacher quality, assessments, and parent involvement. No Child Left Behind set a clearly defined standard for parental involvement, which impacts and influences the educational environment of traditional aged college students (Wartman & Savage, 2008). At the K-12 level, education is viewed as a collaborative partnership between parents and teachers where information is shared and communication is expected. Parents expect to know and be involved in what is going in their child's life (Carney-Hall, 2008; Taub, 2008).

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), passed in 1974, helps to provide access and maintain the privacy of student education records (Weeks, 2001). From K-12, parents have the right to access their student's record. When a student turns eighteen or enrolls in post-secondary education, access transfers to the student (Weeks, 2001). Parents' access to information is then somewhat limited due to FERPA, which affords certain protections to students enrolled in federally funded college and universities (Baker, 2008). For example,

certain information such as grades cannot be shared with anyone, including parents, without a student's written consent. These types of protections give the student control of his or her records. In recent years, the act has been amended with provisions which allow parents to be notified in certain circumstances, such as when a student under the age of 21 violates laws related to alcohol and substance abuse. Similarly, parents who claim their student as a dependent for tax purposes can potentially gain access to information without a student's consent (Weeks, 2001). These types of changes and access further complicate the role of parent in the college environment when there is misalignment or miscommunication on how parents can remain involved beyond the K-12 experience.

Media

A further complication to the parent-institution dynamic is the depiction of overbearing parents in the media. While students may view their parents as supportive (Cullaty, 2011), the media provides a bevy of examples of parents and their over involvement in their child's college experience. Much of the information presented about parents paints them as overbearing, intrusive, and not willing to let go (Cullaty, 2011; Keppler et al., 2005). Additionally, media such as magazines, newspapers, videos, online postings, or word of mouth stories often convey the most exaggerated examples of overinvolved parents. For example, *Woman's Day* magazine published an article describing the worst helicopter parents ever. In the article, Mattern (2016) shared stories ranging from parents moving next door to their daughter's residence hall to others being unhappy with their son's dining hall portion sizes. This is not to say that these extreme examples are not accurate, but when the media only depicts one type of parent, parenting is placed in a box where only one truth is heard (Dunn, 2015). These generalizations have deeper ramifications of how parents are viewed on campus and the way they might interact with higher

education professionals. These generalizations have the potential to create contentious interactions between parents and higher education professionals, putting the student in the middle. There may be some students who want to limit their parents' involvement, while other students may want their parents involved and can do so through several technology platforms which allow them to communicate often if needed (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Communication/Technology

Technology is infused throughout our society and is a way to keep individuals connected personally and professionally. If students and their parents have strong relationships, technology helps to facilitate their ability to stay connected. This is in contrast to decades when communication with parents was limited to weekly phone calls, "snail mail," and infrequent visits home (Cutright, 2008). The ability to email, call, text, or video chat allows students to keep parents up to date on what's happening daily on campus, if those relationships and communication patterns had existed between the student and parent prior to college. Parents can also keep up to date on college happenings through social media and online college newspapers. With technology keeping students and parents better connected in college, those in higher education may need to reconceptualize the way we work with students who may continuously communicate with their parents. While it may not be the example for every student and family, "for most students and their parents today, e-mail, calls on the cell phone, instant message, or texting is a daily activity" (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 16). This societal phenomenon keeps parents continuously connected to their child's educational experience (Cutright, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). The trend also keeps them invested in what is happening with the student and the institution. Additionally, communication between parents and their child, especially on the

weekend, has the potential to reduce dangerous behaviors associated with drinking (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, & Barry, 2008; Small, Morgan, Abar, & Maggs, 2011).

Post-secondary Education Costs

Another investment that parents are increasingly making is financial, as higher education costs increase. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), the average current prices for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board in 2014-2015 were estimated to be \$16,188 at public institutions, \$41,970 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$23,372 at private for-profit institutions. Between 2004 -2005 and 2014-2015, prices for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions rose 33 percent, and prices at private nonprofit institutions rose 26 percent, after adjustment for inflation (NCES, 2016). The rapidly rising costs have caused, in some cases, parents to pick up the additional expenses (Carney-Hall, 2008). While individual student debt has increased, mom and dad are becoming the “next victims of the student debt crisis” (Anderson, 2016). With this, parents are further tied to their students’ educational experience because of their financial investment. For traditional age students and their parents, the idea of a college education might be the “most costly expenditure of a lifetime” (Cutright, 2008, p. 42). This is true for both the student and the parent. For the parent, financial investment may have an impact on parental involvement. As these phenomena are considered, a closer examination of student development is warranted to gain a better understanding of the effects of the college environment from the student perspective.

Student Development

College students experience growth and development in multiple areas. In college, student development is often touted as a necessary focus for undergraduate students. Models and theories of student development have evolved since first introduced, but all involve two essential

components. First, *students* “refers to the specific focus on those enrolled in higher education settings” and *development* “suggests that some kind of positive change occurs in the student (e.g., cognitive complexity, self-awareness, racial identity, and or engagement)” (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 6). Combined, these terms suggest that a transformative experience will occur in college. Development can be facilitated through experiences such as living in a residence hall; participating in student organizations; utilizing health and wellness services; engaging in orientation, athletic services, student conduct, or academic advising; or understanding privilege (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

Student development has a long history in higher education. Since 1636, student development has been a primary goal of higher education professionals and continues to be so today (Patton et al., 2010). There are several types of student development theories that identify markers of growth. Psychosocial development theories focus on what occurs across a person’s life span and how they see themselves in the context of their social interactions in various environments (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013; Taub, 2008). Cognitive structural theories center on how an individual makes sense of the world to increase their intellectual complexity (Hamrick et al., 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013). Theories that focus on membership or role situate an individual’s social identity in the world. Types of social identities include racial, ethnic, sexual, disability, and gender (Hamrick et al., 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013). The crux of typology theories focuses on personality type, learning style, and career choice and emphasizes “more persistent individual traits and characteristics” (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 9). There are several more theory families that focus on student development as it relates to concepts such as

self-authorship, organizations, environments, and student success, all of which provide further insight into how students make meaning and identify themselves in the college environment (Evans et al., 2010; Hamrick et al., 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Renn & Reason, 2013). The work of many higher education professionals is often rooted in student development. Understanding how parents are involved in a child's life provides an important framework for how the role of parents may impact the work of higher education professionals. The new parent-child dynamic calls for higher education professionals to reconsider our work in light of this continued, highly engaged relationship.

Bringing Phenomena and Development Together

The previous sections outlined the societal phenomena impacting students, parents, and higher education, followed by a brief overview of college student development. If development is a central focus of higher education professionals and the students they work with, additional exploration is needed to determine if parental involvement shapes the identity development of emerging adults. The central question of identity development is “who am I?” (Jones & Abes, 2013). Because college is a pivotal time for students, how they view the role of their parents during college provides a new context to consider their identity development in college. Because there are so many facets of identity, I allowed participants to define, conceptualize, and make meaning of the identities they found to be most salient in college.

Problem and Purpose

Prior to the 21st century, there has been an assumption that parents and their undergraduate student should distance themselves from each other. This assumption arises from theoretical frameworks that suggest separation and individuation are necessary for development (Erikson, 1959; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Attending college is often seen as one of several

rites of passage into adulthood. Over the last two decades, Jeffery Arnett has suggested that entry into college does not mark the entry into adulthood but instead the beginning of a new phase of development known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015). While Arnett's concept of emerging adulthood is well received and often used by those studying within certain disciplines, it is not widely known in student affairs or higher education realms. Emerging adulthood extends post-adolescence and primarily focuses on the age when students typically attend college immediately after high school. As I will explain later, emerging adulthood is concentrated on a particular subset of students while also considering the role that parents play during this evolutionary time within this group as it relates to identity. Identity development, part of a larger family of psychosocial theories that focus on development across the lifespan, is often highlighted as a developmental task that necessitates separating self from others for development to occur (Taub, 2008). In this theoretical family, development focuses on content and task development, usually in response to internal and external factors (Taub, 2008).

With the continued close connection of undergraduate students to their parents past high school, there is the potential for conflict when parents and children want to maintain close ties but receive messages from the institution that say it is time for the parent to let go (Keppler et al., 2005). As societal phenomena impact colleges and universities, higher education professionals should pause to consider what role these active and engaged parents play in the identity development of their college-aged children (Taub, 2008).

With the increased closeness and continued contact of undergraduate students and their parents, coupled with the societal phenomena impacting higher education, what does this mean for emerging adults and identity development in college? Through this study, there is an opportunity to understand the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents

through the growing discussion on the student-parent relationship in college (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cohen, 1985; Cullaty, 2011; Dunn, 2015; Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Merriman, 2007; Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001; Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

Emerging adulthood provides the conceptual framework for this study. Emerging adulthood, typically occurring between the ages of 18-25 years of age, is a distinct life stage in which individuals are not children, but not yet adults, and is marked by exploration and transformation (Arnett, 2015). From this perspective, emerging adulthood can be viewed as a life stage unique to many Western and industrialized cultures or those from middle/upper class socioeconomic backgrounds, whereas in some other places, individuals in this age group or even younger are considered adults (Arnett 2000, 2015).

The distinguishing characteristics of emerging adulthood are “longer and more widespread education, later entry to marriage and parenthood, and a prolonged and erratic transition to stable work” (Arnett, 2015, p. 8). Arnett (2015) outlined five features that comprise emerging adulthood: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities/optimism. In *identity exploration*, emerging adults seek to answer the question “who am I?” *Instability* describes the areas that are less uncertain for emerging adults in this time, such as love, work, and place of residence. *Self-focus* describes an internal focus where obligations to others play a less prominent role; *feeling in between* is the transitional period between adolescent and adult; and *possibilities/optimism* are about the seemingly limitless opportunities to have transformative life experiences. Relatively few studies have used emerging adulthood as a framework for the identity development of college students and the role of their

parents. When emerging adulthood is used, it is often framed within a quantitative methodology (e.g., Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Lindell, Campione-Barr, & Killoren, 2017; Michalek, 2016; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Reynolds, Gonzales-Backen, Allen, Hurley, Donovan, Schwartz, Hudson, Agocha, & Williams, 2017).

Emerging adulthood serves as a unique time for identity exploration in all facets of life, including relationships, work, and world perspectives (Arnett, 2000). In this timeframe, approximately 2.2 million high school graduates attend college, with 9 out of 10 enrolled full-time and 3 out of 4 attending a four-year college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Individuals who go to college are faced with new opportunities but also new challenges, such as navigating new living arrangements, managing newfound independence, determining a career, and forging new relationships while maintaining or renegotiating old relationships (Arnett, 2000, 2015; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). While all of these challenges occur, many emerging adults continue to maintain close parent contact as they learn more about who they are in a new environment (Arnett, 2015). Because college students are in this distinct in-between period, an emerging adulthood framework helps to situate the group for the purpose of this study (Arnett, 2000, 2015).

Emerging adulthood accounts for the unique transitions college students experience as they embark on life after high school and beyond. Positive identity development leads to students feeling a sense of confidence as it relates to who they are in the world, how they interact with the world, and how they are viewed in the world (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As a theoretical framework, emerging adulthood provides a valuable area for continued and expanded research in student identity development. Furthermore, research on identity development in

emerging adulthood and the potential role of parents is needed to explore the juxtaposition between the concepts. This primarily refers to psychosocial development.

For Arnett (2015), identity manifests through exploration. Through these explorations, identity is a way for emerging adults to “clarify their sense of who they are and what they want out of life” (Arnett, 2015, p. 9). There are several types of student development theories that focus on a variety of areas such as social interactions in various environments (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013; Taub, 2008), how an individual makes sense of the world to increase their intellectual complexity (Patton et al., 2016; Hamrick et al., 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013), and how one sees themselves in the world in ways such as racial, ethnic, sexual, disability, and gender (Hamrick et al., 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013). Limited studies exist on identity development for emerging adults with or without involved parents. As an overarching concept, identity will be defined by the student through data collection and supported further through literature in the data analysis process.

Significance of the Study

Student-parent relationships in college represent a continued area of interest for those in higher education (ASHE, 2015; Carney-Hall, 2008; Cullaty, 2011; Dunn, 2015; Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). The literature reflects different and sometimes contradictory perspectives on how parents should be involved once the student is on campus and enrolled (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; Cullaty, 2011; Donovan, 2014; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Kohn, 2015; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Merriman, 2007; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001;

Schiffrin, Liss, Miles-McLean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2014; Schwartz & Buboltz, 2004).

The ambiguity of a parent's role with their child in college coupled with societal phenomena taking place in society may create tenuous interactions between parents, students, and higher education professionals. The nexus of these factors calls for a reexamination of the identity development process in college to better understand the impact on students, college campuses, and the work of higher education professionals. Through this study, I plan to expand the discussion on the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. By examining these phenomena, individual institutions and higher education professionals can consider how best to engage parents in partnership to support students on their campus.

Research Question

This study is designed to address the following research question: *What is the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents?* The research question is related to the conceptual framework by focusing on identity development in college, the defining features of emerging adulthood, and involved parents.

Methodology

For this study, I used a qualitative approach, informed by phenomenology, to explore the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. A limited number of studies have used emerging adulthood as a framework for the identity development of college students and the role of their parents, and often have used quantitative methodology (e.g., Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Lindell, Campione-Barr, & Killoren, 2017; Michalek, 2016; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Reynolds, Gonzales-Backen, Allen, Hurley, Donovan, Schwartz, Hudson, Agocha, & Williams, 2017). A qualitative approach allows for the lived experience and meaning to come from the student (Moustakas, 1994). The premise of phenomenological research is to

“understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participant” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235) where the “subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235).

The phenomenon I planned to study was the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. Data collection occurred through interviewing, a method commonly used for data collection in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Individual semi-structured interviews allowed for a more personal and interactive research process (Mertens, 2010). This data collection approach allows the research to “discover the person’s view of an experience of phenomena of study” (deMarrais, 2004, p. 52). To be eligible for the study, participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 22 and enrolled full-time as an undergraduate student who communicated with a parent or parent figure at least once per week and who lived with that parent or parent figure during high school. This exploratory research study occurred at large, four-year public research institution in the southeastern United States due to the researcher’s familiarity and affiliation with the campus. A tiered process was used to recruit a diverse participant pool. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire which included questions such as major, socioeconomic status, parent level of education, and race/ethnicity.

A review of the questionnaires allowed me to determine if those interviewed represented a diverse pool. For this study, diversity included, but was not limited to, having a cross-representation of research site colleges and schools, participant ages, years in school, races and ethnicities, and genders. To understand college student-parent relationships and involvement, data were collected through digitally audio recorded individual semi-structured interviews. Following Institutional Review Board approval, I recruited eligible students to participate in the study. The data were analyzed using qualitative methodology, informed by a phenomenological

approach, to identify salient themes (Roulston, 2010). The study methodology is described in more detail in chapter 3.

Subjectivity Statement

Qualitative research is an intimate process where I, as the researcher, serve as the data collection instrument (Mertens, 2010). My current work involves directing the activities of a student services center that seeks to integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences for undergraduate students. Included in this holistic center is prospective student recruitment, new student orientation, student leadership, academic advising, and an internship program. These areas allow me to have frequent contact with students and their parents. In this role, I also develop relationships with students once enrolled. As I get to know students, the topic of their parents or family usually comes up in conversations. In these conversations with students, I learn about their families and how students interact with their parents. There are times when I get to meet their parents and can observe interactions I've heard about, which allows for informal insight about a student and their parent.

As a researcher, I am aware that my subjectivity might hinder my ability to hear the participant's voice clearly because of my assumptions about student-parent relationships through my work in higher education, my interest in student-parent relationships, and my role as parent of children who may one day attend college. As I was worked on my proposal one week, I was alerted to a Facebook memory that referenced parents. Specifically, the post was "student affairs prayer: Lord, don't let me be the parent or raise the kids we talk about in class" (Appendix G). This post was more about the student, but calls attention to my thinking about parents and students even before I began to explore this as a research topic. In the interview and data analysis process, I remained cognizant of allowing participant voices to be heard through my

data analysis process. In qualitative research, there are several ways to promote integrity and trustworthiness. For example, member checks, which I did, allowed participants to review initial findings for authenticity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was keenly aware that my role in this process was to allow participants to make meaning of their individual experiences with the research phenomenon (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). During data analysis, I had to shift from using a phenomenology framework to a broader interpretivist framework. This was due to hearing my participants' voices which suggested that their experience could not be distilled down to a singular phenomenon. As the researcher, it was important for me to remain authentic to my qualitative discovery and to finish the analysis and frame the findings accordingly.

Operational Definitions

Parent: Biological parent, adoptive parent, stepparent, guardian, or other parent figure

Parental Involvement: Includes parents showing interest in the lives of their students in college, gaining more information about college, knowing when and how to provide encouragement and guidance to their student (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Traditional Aged College Student: Students who enroll immediately after high school and are typically between the ages of 18 to 24 (NCES, 2014)

Identity: The clarification of who you are and what you want out of life (Arnett, 2015) as well as how you view yourself; this could be related to your race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, politics, spirituality/religion, being a student, or other identities that you ascribe to yourself (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Jones & Abes, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013; Taub, 2008).

Delimitations of the Study

This study took place at a large, public, primarily residential, doctoral university with high research activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2017). The study utilized a phenomenological approach in which the goal was to “understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participant” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235) where the “subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235). This study focused on one campus, of a particular type. Generalizability to other students or institutional types is not supported due to the fact students and parents who choose this kind of institution may be different in some ways than those who are attracted to other institutional types. These delimitations may have affected the group of students who contributed to my study. This single institution approach served as a foundation for exploratory research focusing on the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents.

Chapter Summary

Student-parent interactions and relationship have changed over the last 30 years, which is impacting colleges and universities (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The societal phenomena outlined earlier traces the changes in these continued relationships that extend into college. Institutions and higher education professionals must determine their course of action when it comes to the messages they want to convey to parents about their involvement. Emerging adults, as defined in this study (Arnett, 2000, 2015), largely determine who they are while in college, but it is not done in isolation. Identity development can be a challenging experience for them in which they have to navigate the complexities of relationships, career, and money (Arnett, 2015). Because of the changing parenting landscape, consideration should be given to parental involvement in the identity development of emerging adult college students. This study was

designed to 1) understand how participants describe their own identity development, and 2) examine the involvement of their parents and its effect on their development. The following chapter reviews scholarly literature related to student development and student-parent relationships.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The research question that guided this study and served as a framework for this section is the following: *What is the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents?* The following sections will lay the foundation and provide the context for discussing the research question through a thorough review of relevant literature related to the research study. First, I will provide an overview of psychosocial theories of development. Following this overview, I will discuss emerging adulthood as the theoretical framework. Then I will discuss today's college student. Lastly, I will cover today's college parent and their parental involvement. Combined, these sections show the timeliness of addressing the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents.

Psychosocial Theories

To set the foundation for this chapter, a discussion of psychosocial theories must first be grounded in an understanding of student development and student development theory. The development of students and the theories we use to work with students are core components that guide the work of many higher education professionals (Patton et al., 2016). *Student* emphasizes the group found on college campuses and *development* implies a positive change in the student (Jones & Abes, 2011). Working towards student development and understanding student development theory allow higher education professionals to “identify and address student needs, design programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage positive growth in students” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 8).

Various theories assist higher education professionals in their work with students. Such theories allow us to better understand and work with the students who occupy space on our campuses and “help to simplify and make sense of the complexities of life” (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 4). Psychosocial theories are a theory family that provides higher education professionals with a way to approach their students. This theory family focuses on the individual across the life span, how the individual interacts and situates themselves in the world, and how that impacts different components of their life (Jones & Abes, 2011). At various times in students’ lives, the focus of development may be different. For college students, especially undergraduate students, the focus is often on the content of “values, identity, relationships, career and work, and family” (Jones & Abes, 2011, p. 7). This research study focuses on identity development, and the following theories provide a framework to explore the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. A brief overview of foundational theories follows, followed by a discussion of the theory that anchors the work of this study.

Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory

Erik Erikson’s theory on identity development serves as a seminal theory of student development (Patton et al, 2016). Erikson’s theory focuses on the human personality and how an individual’s personality changes over a lifespan based on environmental and internal factors (Erikson, 1959). This theory specifically relates to the identity development of individuals from adolescence to adulthood (Patton et al., 2016). Erikson’s theory is based on the epigenetic principle which states “anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having the time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole” (Erikson, 1959, p. 53). The theory progresses linearly by age and through eight stages. Each stage includes a crisis, significant relationships and attachments, motivators,

and meaningful virtues. According to Erikson, each stage should initiate a change that helps the individual progress to and through later stages (Erikson, 1959).

In stage one, the individual is an infant and the crisis is *trust versus mistrust*. The significant relationship is with their caregiver. During this stage, the infant learns what is needed to receive attention from the caregiver. This stage is critical in regard to how the infant will move through later stages. Specifically, the infant develops a sense of who is able to meet and fulfill their basic needs and who is not. They learn very early on who to will attend to them (trust) and who will not (mistrust). Stage two's crisis is *autonomy versus shame and doubt*. This stage builds upon the previous stage by encouraging exploration and independence. If trust is solid, the two-to-three-year-old builds confidence and self-determination through an encouraging relationship with their family (Erikson, 1959; Patton et al., 2016). Following *autonomy versus shame and doubt* is *initiative versus guilt*. This stage is marked by interactions with new people in new settings such as school. Between the ages of three and six, when this stage occurs, children are very imaginative and active. The child begins to understand right and wrong which leads toward developing a conscience and understanding how consequences relate to their actions (Erikson, 1959). Consequences can come from immediate family members, but may also come from teachers, other family members, or people the child interacts with during this stage. From ages seven to twelve years old, the crisis is *industry versus inferiority*. In this stage, new relationships are introduced, such as friends and peer groups, and the scope of influence moves beyond parents and close family. As with the previous stages, encouragement is valuable as children learn new skills. If children do not feel encouraged this can lead to feelings of inadequacy and frustration through the next set of stages.

The crux of my study is rooted in stage five, *identity versus identity diffusion*, which initially occurs between the ages of 12 to 18 but can continue to impact the individual throughout the life span. During this stage, the adolescent begins to negotiate how they see themselves in comparison to others and their environment (Erikson, 1959). Essentially, the individual is seeking to find their purpose in the world through their connection to others and what is happening in their environment. They are asking questions, learning what they value, and deciding the direction they would like their life to go with more complexity than in previous stages. A lack of purpose can lead to “role confusion as they delineate between how others see them and how they view themselves. Those who experience struggles with developing their core sense of self may feel confused or insecure about themselves and their relationships” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 289). Stage six, *intimacy vs isolation*, focuses on the connection that individuals have with each other in partnered and friend relationships. Usually occurring in the 20s and serving as an initial benchmark to adulthood, individuals want to see themselves connected to others through partnered relationships, friend groups, and feeling a sense of belonging. Failure to connect with others can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Erickson, 1959).

Generativity versus self-absorption forms stage seven and occurs from the late 20s to 50s. Compared to the previous stage, individuals in this stage progress through life experiences such as marriages, births of children, the death of parents and friends, and getting older. These life experiences provoke the individual to consider how and for what they want to be remembered. Knowing what you value and what you want to leave behind for others helps the individual to keep living life. If the individual does not know, they may not be able to move forward in a way that is beneficial to them or to others. The eighth and final stage, *integrity versus despair*, centers around realizing individual mortality. This stage may cause individuals to reexamine

their purpose and place in the world. Regret is a defining characteristic of this stage. The individual might be content with their life or alternatively may wonder if they missed out on a better life, creating the contrasting concepts of integrity and despair.

Erikson's theory serves as a critical premise to the identity exploration and identity development of college-aged students. Erikson's theory supposes that various factors such as environment and relationships are determining factors in identity development, particularly in developing an identity that builds confidence, encourages exploration, and affirms decisions made. These factors and his theory serve as the lynchpin that necessitates the conversation around parents, college students, and identity. The theories that follow further increase our capacity to understand that role that relationships, particularly those with parents, play in identity exploration and identity development. Erikson's theory serves as a significant contribution to identity development across the lifespan, his research solely focused on identity formation in men and used men as the primary example from which to draw his theory. While he did acknowledge women, it was only in relation to their partner's identity which he presumed to be male (Stewart & Newton, 2010). This narrow focus provides an opportunity for additional theorists to further develop additional theories of identity exploration and identity development.

Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses

James Marcia's (1966) theory builds on Erikson's, but specifically focuses on Erikson's stage five, *identity versus identity diffusion*. Marcia wanted to know more about ego identity and understand behaviors associated with ego identity. Crises and commitment were the two variables used to determine individual identity status. Crisis is "the adolescent's period of engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives" (Marcia, 1966, p. 551) and commitment is "the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits" (Marcia, 1966, p.

551). In summary, Marcia wanted to know how individuals faced with certain life decisions would commit to those decisions. Participants were males ($n = 86$) enrolled in history, psychology, and history courses at a small college in Ohio. Primary data collection was semi-structured interviews to determine identity achievement. Marcia asked questions involving commitment to occupational choice if another option became viable. He also wanted to know their overall ego identity. To determine the score for this, participants were instructed to complete fill-in-the-blank sentences around commitment and letting go (Marcia, 1966). The chart below depicts the four areas participants were placed in after scoring and measurements were completed.

Figure 2.1

Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses

Commitment/Exploration	<i>Without exploration</i>	<i>With exploration</i>
<i>Without commitment</i>	Identity diffused	Moratorium
<i>With commitment</i>	Foreclosure	Identity Achieved

(adapted from Marcia, 1966; based on information from Patton et al., 2016)

Identity-diffused individuals are characterized by a lack of crisis and commitment. *Moratorium* individuals explore and will challenge views from authoritative figures such as parents, but do not feel a strong sense to commit to the views they challenged or any views in general. Individuals in *foreclosure* experience no crisis but commit to and accept authoritative views especially from parents. They only understand a small portion of the world and do not feel a need to disrupt their current way of thinking. Experiencing both crisis and commitment are *identity achievers* who take on the difficulty of working through decisions and determining their level of commitment and involvement. Marcia's framework does not suggest that individuals

will progress linearly through defined stages, but that development is variable to an individual's life and circumstances as they relate to crisis and commitment.

Considering Marcia's research in relationship to Erikson's stage five, if an individual is confident and receives encouragement, they may be more comfortable with exploring life and making confident decisions that leave little regret as they progress through their life. Marcia expanded Erickson's view of the *identity versus identity diffused* stage by applying it to college students rather than patients and developing an empirical method to better understand identity development. However, Marcia's findings are limited as they were based on white male college students in the 1960s. Still, in the same way Erikson discusses the role of parents in identity development, Marcia's research confirmed the essential role of parents. In his work, Marcia routinely highlights parents as pivotal to identity exploration based on how parents encourage and support autonomy, connections with their child, and exploration (Marcia, 1993).

Josselson's Theory of Female Identity Development

Drawing on the work of Erikson and Marcia, Josselson (1996) initially conducted a qualitative study where she interviewed 60 female senior undergraduate college students. She later followed up with 30 of the original participants who were then in their 30s and early 40s. Through her study she was able to identify four statuses of female identity development. *Guardians*, the first status, make identity commitments without a process of exploration as a means to explain their choice (Josselson, 1996). They have overly involved parents and cling to parental authority and the legacy of their family experience. They seek security in relationships, not work, and make choices without doubt and without questioning. Guardians assume messages from childhood are correct and silence all inner resistance to the service of being a model young woman. In summary, guardians do what they are supposed to do based on their

connection with their parents or parental figures. *Searchers*, the second status, have “cyclical patterns of exploration, followed by commitment, followed by further exploration” (Josselson, 1996, p. 125). They are often conflicted between parental demands and making their own way in life to distance themselves from parental expectations. When thinking about their college experience and post-college career, many were worried more about feeling like a part of a community than about seeking out their own independence. When they explored and committed, they eventually built confidence in their choices moving forward. A third status, *pathmaker*, experience-a period of exploration or crisis and then make identity commitments on their own. Similar to concepts articulated by Erikson (1959) and Marcia (1966), pathmakers have a strong foundation built upon early support and encouragement from parents to explore life and make decisions. This group typically consists of women who break psychological ties with childhood and form a separate identity. Relational connections are primary, but women must find a balance between those connections and work commitments. These women are autonomous and exude confidence in their daily life actions and experiences. The last status, *drifters*, do not concern themselves with commitments. They experience a lack of crisis and commitment which leads to spontaneous responses where they may be unable to set boundaries. This spontaneity is from their cultural upbringing during the 1960s where anything seemed possible. As students, they had “space and the permission to lose themselves” (Josselson, 1996, p. 142). There was no real harm or consequences from living in the moment with no consideration for what was next (Josselson, 1996). Drifters may not have close relationships with parents and may have unstable friend and partner interactions. Because of their lack of crisis and commitment, life often happens to them without their complicit involvement, and they find themselves continually

reinventing themselves. The chart below illustrates where each group sits in relation to the intersection of exploration and commitment.

Figure 2.2

Josselson's Female Identity Statuses

Commitment/Exploration	<i>Without exploration</i>	<i>With exploration</i>
<i>Without commitment</i>	Drifters	Searchers
<i>With commitment</i>	Guardians	Pathmakers

(adapted from Josselson, 1996)

Josselson's (1996) theory is meant to be fluid and does not follow a linear pathway across the lifespan. It is possible for an individual to be in different tenets at different points in time, but not simultaneously. The saliency of this section is the importance of support and encouragement from those closest to us to begin exploring and developing an identity. Identity in women is fundamentally relational and is rooted in relatedness to others; therefore, changes in relationships have profound consequences for a woman's identity. A woman locates and expresses herself through her relationships with others, knowing who she is in part through who she "is" for those individuals. During college and after, parents continue to play a significant role in women's identity development. Josselson's research highlights the importance of connection to others, especially parents, in contrast to Erickson who believed identity was only tied to occupation and ideology (Josselson, 1996). Alongside Erikson and Marcia, Josselson's theory supports the role that parents play during identity exploration and identity development. While this theory focuses on women, there is room to continue to explore what identity development looks like in different subsets of emerging adults.

Chickering & Reisser's Seven Vectors

Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised Chickering's earlier (1969) version of the seven vectors of psychosocial development. Similar to Erikson, this theory is a stage model in which each vector is intended to build capacity in the individual. The theory is framed by the individual's connection to their individual self, their environment, and their relationships with others such as parents. The successful navigation of each vector increases their capacity to feel confident in who they are relative to the world around them (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Chickering & Reisser (1993) developed the vectors to "help us determine where students are and which way they are heading" (p. 34). The seven vectors are developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

In vector one, *developing competence*, the focus areas are intellectual, physical and manual, and interpersonal. First, intellectual competence involves the ability to use one's mind in a way that grasps concepts and makes connections in a sophisticated way. Second, physical and manual competence highlights artistic and athletic capabilities. Interpersonal competence stresses person-to-person interactions, communication, and the ability to relate to other individuals in settings such as groups. Vector two is *managing emotions*. The goal of this vector is the ability to become aware of, acknowledge, and effectively work through different emotions. Following vector two is *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*. The premise of this vector finding a balance between self and others. As an autonomous person, the individual may feel they only need themselves to be happy or successful. As the individual moves toward interdependence, he or she begins to consider how both self and others, including parents, create the space for mutually beneficial relationships. The next vector, *developing mature*

interpersonal relationships, emphasizes the need for respect between people and fostering healthy relationships.

Another important aspect of my study is located in vector five, *establishing identity*. This vector involves putting the pieces together of who you are and what that means from a holistic perspective. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), developing identity is a robust process that involves 1) comfort with body and appearance, 2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, 3) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, 4) clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, 5) sense of self in response to feedback valued from others, 6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and 7) personal stability and integration. During this vector, a “solid sense of self emerges, and it becomes more apparent that there is an *I* who coordinates the facets of personality, who ‘owns’ the house of self and is comfortable in all of its rooms” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49). Vector six, *developing purpose*, focuses on finding out what the individual wants to do and creating a plan to get there. Often this vector is about finding a fulfilling occupation but can be about finding personal interests and like-minded individuals who may have similar interests. The seventh and final vector, *developing integrity*, is about what drives an individual to be a productive citizen and person in an ever-changing and complex world. At the heart of this vector are core beliefs and values where an individual is willing to put community over self.

There are many parallels between the works of Erikson, Marcia, Josselson, and Chickering and Reisser. At the core of their work is identity and how important the exploration and commitment process are for individuals. Without identity, we would have no sense of self and its impact in the larger community. These theorists provide important foundational and complementary commentary for Arnett’s to expand the discussion on the identity development of

emerging adults with involved parents. Because such focus is given to identity development during college, a better understanding of it is desperately needed.

Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2000) identified a gap in literature related to individuals in the 18-29 years of age range. Specifically, research has tended to focus on childhood or adolescence without consideration of how this group might differ from older adults (Arnett 2000, 2015). The concept of *emerging adulthood* provides a foundation to understand today's college student and his or her parent relationship. Emerging adulthood is measured against certain demographic characteristics and hallmarks of what it means to be an adult in American society (Arnett, 2015) meaning this is a specific concept as articulated by Arnett and may not be applicable for other individuals even if they are within the emerging adult age range. In addition, there are many manifestations of identity development, but this study chose to use emerging adulthood as the framework due to its age range, focus on identity exploration, and the involvement of parents.

Individuals who are in the emerging adulthood phase are typically between the ages of 18-25 years old, engage in longer periods of education, delay getting married and having children, and are prone to experience work instability. What has been considered "normal" is no longer valid or appropriate to assume in the current landscape of emerging adults. For marriage, in 1960 the median age of a first marriage for women and men was 20.3 and 22.8 years of age respectively. In 2016, the median age for women increased by seven years to 27.4 years with a similar increase for men to 29.5 years of age (Parker & Stepler, 2017). For the entering fall 2008 cohort, only 60% of new, full-time undergraduate students graduated by 2014 (NCES, 2017a). Through his research, Arnett (2015) determined that emerging adulthood has five distinct

characteristics, which he referred to as *features*. They are identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism.

Identity exploration. Identity exploration occurs when individuals begin to determine who they are in relation to the world around them. They are often trying to answer the question “who am I?” as they navigate new experiences with family, education, love, and work. During this phase, individuals become more independent of their parents, but parents still play a role in their lives although they may not be involved on a daily basis. These individuals explore different options in various areas of their lives (Arnett, 2015). Identity exploration takes place gradually as “many of the identity explorations of the emerging adult years are simply for fun, a kind of play, part of gaining a broad range of life experiences before settling down and taking on the responsibilities of adult life” (Arnett, 2015, p. 11). Identity exploration allows this group to experience freedom from societal pressures, particularly around work and love, to answer the question “who am I?” (Arnett, 2015).

Arnett (2015) described this feature as the process of an individual finding deeper meaning about what creates purpose in various areas of his or her life such as love and work. In comparison to adolescence where purpose is rudimentary, emerging adults begin to actively consider, question, and strengthen what they believe their purpose to be in life, love, and work. In his later work, Erikson acknowledged that some individuals might experience a longer adolescence period, but all of his work around identity exploration and identity formation maintained a focus on adolescence as the pinnacle (Erikson, 1959). After reviewing Erikson’s research on identity and adolescence, Arnett began to find that more individuals found themselves in prolonged adolescence extending after the age of eighteen, which he termed emerging adulthood. It is during emerging adulthood where individuals begin to navigate

identity exploration and are better equipped to answer the question “who am I?” (Arnett, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, Marcia (1966) and Josselson (1996) both saw the significance of identity exploration and identity development during the college-aged years as evidenced by their continued work. Marcia routinely highlights parents as pivotal to identity exploration based on how parents encourage and support autonomy, connections with their child, and exploration, Josselson, too, acknowledged role that parents play during identity exploration and identity development.

Instability. This feature of emerging adulthood, instability, refers to what occurs with love, education, work, and living arrangements. Arnett (2015) described how a student might change his or her intended college major several times, which causes the student to edit his or her path, creating instability as the student determines next steps. Living arrangements also tend to shift more frequently during this stage, unlike what may occur before eighteen or after their twenties. Additionally, instability may be affected by undergraduate student experiences and understand variances with regards to race or ethnicity along with social class or socioeconomic status (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). For example, if the student attends a university of or college racially or ethnically different from their high school. Arnett acknowledges that social class intersected with education may impact emerging adult research (Arnett, 2015).

During this feature, the connection to parents has an unstable feeling as well. Many individuals move away from home; they are often headed to college, but this does not generally change the close connection between parent and child. In fact, a survey conducted by The Clark University Poll found that 65% of parents contact their 18-21 emerging adult “every day or almost every day” (Arnett & Schwab, 2013, p. 5). During instability, parents may be able to provide some stability, as many changes occur during this feature. This time can involve an

immense amount of change, but the instability felt can also allow the individual time to edit the life they want to have for their future self (Arnett, 2015).

Self-focus. Self-focus involves less commitment to others. As children, there is a commitment to adults who exert authority over their lives. Post-twenties, the commitment may be to a partner, work, elderly parents, or children. Many emerging adults leave home, which may limit commitment and follow up by their parents. For parents who want to continue to engage their child, this can be a challenging time where relational shifts may occur. Their child begins to make decisions about what to eat, when to clean up, and whom they spend time with regularly. They may reach out to their parents when a difficult situation occurs, but they ultimately determine what is best for themselves. Self-focus does not mean selfish but is a necessary feature for further identity exploration and commitment to things that require longevity (Arnett, 2015).

Feeling in-between. This emerging adulthood feature is characterized by having one foot in adolescence and the other in adulthood, but not feeling fully in either group. The in-betweenness comes from not feeling restricted by the commitments of adolescence nor having to shoulder the responsibilities that come with being an adult. They have not reached the “Big Three” that are used as criteria for adulthood: accepting responsibilities for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. Until all of these are met on a consistent basis, emerging adults do not consider themselves adults (Arnett, 2015).

Possibilities/optimism. For emerging adults, the future is bright, and anything seems possible. They do not feel the immense pressure of what is expected of them by parents or society. They feel a sense of freedom as they explore new relationships, start new jobs, move away from home, or experience the many other adventures and changes that occur during this

timeframe. Emerging adults can become who they want as commitments and obligations are few in comparison to adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2015). While societal pressures still exist, there is less immediate pressure to find a job, get married, or have children during emerging adulthood. As emerging adults enter their thirties, the pressure to check off these hallmarks of adulthood increases (Arnett, 2015).

Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood is the theoretical framework that guides my study. Its focus on typical college-age years serves as a springboard to discuss identity development in college students. Additionally, as more parents figuratively come to college with their students, understanding the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents is a critical component in working with emerging adults and their parents.

Millennials and Generation Z

The descriptors used for today's traditional-aged college student, known as Millennials and Generation Z, provide additional support for the discussion of the identity exploration of emerging adults. The need to discuss both groups stems from their co-existence on college campuses. Millennials were typically born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, with Generation Z starting in 1995. Many millennials are wrapping up their undergraduate college careers, but with longer time to degree completion or a delay in starting school for the first time, they will continue to be a generational cohort on college campuses (NCES, 2017a; NCES 2017b). Generation Z is a new generational cohort, which we are really starting to understand as they make their way into college. Specifically, Seemiller and Grace (2017) want to understand how to "meet the needs, interests, and learning preferences" (p. 21) of this group to create environments that are more responsive and aligned to a new generational cohort. Howe and Strauss (2000) described millennial students as special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented,

conventional, pressured, and achieving. They went on to say that millennial students have increased access to resources compared to previous generations. Additional literature confirms this generational group as one that is culturally diverse, technologically savvy, open-minded, and confident. Furthermore, this group is perceived to have grown up with overprotective parents (Levine & Dean, 2012).

An emerging generation, Generation Z is quickly becoming the new generation to pay attention to when it comes to college campuses, parental involvement, and identity. As a new generational cohort enters college, higher educational professionals should adapt their work to meet the needs of the new group. The approach to identity development that occurs with Millennials may not be the best approach based on the characteristics of the new cohort (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Generation Z arrived on campus around 2013, but little is known about this group (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Most were born between 1995 and 2010, meaning we will continue to see them enter college well into the 2020s. According to the research done by Seemiller and Grace (2017), Millennials and Generation Z may appear to be similar or are often lumped together to describe today's college students; Generation Z has their own set of generational characteristics. As a generational cohort, Generation Z can be described as socially aware, globally-minded, technologically-savvy, engaged with their community, and eager to apply their learning for broader understanding (Beall, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2017). They still have overprotective parents, but this has been shaped by a world that has vividly witnessed much tragedy due to technology. Access to images and videos of mass killings, police brutality, and other disturbing violence is available to them 24/7 through technology. The sections to follow outline the societal phenomena that compound the need to further the discussion on college students, parents, and identity.

Societal Phenomena Impacting Parental Involvement

Daniel, Evans, & Scott (2001), state “college is no longer the kind of place where parents send students to learn from experts while readily abdicating their control” (p. 3). Given this declaration, what can we discover about college students, parents, and identity? In Chapter 1, I briefly addressed the societal phenomena impacting parental involvement. This section will expand the discussion of societal factors that have led to an increase in parental involvement in college. As a reminder, these include educational policies that encourage parental involvement at the K-12 level and loop parents into their child’s life in college, the media’s coverage that publicizes overinvolved parents who interfere in their students’ lives, access to technology to stay connected, and rising post-secondary educational costs. These are not the only phenomena increasing parental involvement across college campuses, but they are the ones most salient for this study.

Educational Policies. Policies directing parental roles pre-college encourage and almost mandate parental and family involvement (Carney-Hall, 2008). The educational policies outlined below focus on parents and access. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) promotes and encourages parental involvement as one of its primary targets (Wartman & Savage, 2008). NCLB was intended to give more choice to parents to ensure their child had access to a good education. While NCLB was replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act, the expectation of parent-school communication continues (United States Department of Education, 2015).

Relatedly, at the K-12, FERPA grants parents and guardians with direct access to their child’s K-12 information. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 was introduced by Senator James Buckley to ensure students and their parents had access to educational records. During K-12, parents have full access to their child’s educational records. Upon college

enrollment, generally at age 18, parental access to educational records diminishes significantly because students become owners of their educational records, and FERPA affords them certain rights to protect those records. However, over the last twenty years, the act has been amended or interpreted to provide increased access for parents. One example includes the permission to disclose alcohol and drug violations to parents if the student is under the age of twenty-one. Another example is access to educational records when the child is under eighteen years of age or if the child is claimed as a dependent on parent tax returns (Baker, 2008). Additionally, other laws have been enacted to increase parental awareness about the environment and climate of the institution in regard to health and safety, such as the Clery Act of 1990 that requires higher education institutions to submit and publish accurate crime statistics (Carney-Hall, 2008).

Amendments to and interpretations of FERPA can create confusion for parents around parental involvement and access to information as their child enters college. Higher education institutions may believe their expectations for parent involvement are clear, but parents may not perceive them that way, particularly when they seem to be different from what parents were used to when their students were in high school. The juxtaposition of educational policies at the secondary level with those in post-secondary settings, combined with how parents are perceived on college campuses, generates a complicated picture for the continuing role of parents and their college students. There is a larger conversation that needs to take place around how we engage and communicate with parents if we know they are coming to college with their students (Cutright, 2008). This conversation centers around the identity development of emerging adults and what that work entails for higher education professionals.

Media. The media and parents have a complex relationship. Media outlets inundate the public with innumerable stories about the over-involved parent who cannot seem to let go.

Parents have been given descriptive names such as helicopters, Black Hawks, lawnmowers, submarines, and stealth missiles (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The emphasis on the overinvolved parent is further perpetuated by anecdotal stories that find their way into articles. As previously mentioned, most students value having their parents in their lives, which can lead to many positive outcomes and helpful support during a student's college career (Cullaty, 2011; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Wartman & Savage, 2008). To know what-parental involvement looks like, we need to examine it from the student perspective and look at how that informs identity exploration and identity development during college. The stories we read about over-involved parents may be humorous, but do not provide the full landscape of parenting today's traditional college student and what that means for their child's identity development.

Communication/Technology. The rapid evolution of technology to keep people connected has transformed the way parents and their children stay connected during college. Referred to as the "world's longest umbilical cord," the cell phone has increased the capacity for parents and students to share details of their lives through a constant flow of phone calls, text messages, and images, which many believe contributes to the notion of helicopter parenting (Swann, 2014). According to Wartman and Savage (2008), technology influences several aspects of the college environment, from how services are provided to how information is accessed. They went on to state, "we cannot expect that technology will not affect how students relate to others, including their parents" (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 94). Technology allows parent and child to stay connected, and this should cause institutions to pause and consider what this means for student development during college and the role of higher education professionals during this process. Likewise, institutions should ask how they can use technology to become

more proactive in their approach to including, and not distancing, parents (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Post-secondary Education Costs. Post-secondary education costs continue to rise, and nothing points to a decrease in prices anytime soon (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The costs of education, including tuition, fees, room, and board, have more than doubled at different institution types. For all institutions in the 1984-85 academic year the average cost of tuition, fees, room, and board was \$10, 210. During 2014-2015, the cost was \$21,728. For public institutions, the cost was \$7,626 during 1984-85 and \$16,188 during 2014-2015. In 1984-85 for private nonprofit and for profit institutions, the cost was \$18, 354. By 2014-15, the cost had increased to \$37, 424 (NCES, 2016). Because this may be one of the largest financial investments during an individual's lifetime, multiple revenue streams are needed to fund post-secondary education (Cutright, 2008). To pay for college, students may work and take out loans, but their parents find themselves investing in their child's educational experience through loans and other means to lessen their child's financial burden (Wartman & Savage, 2008). This financial investment may lead parents to become more curious about what is happening with their child and at their child's school.

Chapter Summary

Once a student is admitted to college, higher education professionals encourage parents to let go of their child. The concept of letting go is derived from literature that promotes autonomous and separate behavior from parents in college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1959; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004). A review of the literature demonstrates the evolution of identity exploration and identity development as a central task for emerging adults to navigate during college. This topic merits increased research

and best practices by higher education professionals because of the evolving nature of working with college students. As mentioned in Chapter 1, development has been and continues to be a primary goal of higher education professionals (Patton et al., 2010). The societal phenomena impacting parental involvement during college serves as another motivating factor for newer information and research to inform the work taking place on college campuses. Identity development in college and involved creates an opportunity to broaden the discourse around this topic to better serve two critical constituencies – students and their parents.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to address the following research question: *What is the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents?* This chapter outlines my methodological approach to understanding the experience of identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. Originally, I constructed my methodology to align with a traditional phenomenological design. As I progressed through my data analysis, I realized that a phenomenological design was no longer an appropriate methodology to complete my study. Upon this realization, I took a broader qualitative approach which was better suited to the emergent themes in comparison to phenomenology. Specifically, the themes represented a process of progressive identity development to encapsulate the experience of student participants, rather than a single phenomenon, like in traditional phenomenological design, through which to understand the lived experience or essence during a moment in time (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter outlines the methodological approach I took to complete my study, which yielded themes and findings related to the experience of identity development of emerging adults with involved parents.

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative researchers use a variety of methodological approaches. The most often used and recognizable include basic qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, the goal is to “achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives,

delineate the process (rather than an outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Each approach provides a different lens based on what the researcher seeks to know and understand (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative research seeks to “understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). The goal of phenomenology is to understand the essence of a singular phenomenon or experience (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Grounded theory takes the collective experience to create or identify a theory (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethnography focuses on positioning the researcher as an immersive component of the research process and product (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of narrative analysis or inquiry focuses on an individual’s life story to “make sense of our experiences, how we communicate to others, and through which we understand the world around us” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 33-34). Case studies are an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37) where “it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38).

There are several characteristics that describe qualitative research overall. Individuals who engage in qualitative research “are interested in *understanding the meaning people have constructed*; that is how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). First, qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding. Second, the researcher is the primary instrument. Third, researchers use inductive methods to explain a phenomenon. Lastly, rich descriptions using words and images are collected to demonstrate meaning and understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are

additional characteristics and competencies related to qualitative research, but the four outlined above serve as the primary descriptions of qualitatively grounded research.

Phenomenology

Van Manen (1990) stated, “phenomenology is, on the one hand, description of the lived-through quality of lived experience, and on the other hand, description of meaning *of the expressions* of lived experience” (p. 25). Phenomenology started as a significant methodological movement in 20th century from the philosophy and humanities disciplines (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Currently, it takes on “a broader meaning as phenomenology has been developed as a human science that is employed in professional disciplines such as education, health science, clinical psychology, and law” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 615). There are several strands of phenomenological inquiry. The strand that aligned best with my study as originally designed was transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology. Most identified with Edmund Husserl, transcendental phenomenology is comprised of two main concepts: intentionality and intuition. In his book, Moustakas (1994) discussed Husserl’s approach to transcendental phenomenology through these two concepts. Intentionality “refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). Intuition is “the beginning place in deriving knowledge of human experience, free of everyday sense impressions and the natural attitude” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). Together, these concepts frame the way that phenomenological methods are used to approach the research question, research design, and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This strand of phenomenology has “core processes that facilitate derivation of knowledge: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative

Variation” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). In my data analysis section of this chapter, I will define and outline these core processes and explain the elements I used in my analysis.

Research Design

For my research design, I initially planned a phenomenology, but in the end, I conducted a qualitative study informed by a phenomenological approach to understand the experience of identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. Qualitative research centers the participant as the meaning maker to answer the research question (Mertens, 2010). In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to uncover, discover, explore, or somehow allow participants to speak for themselves around a particular topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The premise of phenomenological research is to “understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participant” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235) where the “subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235). The essence of phenomenology is experience. According to Moustakas (1994), experience is best explained by the person experiencing the event. This is considered the first part of empirical phenomenological research. The second part occurs when the researcher reviews the participants’ descriptions to understand and interpret what the experience means in order to answer the research question (Moustakas, 1994). I intended to use a phenomenological approach from data collection to data analysis, but my themes did not elicit a singular experience, essence, or phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994). Because my themes identified a sequential process, it made more sense to pull back from the phenomenological approach and transition to a broader qualitative approach to describe participants’ experiences and the themes that emerged from their descriptions of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following sections further describe the process by which I conducted my research to answer my question.

Site

I conducted this study at Research University (RU), a large four-year, public research university in the southeastern United States. RU has numerous academic offerings for undergraduate students with 140 majors. The institution has over 28,000 undergraduate students enrolled, with an overall enrollment of over 37,000 including graduate and professional students. Undergraduate student enrollment makes up 76% of total institutional enrollment. According to their 2017 online fact book, 94% of undergraduate students were enrolled full-time, 58% of undergraduate students were between the ages of 18-20 with an average age of 20, 56% of undergraduate students identified as female, 89% were in-state residents, and almost 70% were White (University Fact Book, 2017). On average, the undergraduate population is made up of traditional aged students, mostly White and female, who attend college full-time in their home state.

Procedures

In the sections that follow, I will outline the process I utilized to recruit, select, and interview participants after receiving approval from my dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participant Recruitment

For this study, I sought participants at the research site who were undergraduate students between the ages of 18-22, who were enrolled full-time, and who communicated with a parent or parent figure at least once per week. Because of participant criteria, I utilized purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was necessary to address the research question and is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). It

provided a gateway to collect information using the theoretical framework as the foundation, especially as related to participant ages and year in school. The broad participant criteria were based on the scope of my research study, which was to understand the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents.

The participant recruitment email and flyer (see Appendix A and Appendix B) were sent to students at the research site via a proposed multi-tiered recruitment process. The proposed first tier consisted of sharing the email and flyer with 16 academic advising contacts. First tier contacts were asked to disseminate the recruitment email and flyer to students meeting the eligibility criteria. The email to academic advising contacts included information the student could review related to the research study. The proposed tier two consisted of sharing the flyer along with the email text on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; only Facebook was used for the study. Tier three, which I did not need to utilize, consisted of sending email and flyer information to representatives in a variety of University divisions, departments, offices, or units (see Appendix F). If the first three tiers had proved unsuccessful in recruiting the participants needed to complete the study, I had planned to utilize an undergraduate research pool at the research site by contacting the coordinators for permission and submission. Finally, if all tiers had been exhausted, I had planned to ask participants if they knew of others that might meet eligibility criteria, which is known as a snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Recipients in both tiers utilized (academic coordinators and Facebook users) were encouraged to share broadly with others in their undergraduate student network to increase the possibility of a diverse participant pool. For this study, diversity included, but was not limited to, having a cross-representation of research site academic divisions, as well as diverse participant ages, year in school, race and ethnicity, and gender. The recruitment email requested

participation in a qualitative interview study and provided detailed information about what would be involved (Appendix A). I planned to use the multi-tiered process and recruit sequentially, but the initial response from interested students was rapid. After the information was disseminated through the first two tiers, interested participants began to email me indicating an interest in my study. Within ten days of sending the email to academic advising contacts and posting on Facebook, I had 58 potential participants.

Upon receiving an email from a potential participant, I sent one of two emails. The first email included more detailed information about the study, a reminder about the eligibility criteria, and a Doodle poll link to schedule an interview in one of the 11 interview time slots utilizing the hidden poll feature, which keeps information such as participant names, comments, and votes confidential. The choice of eleven time slots was based on the number of 75 minute times blocks I had available during a two-week time frame to conduct interviews. This email was sent to 34 of the interested participants (Appendix A), which comprised the group who responded immediately to the recruitment email and met the eligibility criteria. The interview time slots filled up within two hours of the recruitment email being sent. Once all interview time slots were filled, I followed up with each participant to confirm their date/time, provide the interview location, and ask them to bring an artifact that provided a sense of who they are, their identity development, and the relationship they have with their parent/parent figure. Participants were sent a reminder email (Appendix A) one or two days before their interview. In the reminder email, each participant was asked to reply upon receipt.

The 24 interested participants who responded after all available interview slots were filled were sent a different email that thanked them for their interest in my study and communicated that I would add them to my interested participant list in case an interview time

opened up. Ten of the 11 students who scheduled interviews kept their appointments and were interviewed as planned; one was a no-show. However, since my choice to schedule 11 interviews was based on time available to conduct them, rather than the research design, I decided not to add another participant until I conducted the initial interviews and determined whether I needed additional data. For me, thanking all students who responded for their interest and adding them to a wait-list, was necessary if additional participants were needed to answer the research question.

Participant Overview

The eligibility criteria for this study specified that participants were enrolled, full-time undergraduate students of traditional-age, 18-22 years old, who communicated with a parent or parent figure at least once a week by phone, email, text, video chatting, or another communication tool and had lived with that parent or parent figure during high school. Of my 10 participants, eight were female and two were male (one of the students who scheduled an interview did not keep the appointment). Two participants were from out of state, representing one state in the same region and another from another region of the country. Additionally, participants represented five different academic divisions at the research site. During the course of interviews and on the demographic questionnaire, one participant identified as Black, another identified as Black and Jamaican, two identified as White and Jewish, and one identified as White and Turkish. Remaining participants identified as White only. Overall, the participants tended to reflect the demographic make-up of the research site for gender and residency, but the group was more ethnically and racially diverse than the overall student population. Chapter 4 will provide more detail about each participant.

Data Generation

To understand the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents, data came from individual semi-structured interviews, which were digitally audio recorded. Interviews lasted from 47 minutes to 89 minutes. An interview introduction and protocol guided the interviews (see Appendices D and E). The interview guide was developed to align with the research phenomenon using Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015); specifically, the features that form the groundwork for his theory and my research study are as follows: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism. Alignment helps to distill responses from participants to answer the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Interview protocol alignment with the study framework provided clear guidance on "how best to engage participants in questions" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 61) regarding the research phenomenon. The strength of semi-structured interviews and theoretical framework alignment is that it makes the best use of time between the researcher and participant without being overly restrictive (deMarrais, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Table 3.1 shows the relationship between the theoretical framework and interview questions.

Table 3.1

Interview Guide Question Matrix

Arnett's Features (2015)	Interview Guide Question
Identity exploration	What identities are most important/salient to you? How did you determine this? Did you experience anything for them to become important?
Instability	Tell me about your friend groups? Where is home for you? Describe your house and who lives there? Who did you live with before college? How often do you go home to visit your parents? Where do you live in Athens? How did you choose where to live? Who do you live with? What is your relationship to them? How would you describe your interactions with them?
Self-focus	What types of decisions have you had to make during college? How do you go about making those decisions? Are your parents involved in any of your decisions? How do you decide when to include them? What does that conversation look like? When you make the decision do you think more about what you want or what your parent wants?
Feeling in between	What does it mean to be an adult today? What does being an adult mean to you? What are some examples? Do you consider yourself as an adult? Do you feel like you're an adult? If so, how? If not, why? How do your parents view you in terms of being an adult? How do you know? How does that make you feel?
Possibilities/optimism	What are your dreams and aspirations? Do you feel optimistic pursuing your dreams and aspirations? What have you done or are doing to get there? Do you involve your parents?

As a measure of credibility, the interview protocol was reviewed by my four-person dissertation committee who provided constructive feedback. Upon receiving feedback from my committee,

I implemented their suggestions which included asking some specific questions related to the participants' parents, living arrangements, and friend groups.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews are the data collection method most often used in phenomenology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing interviews allowed me to “discover the person’s view of an experience of phenomena of study” (deMarrais, 2004, p. 52). In my role as the researcher, participants were the experts on the phenomenon being studied, and I took on the role of learner (deMarrais, 2004). Interviews served as the primary data collection method for this study and played a significant role because they provide an opportunity to “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). I used semi-structured interviews to allow for a more personal and interactive research process (Mertens, 2010). The semi-structured nature of the interview protocol (see Appendix E) allowed me to address the research question, while giving myself and the participant the opportunity to explore other ideas if needed. Interviews provide a glimpse into the lived experience that may not be otherwise reflected by another data collection method (Moustakas, 1994).

During my interviews, I took particular care to consider the power dynamic as the researcher who would interpret participants' lived experiences with the research phenomenon (deMarrais, 2004; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). By acknowledging this potential dynamic and my interest in students and their parents as stated in my subjectivity statement, I attempted to bracket presumptions that I had about students and their parents. As I sought to bracket and be aware of any preconceived notions I had about this phenomenon, it allowed me to engage with the participant and not allow any outside noise to “readily tell me what something is”

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). I completed ten interviews total. I did not conduct one interview due to a no-show on the part of the participant.

Before each interview officially started, I took time to build rapport with the participant. This included asking how they were doing, how their weekend was, whether they enjoyed their recent snow day, or other similar small-talk to make them feel relaxed and welcome. After building rapport, participants were asked if they remembered their artifact and to consider a pseudonym. A review of the consent form letter (see Appendix C) preceded the start of each interview recording. I reviewed the consent form letter with each participant and also gave them time to review before signing. I retained a copy for my records that included both sets of signatures. The participant was given a copy with my signature for their records as well.

From there, I read the interview introduction (see Appendix D) to the participant. The interview introduction included an overview of the study, a reminder about the artifact, and the opportunity to select a pseudonym. At the conclusion of the interview introduction, I indicated that I would need their verbal consent to audio record before starting the interview. All participants agreed and provided their consent on the audio recording. Verbal consent led into the questions and probes outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix E).

After completing my second interview, I noticed that the student had some difficulty with conceptualizing identity. After that particular interview, I wondered if other first or second year students would have any issues with understanding identity. After reflecting on this observation, I decided to update my interview introduction to provide more context to the concept of identity. After completing all ten interviews, I noticed that first or second year students did, in fact, have more difficulty in conceptualizing identity. Because of the update to the interview introduction

after the second interview, I was able to have richer discussions on identity because I began with an explanation I could refer back to when needed.

Each interview opened with me asking about the participant's artifact and its selection. Artifacts are described as "three-dimensional physical 'things' or objects in the environment that represent some form of communication that is meaningful to participants and/or the setting" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). Artifacts may in some cases be considered a form of data that provides insight into a bevy of constructs including ideas, assumptions, knowledge, opinions, and perceptions (Norum, 2008). For this study, the artifacts did not serve as a separate form of data to be analyzed, but provided a way to start the interview in a meaningful way. Participants brought a variety of artifacts including jewelry, clothing a children's book, a camp counselor patch, a backpack, text messages, a key chain, and a Japanese candy set. Through their selection and description of their chosen artifact, I could discern its significance to each participant. Artifacts are a source of information that "shed light on important aspects of a person, society, or culture, enriching any study" (Norum, 2008, p. 25). In this study, the utilization of artifacts was another method to open the conversation about the participant's identity development and the involvement of their parents. The artifact selected by the participant is given meaning by its selection.

Following a discussion about their selected artifacts, we continued with the rest of the interview. During each interview, I fully tuned into the person and their experience, asking follow up questions while observing body language. Because of the semi-structured nature of the interview, some questions were asked differently, not at all, or new questions arose based on the particular participant and their interview. As I progressed through the interviews, I made adjustments as needed and kept details notes after each one.

Following the interview, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (Appendix H). This final step allowed me to secure additional information about the participant and to better describe the diversity of my participant pool. As each participant left, I let them know I would be in touch for them to review their individual transcripts. Each recording was saved under the participant's selected pseudonym to retain participant confidentiality. The audio recordings were transcribed into a Word document by an individual transcriptionist and a transcription service. After recordings were transcribed, I used member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This occurred when participants reviewed their transcripts for accuracy (described in more detail below).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is essential to maintain integrity of the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Several factors, including researcher positionality and power relationships, can interfere with the research process. Who we are and what we bring to the research process must be accounted for during every step of the research process to ensure participant voices are heard through our interpretation of their perception or experience (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

One method I used to increase trustworthiness was through *member-checking* which occurs when participants are provided with the opportunity to review their transcripts before reduction and the emergence of any themes began (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After I finished listening to the interview, participants were sent their transcript for review (see Appendix I). Participants were asked to focus on making any factual corrections and flag anything that might put them at risk, and to respond within a week of me sending their transcript. If I did not hear from them within the specified timeframe, I proceeded with data analysis. Half of my ten

participants responded to me after reviewing their transcribed interview. Of the five that responded, three indicated factual corrections and flagged things that might have put them at risk of being identified, such as inserting their real first or last name, indicating their hometown if it was a smaller population, or mentioning specific campus involvement within their interview.

Data Protection

After each interview was transcribed, member-checked, and analyzed, transcriptions were placed in a locked cabinet in my office that only I can access. After submitting my final dissertation and forms for graduation, I will erase the audio recordings. Transcripts will be stored in my office under lock and key until a manuscript is accepted for publication or for two years, whichever is shorter.

Data Analysis

The following sections outline the qualitative data analysis process employed to generate findings. In qualitative research, the goal is to best answer your research question and phenomenon studied based on “the questions being asked, the data being gathered, the analysis in progress, and the resources you have to support the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 101). One approach to this is to horizontalize participant statements and derive knowledge to generate invariant constituents, also known as themes (Moustakas, 1994). During my interviews, participants answered many of the questions similarly. I began to notice similarities during the third interview which continued until the last interview. Two key indicators led me to confirm that I reached the process of generating themes with the first 10 interviews. First, I listened to participant interviews in person and then the audio recordings. I determined that participants had similar responses to my interview questions, and new information was no longer presented by the last interview. Second, my researcher journal confirmed this as well; it was most evident by

how participants described their relationship with their parents, especially in regard to them being a support and offering guidance.

The qualitative research study was informed by a phenomenological approach. Originally, I planned to use the approach outlined by Moustakas (1994) for data analysis. For Moustakas (1994), analysis is conducted by: 1) being aware of your assumptions related to the study, 2) horizontalizing every statement to give equal value, 3) creating theme clusters, 4) compiling textural (individual) descriptions of each participants' experience, 5) providing structural (composite) descriptions of the experiences, and 6) integrating those descriptions into textural-structural (group) synthesis. As I attempted to move into the fifth step, however, I realized that what was emerging was not a singular phenomenon, but rather set of themes that reflected a progressive sequence of identity development. While I was able to understand their experience, it became more situated in their experiences as individuals moving along a continuum of identity development and not a singular phenomenon to encapsulate an essence. I then began to examine the data from a broader qualitative approach to complete my study. This consisted of reexamining participant transcripts, listening to their audio recordings, and marking passages into categories to collapse into themes.

Bracketing/Epoche

As the researcher, I served as the instrument to understand the experiences of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. The underlying premise to use a phenomenological approach in my study was to center the participants' experiences and seek to, eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, belief, and prejudices of

normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41)

To reach this point, I had to acknowledge any presuppositions I had related to the phenomenon I wanted to study. Presuppositions included being aware of what I bring to this study as a higher education professional who directs the activities of a center that has frequent interaction with students and their parents. In phenomenological data analysis this is referred to as bracketing or epoche, in which the researcher remains open and fresh to participant voices in an attempt to put anything known aside “stay away from everyday habits of knowing things, people, and events” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). As I interviewed each participant, and listened to and reviewed their transcriptions, I would often have to repeat this process and be aware of my biases and what I bring to the research as both researcher and instrument. This was especially challenging because I had to continually be self-aware of my verbal and non-verbal responses. This manifested most often when participants brought up topics they do not discuss with their parents. For example, during two interviews participants mentioned non-committed sexual relationships. I was not expecting this and had to regain my focus to proceed with the interview. Additionally, I knew some of the participants outside of this study. Moustakas (1994) describes this tension as not taking a position with whatever is described by the participants.

Transcript Review

For me, the first step to identify themes and produce findings was to review the transcripts for accuracy upon receiving them from the transcriptionist and transcription service. This part of reduction involved reviewing the transcripts repeatedly for different reasons. First, transcripts were reviewed upon receiving from the transcriptionist and transcription service. This occurred while listening in tandem to each individual audio recording. During this process,

I listened to the audio while reading the transcript for accuracy, to update and edit as needed, and to remove any direct identifiers (e.g., if the participant used their real name). All identifying elements were removed or given a pseudonym. During the first listen, I was aware of voice inflection and emotionality, and took additional notes to add to my notes from the initial in-person interview. The second review consisted of examining participant interviews to identify significant passages. The identification of significant statements served as a foundation for themes to emerge later in the data analysis process as outlined below.

Horizontalization

Horizontalization is a process utilized in phenomenological reduction. Specifically, this process gives each interview equal value “as we seek to disclose its nature and essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). Giving each interview equal value is important when data analysis commences. After the first review, I continued the reduction process as outlined above. First, I reviewed each individual interview to identify participant quotes that explained the phenomenon. During this process, I gave each passage equal value (Moustakas, 1994). See Table 3.2 for an illustration of the horizontalization process.

Table 3.2

Horizontalization of Experiencing a Supportive Parental Structure

Participant	Quote
Ashley	But my mom always was supportive of me, especially in school, so at different events she's like showing up in the middle of the day and it's like, wow mom, you're here.
Meredith	And she's very, she's always been very trusting of me, so I've never had to hide anything from her. So there's no secrets ever.
Mike	So that's what my parents did for me, is they gave me the ability sometimes just to be a kid, and to explore different things.
Panda	I thought this was just really descriptive of how my parents help us and try to be involved with our interests.

Invariant Constituents

To identify invariant constituents, which “point to the unique qualities of an experience, those stand that out” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 129) and understand the “what” of the phenomenon and experience, I had to engage in deleting information that did not address the phenomenon or answer the research question. This involved removing passages that were “irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97) to reveal what is most important. This process includes clustering “into common categories or themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118) by finding commonalities and differences among all participant interview transcripts. See Table 3.3 as an example of invariant constituents reduced into themes.

Table 3.3

Reduction from Invariant Constituents to Theme Clusters Example (Experiencing a supportive parental structure)

Invariant Constituents	Theme
Referenced experiencing support from their parent(s)	Experiencing a supportive parental structure
Referenced their parent(s) being there for them	Experiencing a supportive parental structure
Referenced parent(s) taking part in their child’s interests	Experiencing a supportive parental structure

Theme Clusters

Initially, horizontalization gives every passage equal value, but the reduction process allowed me to see what was significant, removing passages that were “irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97) to reveal what was most important. Subsequent reviews of invariant constituents, repetitive and overlapping statements, revealed ideas about parents being supportive, like cheerleaders, always being there for their child, independence, responsibility, and other statements moved closer to

emerging themes. Using my electronic list, I identified invariant constituents. This derived the following meaning units including 1) feeling supported/being there, 2) evolving relationships, 3) taking responsibility, 4) learning from my parents, 5) money matters, 6) independence, 7) exploration, 8) making decisions, 9) feeling optimistic, 10) technology, 11) privilege, 12) non-parent relationships, and 13) living arrangements. Once these were identified, I used the same electronic list to determine if these themes could be further collapsed.

After reviewing again, four final themes were created to describe the experience of identity exploration of emerging adults with involved parents. For example, all participants referenced how their parent or parent figure supported them in different contexts or situations. I reduced this into “encouraging a supportive parental structure.” Other categories that were reduced under this theme were feeling supported, exploration, independence, and feeling optimistic. Once all themes emerged and no more reduction could be done, a new chart with themes and supporting interview passages was created to describe the experience of identity exploration of emerging adults with involved parents. It was at this point that I realized that the experience could not be described in terms of the essence of a phenomenon, but instead was best represented as a set of experiences that occur in a sequence represented by themes.

Individual Participant Descriptions and Observations

Since it was clear that my results did not reflect a singular phenomenon but rather a sequence of experiences represented by themes, I decided that the best way to convey the findings was to provide individual descriptions first, followed by discussion of the themes that emerged from the analysis. Individual descriptions focused on describing the participants’ experience of identity development to share how they conceptualized their experiences. In this step, understanding the experience from each participant was central. For this step, I pulled out

quotes to construct participant descriptions. Information in this section included demographic information, artifact selection and its significance, how they described themselves, how they described their parent relationship, and subtle integrations of the themes further discussed in Chapter 4. The process of encapsulating the individual descriptions generated themes to describe the collective experience and answer the research question for the group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through first understanding the individual experience, I recognized similarities in their statements which later led me to develop themes to understand the experience from the group, or composite, perspective. It was important to understand the participants' relationships and experiences with their parents to generate the themes that answer the research question. Without understanding the context of those relationships and experiences, it would have been difficult for me as the researcher to understand and articulate the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. During this process, I made notes about how they described their thoughts and feelings related to the experience. This included when they felt supported, how it made them feel, and the frequency of these occurrences. This is integrated into the findings and strengthened by participant quotes in Chapter 4.

Theme Synthesis

Theme synthesis highlighted the collective experience for this group of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through the revised qualitative approach to construct themes, the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents is revealed. This revelation did not come easily, which I outline in more detail in the section below. Ultimately, as described above, I was not able to capture the singular essence of their experience because identity and development as separate and combined constructs are complex and suggest a transformation that occurs over a period of time and not at a moment in time as suggested by

phenomenological researchers (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The data analysis process revealed a what and a how but centered more on the progressive impact of participant relationships with their parents on identity development over time. The developmental and progressive nature of the themes better illuminate the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents as a series of phenomena, as opposed to a singular phenomenon at a given moment of time.

Tension in Qualitative Research

Charmaz (2007) highlighted the tensions in qualitative research. She described these tensions as methodological and explained by stating, “In speaking about methodological tensions, I mean ambiguous or contested perspectives and practices that result in conflict about standards for qualitative research” (Charmaz, 2007, p. 77). The tensions center on data gathering strategies, the place of extant theory, the analytic level of study, and the writing process (Charmaz, 2007). I believe these same tensions translated to my research study. I encountered tensions between my qualitative approach, phenomenological framework, research design, data analysis, and articulation of a single phenomenon. Specifically, phenomenology is centered around the lived experience of a phenomenon during a moment in time (Moustakas, 1994). Through the data analysis process, several phenomena emerged progressively and sequentially which made it difficult to articulate a single essence for the research study. How does a novice researcher approach this type of tension in qualitative research? For me, I had to assess my synthesis of the themes. I could not describe a singular phenomenon, but found that I had several phenomena to address.

While my study was informed by phenomenology, it was more of a qualitative study due to the nature of my research topic and question of the identity development of emerging adults

with involved parents. In a true phenomenological study, I would have looked at the essence of the experience, and then once I understood the experience, I could have then looked to see if there was applicable theory or literature, such as Arnett's model of emerging adulthood. In this study, my research question focused on the nature of their experience; this is closer to phenomenology than other qualitative methodologies. However, the data analysis and findings were not in full alignment with how a researcher conducts phenomenological research. Additionally, in retrospect I realized that identity and development are complex constructs that are not best characterized as a singular phenomenon during a moment of time. Identity development implies movement, growth, and progression. As I concluded my data analysis, I realized the difficulty in encapsulating a singular essence because several phenomena emerged from the process, which is not surprising because I was interested in the process of identity development. To note one essence when several emerged would not provide a holistic understanding of how participants understood the experience for them. The essence of their experience comes through the outlined themes which are progressive, just as identity development is meant to be progressive. After data analysis and difficulty articulating the essence, I realized the phenomenological approach I took was not the best fit for my research study. Instead of articulating the textural and structural descriptions as outlined by Moustakas to identify the essence of their experience, I had to synthesize their experiences through the progression of the phenomena that emerged. Moustakas (1994) recognized the importance of participant voices to reflect what is taking place for them, and in this study, those voices provided grounding to the themes and the understanding of their ongoing lived experience.

My study was qualitative in nature, but required some unexpected reassessment to represent the developmental progression reflected in the findings, which did not align with how I

originally proposed to conduct the study. During the revaluation process to complete my study, I had to determine the best way to convey my themes and findings that would allow me to frame my study in a way that was true to the participant experiences and that has meaning for the reader. I wanted to remain honest about what I found and also be true to the impact and influence of Arnett throughout the study, including in the interview question development and use of his model as a conceptual framework. Reassessment of my original research design allowed me to transition from a phenomenological approach to using a broader qualitative approach to examine my data and report my finding, including both their individual experiences and the generated themes.

Chapter Summary

My approach to the design of this study was rooted in the research question and situated from a qualitative approach informed by phenomenology. This study took place at a large four-year, public research university in the southeastern United States. I recruited participants through a multi-tiered process that yielded 58 interested students and 10 completed interviews. Through participating in semi-structured interviews and sharing a personal artifact, participants had the opportunity to share their perception of their experiences. The data collection methods used in combination with credibility strategies helped to increase the trustworthiness of this study. Data analysis was started using Moustakas' phenomenological model of reduction (1994), but transitioned to an interpretivist qualitative approach to guide theme development and report findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The next chapter presents the results of the analysis and the research findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. Question development for my interview guide arose from an interest in learning more about this experience. Specifically, it came about during my current position as the director of a center that has frequent communication and interactions with the parents of emerging adults. In my role, I have the opportunity to develop relationships not only with students, but sometimes with their parents. My curiosity led me to want to know how these parent-child relationships play a role in the identity development of emerging adults in college.

A review of the literature revealed that limited studies have used emerging adulthood as a conceptual framework for examining the identity development of college students and the role of their parents. The few that exist have often been done with quantitative methodology (e.g., Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Lindell, Campione-Barr, & Killoren, 2017; Michalek, 2016; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Reynolds, Gonzales-Backen, Allen, Hurley, Donovan, Schwartz, Hudson, Agocha, & Williams, 2017). Utilizing a broader qualitative framework informed by phenomenology allowed me to “determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). The basis of my study was grounded in the research question: *What is the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents?* Data analysis was started using Moustakas’ phenomenological model of reduction (Moustakas, 1994), but as I progressed

through my data analysis, I realized that a phenomenological design was no longer an appropriate methodology to complete my study. This chapter represents the broader qualitative approach taken to understand the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. The sections that follow elucidate participant experiences around the research study to create an understanding of participants' experiences through the themes generated from the data. The themes that answer the research question are *experiencing a supportive parental structure*, *gaining independence*, *becoming equals*, and *envisioning adulthood*. The participant introduction and theme sections provide an understanding of their experiences. Together, these sections clarified the experience of identity development of emerging adults with involved parents into individual and thematic experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participant Overview

Ten undergraduate students participated in my study. Each participant met the criteria by being an undergraduate student, enrolled full-time, who was between the ages of 18-22 years old, and who communicated with a parent or parent figure at least once a week by phone, email, text, video chatting, or another communication tool. Participants also lived with that parent or parent figure during high school. All participants had a genuine interest in discussing my study topic. I recruited participants utilizing a multi-tiered process that yielded interest from over 50 students. Students were recruited through their academic division or via a post shared on my Facebook page. Students were asked to select an interview time. Upon selecting a time, participants received an email confirming their participation with specifics on where to meet. Prior to each interview, participants reviewed the informed consent letter which included giving me permission to audio-record their interview. Participants selected a pseudonym that I could use

during the interview and subsequent interview transcription. The next section provides a description of each participant.

Participant Descriptions

The following tables provide a demographic overview of my 10 participants. Table 4.1 includes general participant demographic information such as their major, age, and gender. Table 4.2 includes parent or parent figure information; parents' educational background, occupational information, and salary, if known, were included. Parent figure identification was determined by each participant. All parent figures listed were a biological parent to their child to my knowledge. In some instances, only one parent figure was listed based on the participant's relationship to the second parent figure. In other instances, two parent figures were listed, but they were not always married. A few discussed stepparents or other parent figures in passing but did not provide additional information to include. Table 4.3 includes additional participant information that is relevant to understanding the participants' experience. This included information related to how they pay for school, how they describe their socioeconomic status, if they work and how many hours, and if they were the first in their family to attend college. Participants had a strong interest in my research topic and represented a variety of majors, ages, and income levels. Collectively, participants represented five academic divisions at the research site and ranged in age from 18 to 22. Two participants identified as male, two participants were out-of-state residents, and two participants identified as Jewish. Additionally, one participant identified as Black with Jamaican lineage and another with a Turkish lineage. Two students were in their first year of college, two students were in their second year, four students were in their third year, and two students were in their fourth, and final, year. Seven of the ten participants worked, with one participant working more than twenty hours per work. All students

had some type of scholarship, with half having some type of student loan. Overall, the participants tended to reflect the demographic make-up of the research site for gender and residency, but the group was more ethnically and racially diverse than the overall student population.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Major	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	In-State
Ashley	Human Development and Family Science	22	Black	Female	Yes
Bianca	Animal Science	20	White	Female	Yes
Christina	Public Relations	18	White/Turkish	Female	Yes
Kayla	Biology	19	Black/Jamaican	Female	Yes
Mary	Biological Sciences	19	White	Female	Yes
Meredith	Biological Sciences	18	White/Jewish	Female	No
Mike	Human Development and Family Science	21	White/Jewish	Male	No
Panda	World Language Education/French	20	White	Female	Yes
Savannah	Animal Health/Biological Sciences	20	White	Female	Yes
Tyler	Biological Sciences	20	White	Male	Yes

Table 4.2

Parent Education (highest earned) and Occupation Information

Participant	Parent Figure # 1	Parent Figure # 2
Ashley	Professional Degree Financial Litigation Specialist \$65,000	N/A N/A N/A
Bianca	Bachelor's Degree Software Consultant/Contractor NA	Bachelor's Degree Nurse N/A
Christina	Graduate Degree Chemical Engineer \$200,000	Bachelor's Degree Regional Vice-President of Sales (Insurance) \$100,000
Kayla	Some college Certified Nursing Assistant \$32,000	High School N/A N/A
Mary	Graduate Degree Teacher \$36,000	Bachelor's Degree Accountant, Chef, Soccer Referee/Assignor \$32,000
Meredith	Professional Degree Facial Plastic Surgeon \$100,000	Professional Degree Insurance Fraud Attorney N/A
Mike	Bachelor's Degree Financial Advisor \$250,000	Graduate Degree Mother N/A
Panda	Bachelor's Degree Teacher N/A	Bachelor's Degree IT & Web-builder N/A
Savannah	Some college Calibrations \$60,000	Some college International Buyer \$60,000
Tyler	Graduate School Travel Nurse N/A	N/A N/A N/A

Table 4.3

Additional Participant Information

Participant	SES Description	First Generation	Currently working	Hours per week	Loans	Scholarships
Ashley	Middle	No	Yes	11-20hrs	Yes	Yes
Bianca	Middle	No	Yes	11-20hrs	No	Yes
Christina	Middle	No	Yes	<10hrs	No	Yes
Kayla	Middle	Yes	Yes	11-20hrs	Yes	Yes
Mary	Lower	No	Yes	10hrs	Yes	Yes
Meredith	Higher	No	No	N/A	No	Yes
Mike	Higher	No	Yes	11-20hrs	No	Yes
Panda	Lower	No	Yes	21+hrs	Yes	Yes
Savannah	Middle	No	No	N/A	No	Yes
Tyler	Middle	No	No	N/A	Yes	Yes

Below, I will provide richer descriptions of each participant before weaving their stories together to answer my research questions and present the findings of my research study.

Understanding participants individually provides credence to this study as their group narrative emerges in the themes and findings, which answer the research question and address the phenomenon identified in Chapter 3. Additionally, this section is meant to both introduce the participants and briefly introduce the themes to make connections back to those experiencing the phenomenon.

Participant Introductions

Ashley. Ashley is a 22-year-old Black female in-state resident majoring in Human Development and Family Science. She is in her fourth and final year of college. She describes herself as resilient and determined, with family being important to her. She is most proud of her identity as a Black woman who is capable of being a leader but can follow others when needed. She aspires to reach people through her story of being resilient to life struggles and to work in Washington, DC. The artifacts she brought were three pictures that included various family

members but always included her mom. Ashley described her relationship with her mom as very close. Looking at a photo of only her and her mom, Ashley reflected,

And like I said, from the first photo, it's like we are really close, we talk about things that I would think I guess other people don't talk to their moms about. Like I feel like I can talk to my mom literally about anything and she won't necessarily judge me but she will give me advice for what's in my best interest and from her experiences.

Ashley appreciates her mom's involvement in her life, which has been an important foundation for their relationship since childhood. She communicates with her mom frequently throughout each day, often starting with a morning inspiration text. Ashley's relationship with her dad has evolved over time. Before the age of 12, he was involved, but that changed when he took a job away from her childhood home and eventually divorced her mom near the end of Ashley's high school career. This strained Ashley's relationship with her father and the relationship remains complicated today. Ashley would like to have a more engaged relationship with her dad but lacks respect for some of his choices that impacted her directly.

Ashley's connection to the themes and subsequent findings is most rooted in becoming equals and envisioning adulthood. Ashley considers her mom as a friend and her mom considers her one as well. Their relationship has had ups and down and they look to each other for support. While Ashley has a lot of respect for her mom, she envisions her own adulthood differently from her mom as it relates to relationships and certain characteristics she looks for when meeting and getting to know new people.

Bianca. Bianca is a 20-year-old White female in-state resident majoring in Animal Science. She is in her third year of college. She describes herself as driven and hard-working,

someone who values learning and good relationships. Bianca wants people to see her as a scientist, a learner, and friend. For her, these identities indicate she is becoming an adult. She aspires to earn a PhD and become a researcher because of her love of learning new things. Her artifact is a book given to her by her mom when she was in middle school. The connection between the book and their relationship is the love they both share for books and reading.

Bianca shared,

So a large part of it is the connection I have with my mom with books and talking about that, and then also about trying to find something that I love doing and that creates something good and contributes something.

Bianca communicates with her father often. She believes he makes her consider alternative perspectives. Specifically, she recounts their talks involving politics and the ways he encouraged and taught her to be open to different viewpoints. When talking about this, she stated,

And so I think my dad helped with that a lot, and I'd have discussions and debates with my dad, and he'd help me to see both sides. He'd play the devil's advocate and he'd kind of teach me to play the devil's advocate too, just so I can get a good, well rounded view.

She communicates with her parents regularly to update them on the exciting concepts she is learning in class and in her part-time research lab position. During one segment of her interview, Bianca revealed that she has an eating disorder, which was most prominent during middle and high school. While her parents did not understand the reason for her eating disorder, they were very supportive, as she described it, and did their very best to help her manage during the most difficult times. Her parents' level of involvement has waned as she's progressed through college, but "it works" based on where she is in her college life.

Bianca's connection to the themes and subsequent findings focuses on gaining independence and envisioning adulthood. As a third year student, Bianca realizes that she controls what happens in her life. That includes finding jobs to pay for school and non-school related needs that help support her post-graduate goals of being accepted into a doctoral program. Because she has a considerable amount of independence, she spends time envisioning her adulthood. She considers what it takes to get there and how she plans to achieve her dreams and aspirations.

Christina. Christina is an 18-year-old White female in-state resident majoring in Public Relations. She is in her first year of college. She immediately describes herself as being from Turkey, where her father was born and raised and where she lived as an infant and continues to visit often in the summer. However, she then also tells me that she does not think about being Turkish since, after her parents divorced when she was in third grade, she was raised primarily in the United States by her mother, who is American. She goes on to describe herself as "super outgoing" as well as someone who likes to encourage others and offer advice. Her most important identity is the one she has as a result of her belief in Jesus Christ, but she realizes being a Christian cannot be the only way she identifies herself because "that's only a part of my life and it all works together." She currently has two career aspirations: being a missionary or doing public relations in New York City. A cross necklace given to her by her mom serves as the artifact Christina presents for the interview. The necklace signifies both her relationship to Jesus Christ and her mom. She rarely takes off the necklace because it makes her feel like her mom is always with her. When things are not going as planned for Christina, her mom "always points me back to remember Jesus is for you, don't give up on that."

The relationship Christina has with her dad has nuances of cultural misunderstanding impacted by her parents' divorce when she was in the third grade. Christina's upbringing has been mainly Christ-centered and in the United States, primarily being raised by her mom. Because of their cultural differences, Christina's dad does not always understand teenage or college student behavior in the United States. She further describes their relationship as "kind of like – this sounds so bad, but sometimes like just awkward." She goes on to state she wishes she had a relationship with her dad like some of her friends have with theirs, spending time together shopping, going out to eat, or attending events. Christina communicates with both parents on a daily basis through phone and text, but more so with her mom. She and her mom also communicate through Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook. According to Christina, she likes the level of involvement she receives from each parent which challenges her to become independent, but also offers her support when needed. As a first-year student, Christina is no longer at home and has to make decisions for herself such as where to live and how to prioritize her time.

Christina's tie to the themes and findings is with gaining independence and envisioning adulthood. Her connection to the envisioning comes from her experience with her parents' divorce at a young age. Additionally, her parents are open with her regarding their reason for divorcing. Like Ashley, this caused Christina to reflect on what she wants in a husband. Specifically, she mentioned that it is important to her that her husband identify as a Christian. She retold a story of why her mom wanted to move back to the United States when Christina was an infant. In telling this story, Christina mentioned that her mom did not want her to be brought up in a non-Christian country or religion. This signified how important a Christian upbringing was to Christina's moment and how important it has become for Christina.

And then there was a big earthquake over there which is why – I think it was the final straw for why we moved back. I was five months old, I say we, yeah, I was a baby. But we lived in our car for three days under a tree and my mom was like, okay, we've got to go back because she didn't want me to be brought up there because she wanted me to grow up in a Christian home, she wanted to take me to church and there's not that there. Like I couldn't even have the word Christ in my name, that's why I picked that. I couldn't even have the word Christ in my name because his family didn't want that in my name and my mom's like, this is crazy. See in my opinion it's like you should have talked about all of that before you got married and that's why I've learned, now I know the kind of husband I want. I got – I have to find a Christian man so we can bring our kids up the same way because obviously it's affected me, that's how – that totally shapes your kids.

Kayla. Kayla is a 19-year-old Black female of Jamaican descent in-state resident majoring in Biology. She is in her second year of college. She describes herself as friendly, caring, hard-working, determined, intelligent, and ambitious. Being Black and having Jamaican heritage are important parts of her identity in college. As we discussed identity, Kayla shared,

I was born in Jamaica, so now since I'm surrounded by more culture in college, there's like the African Student Association, or union. I think it's union. They've opened up my eyes a little bit to my own culture, because I see them proud to be African. It's opened up my eyes to appreciate where I come from a little bit more. I've definitely stuck to that identity, like that part of myself a little bit more. More in tune with what's going on. I think that's helped.

Another part of her identity she believed may impact her as she becomes older is being female. Kayla shared, “In certain situations men are appraised more for certain things, so I do think that might affect me maybe in the future a little bit more.” Kayla really wants to become a doctor and so makes her academics and studying a priority to reach this goal. Kayla’s artifact was a necklace with two turtle-shaped turquoise charms. It was an unexpected gift from her mom. In describing how she received it and its importance to her, Kayla explained,

She just buys, anything that she sees she just thinks of her kids first, and she just buys it. Yeah, so that's kind of why it's important to me, and I really like it. It's just like she thought of me. None of my other siblings got anything that day. She just was like, "It's for you."

When Kayla describes the relationship between her and her mom, you can sense the respect she has for her mom’s willingness to do whatever is needed. Kayla articulates this further,

Well, she's definitely like the rock in our family. She's definitely like the strong person if everybody's sad, she's the one that will try to like cheer you up. ...She's definitely given me a lot of love. ...She's hard-working, which is like how I try to be. Like when I see strength, I just see my mom. She's who I'm trying to be as strong as. ...to give us everything that she's never had, to make sure that we have a future no matter what we want to do. She will support us through anything. If we want to be anything in the world, it doesn't matter. She's there to support us, to drive us around. Yeah, so she's definitely a huge support in my life.

Her mom maintains a high degree of involvement in Kayla’s life. For example, Kayla does not have a car so her mom will come to campus to take her to the grocery store or make multiple trips between home and campus to have Kayla’s laptop repaired. Kayla does not provide much

on her father as a parent figure. Her mom serves as the primary parent figure in her life and they communicate a few times a week on the phone. Experiencing a supportive parental structure and gaining independence are the most prominent themes for Kayla. As a third-year, Kayla is still reliant on her mother for many things, but having a supportive structure allows her to gain independence especially when she does not have to ask her mom for money or can make her own decisions.

Mary. Mary is a 19-year-old White female in-state resident majoring in Biological Science. She is in her second year of college. She describes herself as someone who is eager to learn, is looking to be involved in opportunities that help with her career, loves to worship, and enjoys working out. Mary is committed to her academics and understands this commitment will serve as a foundation to future success. She also really values her parents because of their investment in her from a young age, particularly when she was born with, as she describes it, “a brain deformity.” Mary brought two artifacts to the interview. The first artifact was her backpack because school is really important to her. Affixed to her backpack was her second artifact which was her Rock Eagle counselor patch which has been the highlight of her collegiate 4-H experience and inspired a potential career path as a pediatric oncologist. The inspiration came from working with a young person who spent time in a children’s hospital. The identities most salient to her are being seen as a positive person who lives by the SPLAT (super positive living all the time) model and serves as a leader for others. She reluctantly ascribes to her religious identity as a Christian. She’s sensitive about this part of her identity, saying,

Like of course I'm a Christian, of course I love worship. I'm also, I don't want to say typical Christian, but I'm not like you're not a Christian I can't hang out with you....So of course I'm a Christian, but I don't think I would, I don't want to say

advertise it, but I mean it's very clear that I'm a Christian because I love people that much, but I don't want people to be, oh she's a Christian I can't hang out with her.

Mary's relationship with her parents has gotten stronger since moving away to college. They have always been supportive, but Mary was often wrapped up in her life and stayed busy because of activities she felt she needed to complete in order to be admitted to college, such as participating in athletics, serving as a leader in student organizations, and studying to make good grades. There was some tension because of that, but it has lessened in recent years. She explained, "And we've gotten a lot closer because they've realized that oh my God, she was right. She needed to do all of these things to prepare her." Mary communicates with her mom daily and her dad less frequently. Recently, her parents have become more involved in her life, because as their oldest child, they want her two younger siblings to see what is possible in their own lives.

According to Mary, she was an adult before entering college. Becoming equals and envisioning adulthood are the prevalent themes as she reflected on her experience. The presence of the parent-child dynamic in her life is diminishing and a new relationship with her parents is evolving.

Meredith. Meredith is an 18-year-old White female with a Jewish background. She is an out of state student majoring in Biological Science. Meredith is in her first year of college. At first, she described herself within the context of her family where she is the youngest of three with divorced parents. She doesn't want to be seen as having a privileged mentality although she is from an upper middle-class family. Meredith is a learner who loves horses. Important to her are family, animals, close friendships, and being Jewish culturally more than

religiously. Meredith dreams of working for a large wildlife animal refuge, having a family, and living closer to her family. “Nevertheless she persisted” adorns the t-shirt she brought in for her artifact. It also includes a picture of Rosie the Riveter. It was given to her by her mom and signifies how her mom “has always instilled the value of being a strong woman on my own.” Meredith enjoys the relationship she has with both parents including their level of involvement, which means their knowing what is going on in her life. Meredith and her parents are aware of their changing roles but are working to maintain a strong relationship. To do so, Meredith talks to her mom daily through FaceTime, phone calls, or texts. Meredith talks to with her dad a few times a week and tries to FaceTime him at least once a week.

Meredith, a first-year student, is focused on gaining more independence in life. She is an out of state student who is learning about herself separate from her parents and siblings. As a result of being further away, Meredith is making more decisions on her own which changes the relationship with her parents to be more like friends and equals.

Mike. Mike is a 21-year-old White male with a Jewish background from out of state. He is majoring in Human Development and Family Science. He is in his fourth and final year of college. Mike describes himself in relation to his background. His parents stressed being kind and caring, which are important values that he carries in his daily life. He is also confident and considers himself a friend to others. Friends and family are important to him. The way he interacts with both friends and family is about mutual respect for others’ interests and beliefs. The next step for Mike is to obtain a Master of Social Work degree and have a family while continuing to develop himself as a professional and person. A keychain with Thor’s hammer is what Mike selects as his artifact. As a child, he played sports and was often one of the smaller kids. To encourage him to “play tough” and not be intimidated by his size or others, his mom

started calling him Thor. She eventually bought him a keychain as a reminder to be mentally tough whatever the obstacle.

Mike continues to maintain a close relationship with his parents although he is several hundred miles away from them. He communicates with his parents at least once per day. As an emerging adult, he now understands decisions they made for his benefit. He further explains,

And so our relationship was always very close. They always knew what was going on. When I was younger, my friends used to tease me a little bit, because they felt like I would always tell my parents everything. Which was mostly true; they were a very big part of my life. And looking back on it, I definitely didn't always appreciate it. I didn't want them to be, sometimes, how I would view controlling. But now I realize that it was always for the best, and you don't necessarily realize how young you were until you're older, and now I do. So I'm very appreciative of the decisions they made for me.

As Mike prepares to graduate from college, becoming equals with his parents and envisioning adulthood were at the forefront during our interview. When he was younger, Mike was not observant about the experiences of his parents and sister. As he matured, he became more aware of what it means to be an adult and is more conscious of life's realities as an adult. Because of this, he is able to serve in an emotionally supportive role in his family as a son and brother to his parents and sister. His increased awareness of adulthood caused him to reflect on what adulthood means to him and what he wants for his life.

Panda. Panda is a 20-year-old White female in-state resident. She is in her third year of college majoring in World Language Education and French. In describing herself, Panda said she thinks of herself as “stupidly funny.” She is extremely close with her slightly older sister and

believes her identity is tied to her sister due to shared understanding of each other. The identities she said she thinks about the most are being female, heterosexual, White, and a language nerd. During our conversation she added that being White was normal, but that her parents “have always given me a respect for the privileges that I've been given in my life.” These identities were all shaped by her parents. After graduation, Panda plans to become a high school French teacher and later use her language skills to work for the government. A Popin Cookin Bento Japanese candy kit given to her by her parents a few months ago is the artifact selected by Panda that she brought back to school with her. It represents her parents’ attentiveness to her interests as a child. She states, “I thought this was just really descriptive of how my parents help us and try to be involved with our interests. It was just a really nice sentiment, so I kept this one. I took it home.”

Overall, Panda has a good relationship with her parents, but described the relationship between her and her mom as a little strained at times because her mom can be a little critical. Her parents are actively involved in her life and often offer quick advice via text message or video chat when needed. She talks to her parents once per week together on the phone.

Panda, like Kayla, is very much appreciative of her parents attending to her interests. Through her interview, she described how important experiencing a supportive parental structure was to her success. Her parents continue to take notice of her interests and likes even when they do not agree with them. This leads Panda to gain confidence in her decisions and motivation to support herself as she becomes less a child to her parents and more equal to them soon.

Savannah. Savannah is a 20-year-old White female in-state resident. She is a third year student with majors in in Animal Health and Biological Science. Savannah described herself as outgoing, open, and easily stressed and said that she loves animals, shoes, and

shopping. She also likes chemistry and biology. Savannah values her academics, family, religion, and animals. The identity most salient to Savannah is her religious identity. She grew up going to church with her parents and has found ways to incorporate religion and associated activities into her busy college life. Her parents made this a central part of her life from an early age. During our interview, Savannah explains its importance in her life,

I just always grew up with the church. Even when I was younger, my parents, they would always like, read the bible at night. They've always got me prayer books, especially when I am stressed out. They're always like, okay, just pray about it. Let God take care of it. He has a plan for you. Of course, always follow your dreams. If you really want to do something, then keep trying. My parents have always referred back to God.

After college, she would like to work with small animals as a veterinarian; she wants to be successful and not have “financial problems.” Her artifact is the text messages shared between her and her parents. They have their own private group that doesn’t include her siblings. She enjoys being connected to her parents who she says, “sometimes ... consider me the favorite child.” Savannah calls her parents as she walks to class most days. They also share funny videos via Facebook. The relationship she has with her parents is “super close.” She shares more with her mom than her dad to maintain a “daddy’s little girl” image. Her parents continue to be involved and often come to town to support her during various events.

Savannah is taking the time to learn about herself and what she wants in life. She is beginning to gain independence and make decisions that will increase her overall well-being. Being aware of her well-being is possible because of her parents and the supportive structure they provide for her to be the best Savannah she can be.

Tyler. Tyler is a 20-year old White male in-state resident. He is majoring in Biological Science and in his third year of college. Tyler describes himself as an athletic, social person, who procrastinates, is forgetful, goes with the flow, and rarely makes plans. He really values his education, “‘cause I feel at this point in our society that equates to success at some level, whether it's money or whether it's what job you have.” Tyler’s social circle is really important to him as well. He believes a good social circle undergirds a good life. Family is extremely important to Tyler. His mom is his biggest supporter. Tyler also appreciates his relationships with his older siblings now that he is in college. Tyler admitted that he does not consider identities very often, but the one that means the most to him is his identity as a student. He enjoys people asking what he is doing and feels a sense of pride when saying he’s a student at his institution because some people did not think he would get into a place like this university. Tyler has had the same career path interest since high school. He wants to become a dentist and has a pretty clear path on next steps post-graduation.

Tyler showed me a picture of him and his mom at football game. This picture holds a tremendous amount of value to him because of his mom’s role in his life and how she tried to serve as both mother and father to him; he describes this by stating,

Yeah. It has meaning to me, specifically because I never had a father figure, so she kind of steps into that role and I feel that's one of the ways she's always tried. Like when I was little, we got season tickets to whatever team was around us wherever we lived and she just always tried to get athletics into my life and get father figures that way and just all of that.

Tyler describes their relationship as honest with an abundance of communication throughout the day, usually initiated by his mom. His mom is very involved in his life, ranging from making

sure he is okay to creating monthly schedules for him so he does not miss anything. Tyler appreciates all that his mom has done and continues to do but knows her level of involvement will eventually decline. Tyler's mom provides supportive parental structure. Some might view his mom's involvement as hovering, but Tyler enjoys his mom's involvement. While his mom provides support, Tyler is firmly in control of his future as he considers what adulthood looks like to him and the best pathway to achieve his dream.

Each participant had their individual story to tell about their experience of identity development with involved parents. Their cohesive experience, articulated in the section below, makes the tangible connection to the research question illustrated through participants' voices.

Themes

During the data analysis phase, four overarching themes emerged, all centered on the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. Themes were derived from synthesizing the data utilizing Moustakas' phenomenological model of reduction. The first theme, experiencing a supportive parental structure, centered on how parents provided a positive framework that encouraged emerging adults to understand who they are as they navigated their identity development process. When participants experienced a supportive parental structure, students gained independence, the second theme, to clarify who they are and what they want out of life. As independence increased, a shift occurred during which the parent and child transitioned to becoming equals, the third theme. Once students see themselves as more equal to their parent figure, they began a process of envisioning adulthood, the fourth theme. Together, these themes illustrate that a student's relationship with their parents can create a context for facilitating their identity development during college. Each theme description below uses relevant participant quotes to support the findings.

Experiencing a Supportive Parental Structure

Each participant repeatedly mentioned the support they received from their parent. This came through in multiple ways, such as their parent being involved in their college life in various ways, offering advice and guidance, and communicating frequently. Experiencing a supportive parental structure undergirded the student's identity development as they navigated life in college. During the reduction process, I noted how often participants referenced how their parents supported them. Statements that referenced parental support, parents being there for their child, parents observing their child's interests, and other similar comments were further reduced into the first theme of experiencing a supportive parental structure. This included being attentive to their children's interests, which demonstrated that what their child was interested in mattered to the parent. Interviewees reported that parents also provided support by allowing their children to think through and come to conclusions about different decisions such as roommate issues, where to live, or what to select as a major. In particular, allowing their children to think through and come to conclusions about different decisions affected participant identity development by participants' knowing that their parents would always be there as a source of support during life transitions especially during college. This provided students with a sense of stability to determine who they want to be in college.

For Savannah, her mom's involvement manifested in the way her parents continue to support her in college by attending her co-curricular events. Christina articulated a similar sentiment when sharing that she and her mom attended three concerts together during her first semester. Christina also appreciated that her mom listened and could offer different suggestions to her, especially as a first-year student starting to take major related classes. The level of parental involvement Meredith described centered on her preparation to try out for the equestrian

team. She remarked, “They’re both very involved. They both know everything about what's going on, and what might be going on. One example is with like the riding team, my mom helped me get training all summer, even though I didn't make the team, I was still training a lot before.” Experiencing supportive parental structure is evident in other ways as elaborated on by participants. Mike appreciated that his parents “ask all the right questions” even though they are 800 miles away.

Ashley expressed how her mom comes to visit her and will also attend events for Ashley’s friends, such as weddings or baby showers, when Ashley is unavailable to attend. For Kayla, her mom’s guidance is important. As a younger student, she has not had the opportunity to make many decisions and relies on her mom for advice. She acknowledges this by answering,

I still rely on her. Like if I don't really know something, like a loan situation, like I'll rely on her to kind of guide me in the right direction. The biggest thing I guess is like financial wise, I'm not an adult, and I still like ... Like, "Mommy," if I ever need anything.

While she has had experience being away from home a little longer and having more independence in decision-making, Panda still seeks advice from her parents. During our conversation, she offered that “my mom is usually the one to jump up and give me advice on that, and it's usually great advice.” Tyler presented his mom as very involved in his daily life. During his interview he mentioned how his mom creates lists for him and has access to his grades. He stated,

She has my ELC password. She definitely looks at all my grades. Makes sure I'm on track, but she doesn't text me like, "Hey do this, do this, do this" for the most part. She definitely sends me a list once a week of things I need to get done and

she sends me a calendar for the month of all my hockey games and practice and socials and tests and anything I have to do, it's on the schedule. And if it's not on the schedule, I probably will not get to it. So that's definitely the role she plays, is making sure that I'm where I need to be.

During the interview, Tyler discussed times when he took the lead or made decisions, but overall he is comfortable with his mom's level of involvement in his life. Tyler appears to be happy with his mom's style of involvement, but it may not be the best thing for him in terms of how her navigates his own identity development. His mom's level involvement in comparison to other participants' parents may lengthen the progressive nature of identity development as outlined by this study's themes.

While not all students are at a point of knowing who they are, identifying what they want out of life, or making independent decisions, many of their parents are providing the structure for them to be able to do so later on in life. These examples build on the importance of experiencing a supportive parental structure. For participants in this study, experiencing a supportive parental structure provided a secure foundation for identity development as they navigate through emerging adulthood and into adulthood. For most participants, the structure changed from first year to fourth year. Kayla, a second-year student, needs her mom more for various reasons compared to Mike, in his final year of college, who is comfortable making life decisions as he prepares to select a school to attend for graduate work. Overall, each student appreciated their parents' involvement, advice giving, and communication.

Gaining Independence

As participants described support from their parents, the second theme, gaining independence, emerged. During interviews, participants referenced how their parents allowed them to take responsibility for their own decisions. In addition, several participants mentioned how their parents discussed money matters such as how to financially supplement their education or pay for non-academic expenses. During the data analysis process, these statements were further collapsed into the second theme. Mike described how he gained independence in the context of exploring. He explained,

but really, I've gotten to an age where I'm not on my own; I still have them, but they're letting me explore and do my thing, and then they're always there to help and support me, which has been a really good dynamic; it's allowed me to feel like I have the freedom I need in college to explore my own identity, and become my own person, become an individual.

Other participants also had experience with gaining independence. Ashley described how her mom understands that she can do some things on her own such as navigating a car in a high-traffic metropolitan area. Ashley said, “She understands like I can do it, I'm independent, I've shown her that I can handle it and manage.” Kayla demonstrates gaining independence because she realized that her mom's finances were strained with four children. She now has a job and can pay some of her bills. She is proud of this and declares during the interview, “then I feel like I'm actually doing something for myself. I don't have to rely on anybody else to do this.” Like Kayla, Bianca feels like she is gaining independence when she pays her own bills. Her parents agreed to pay for her first year and Bianca had to develop a plan to pay for the rest. She has managed to

purchase her own vehicle, pay for her meal plan, and pay for her apartment as well as any other necessities she needs. Ashley echoed the theme of gaining independence through being able to afford to move off-campus during her last year of school. This was not feasible during her first three years of school. As she gained independence, she found “opportunities to work on campus in different capacities as well as picking up, like, a few other part-time jobs. So being able to work and kind of pay my way.” Panda also is gaining independence through her finances. Panda shared emphatically,

I've always paid my own rent. I've always had a job since about senior year of high school, and I've barely had a week off since, earning my own money and paying my own rent even as a freshman who worked 25 hours a week. It's made me feel really confident in myself. Also, not being on a meal plan, making my own food made me really confident in myself.

For others, gaining independence did not translate to a financial component, but was about making decisions about living arrangements, academics, careers, or mental health. A recent decision made by Mary was whether to drop an important class because she had not passed any exams. She reached out to her mom for advice, but realized the decision was ultimately hers to make. She decided to “stick to my guns - I've got this.” Like Mary, Tyler was involved in his own academic crossroads. For him, it was about continuing as a science major or changing to another major where students seemed to have more fun. He reached out to his mom who was supportive of him changing his current major to business major. As he contemplated his alternatives, Tyler realized that he did not want to start out in corporate America. Thinking long term helped him solidify staying in his academic major. Although her mom is a real estate agent, Christina took the lead with her friends in securing a place to live during the next

academic year. She listened when her mom gave advice about the lease, but remained adamant about choosing to live in a particular neighborhood. Similarly, Meredith's path to gaining independence was deciding who to live with during the upcoming academic year. She originally wanted to live with her current roommate, but decided to live with other friends. Her mom's suggestion was to provide her current roommate with another reason why she could not live with her next year. Meredith responded to my probing questions by stating,

I used to be dependent on my mom's ideas, and that was probably right if she told me. I took her advice, but it was more of what I thought was best. And she thought that I should kind of lie, well not lie, but kind of like give her another reason that wouldn't personally offend her. But I was like, I don't want to make something up if I'm going to feel bad saying that. If it's not even true.

Meredith decided to be honest with her current roommate. Savannah's way of gaining independence was related to her mental health. During the interview, she shared that her mom and older brother suffered from depression. She further explained that they sought treatment to get better. When she began to feel depressed after she ended a relationship, Savannah made the decision to go to the on campus health provider to talk to someone about her feelings. Her mom was supportive, but her mom did not understand why she needed to do this. Savannah recalled,

I'm glad I did, because honestly, I think everyone could kind of use it, especially when they're stressed out and stuff. I think it's very nice to have a perspective from someone that knows nothing about you, so they can't be biased in any way. I'm just really happy that I did that.

The students described in this section have been able to gain independence in various ways such as having a job, choosing where to live and who to live with, determining next steps in their career paths, and taking charge of their finances. Gaining independence separate from others allowed each participant to begin to develop a sense of who they are and the identities that are salient to them. Their increasing independence puts them on a path to feeling confident in who they are and the decisions they make. It also creates a path to becoming equals with their parents and other adults.

Becoming Equals

The becoming equals theme became apparent as I reviewed participant interviews during data analysis. I asked participants how they involved and integrated their parents into their lives and whether their parents viewed them as an adult. To probe deeper, I asked participants how they knew whether or not their parent viewed them as an adult. Statements that stood out for this theme included participants being a friend to their parent, the parent seeing them as a friend, and being treated as an equal by supervisors and adults. Additionally, several participants remarked that their parent-child dynamic has changed since high school.

When Mike reflected on this, he realized that he had become more equal with both his parents and older sister as he became older. As a child he was not always aware of what his parents and sister were going through. For example, he mentions that he can now be more supportive and helpful to them as a son and brother during difficult life situations. Becoming older and more aware has allowed him to “be more supportive and give more of a helping hand to my older sister and my parents.” Later he clarified this further by saying, “and when they talk to me, they talk to me as an equal. There's always that parent ... I don't get those parent/child lectures anymore. I just get more like, 'Let's talk this out.'” Ashely noted that following her

parents' divorce, and as she transitioned through college, that it was not "mom just being mom, mom was more like a friend." Christina is one the youngest participants, but she views her mom as a friend, and others notice it too. Christina stated, "a friend pointed out to me earlier is that my mom and I are like more – and I've always known this, we're more best friend than we are parent/child and it's because we've only ever had each other."

Being an equal is important to Bianca in all areas of life. This includes calling her supervisor by her first name or the evolving relationship she has with her friends. Specifically, Bianca shared, "so I definitely feel like I am evolving more towards having a friendship with my parents besides just feeling like I'm their kid." Kayla made a similar statement when talking about their changing relationship. Kayla shared,

I think since I'm maturing a bit more we can talk about things that maybe we couldn't when I was younger. It's definitely more less a little mom type situation, and more like a friend. She's become more to me, I would say.

Tyler, too, saw more of an equal relationship with his mom. For him, it was in the types of conversations he has with his mom. Most topics are not off limits when they talk.

Some students articulate a different relationship with their parents. Meredith wants to return to a parent—child relationship with her dad because he wanted her to become independent too early. Meredith said it has always been more of a friendship with her mother and she brought that relationship with her to college. When I asked Panda if there was still a parent/child structure or whether she feels like it is evolving into friendship or something more equal, she responded that she feels the equality more with her dad, but with her mom,

It's still like, "Have you not washed your shirt today? You need to go do your laundry now." Or "Can you set the tablecloth for me?" "Oh yeah, give me a

second." "No. I mean now." That kind of deal. She's still trying to assert her authority whenever she can. But she's still a good ear to talk to.

Savannah expressed a similar sentiment with both of her parents, but acknowledged their relationship may be evolving,

I wouldn't say that it's more friendship. Maybe like, because they're still, they still parent me more than like, friend me, ...we have become more friends and kind of talked more like friends and stuff since I've gotten older, but I would still say that they probably parent me more. I don't know. They give me so much advice, I don't know if it's more of like parent advice or friend advice.

Mary was the only participant to state that she has a primarily parent-child relationship with her parents. From her perspective, she exerts a certain amount of independence, but still relies on her parents for various types of support such as financial advice and assistance.

For six of the participants, becoming equals and developing a friendship with their parent exemplified a certain level of trust and understanding from their parent as they begin to get a strong sense of how they want to appear to others. For most participants, it is more about being seen as an equal and having a relationship that extends beyond their parent telling them what to do. For this in-between stage with one or both parents, elements of becoming equal are present, but not yet well defined or clearly articulated.

Envisioning Adulthood

Envisioning adulthood, the final theme, was most often reflected in the way participants described how they might want to do things differently from their parents. Through the reduction process, this emerged from ideas such as paying bills, being mature and independent, providing for someone else, and being resourceful. For this theme, participants shared what it

meant to be an adult by society's standards, but also what being an adult meant to them.

Additional questions centered on whether they felt like an adult and whether they were viewed as an adult by their parent.

Kayla described being an adult in terms of being independent and being able to find one's own resources if not financially stable. She emphatically stated that she does not consider herself an adult. She feels like an adult at times, but on a day to day basis she is not there yet. Kayla does not believe her mom views her as adult either. Kayla has observed her mom's life as challenging. She recognized that she, at times, has made her mom's life harder but is "trying to make it easier now that I'm older." In terms of relationships with significant others, Kayla expressed wanting a different outcome than her mom has and feels like she can make better choices. Her mother did not have a successful marriage which has made it more difficult for her mom as well. At the time of our interview, Kayla's mom was going back to school. Kayla was proud that her mom was continuing her education, but observing that motivates Kayla to persevere through her classes each semester to complete her degree sooner rather than later. She summarized by stating, "Yeah, definitely education and marriage wise, I feel like I could probably do a bit better in instances." For Kayla, this means completing her education on schedule and making a better decision about whom she marries.

Savannah, a third-year student, thought that being an adult by today's standards was more about an attitude and how one handles various situations through problem-solving. She believed that how she generally handles situations is like an adult. However, like Kayla, she did not consider herself to be an adult yet, but said, "I do feel like I am working towards it." The way that Savannah wants to be an adult differs from what she has seen in her parents. She described them as conservative, while she tends to be more liberal. She also wants to manage

money better than her mom because she feels her mom is too giving, even after both of her parents were laid off during the 2008 recession. She also noted that her parents have difficulty communicating with each other. For her, when she is ready to be in a committed relationship “communication is going to be the number one [priority].”

For Ashley, a fourth-year student, an adult today was someone who has a job, is on their own, and can provide for their own food, transportation, and housing. To her, an adult was someone who is “just really taking care of business and figuring out who you are and doing that, being that.” When asked about her own adulthood, she responded,

So I'm a little bit in the middle. I feel like I'm an adult because I'm living on my own, but I also have the support of my mom and some other family members. So in that sense it's like, no, I can't fully support myself yet, but I'm working towards it...

Ashley's relationship with her dad after he moved away made her more aware of what to look for in future friendships and relationships. As a college student she understands, to some degree, he was working to meet career goals when he left, but as a 12-year-old, it felt like a selfish act. Now, Ashley looks for people who exhibit characteristics such as compassion and being considerate of others. In return, she works intentionally to extend the same to others.

Tyler, a third-year student, related being an adult to financial resources and how one is able to take care of other people or pets in their life. When he reflected on what being an adult means to him, he related it to reaching a sense of maturity and making “the right choice” in certain situations, especially socially. Tyler did not consider himself an adult. When asked he replied,

I'm not an adult. I could act like an adult and I think I have an adult mindset, 'cause I think very rationally and I think most people would tell you I'm really mature. But I don't do my own stuff.

As Tyler gets closer to adulthood, like others, he wants to do things differently than his mom. In our interview, he mentioned that he does not want to work as much as his mom did when he was younger. He understood why she had to do this and admired her work ethic to provide for him, but as much as possible he wants to be present in every aspect of his future children's lives. He remarked, "I want to be at everything and I don't really want to have to pay for a babysitter for my kid, but she had to; she didn't have a husband or anything." He went on to discuss how he views marriage from being raised on a single-parent household.

Also, along with that, whoever I marry, we're not getting divorced until our kids are out of the house, 'cause I don't want my kids to grow up without two parents, even though I think I turned out okay, I think my mom worked really hard for me to turn out okay, 'cause I could have not.

Self-sufficient is how Bianca, a third-year student, described adulthood. She explained further by stating that adulthood also comes from emotionally maturity. She added that a determined effort is needed when moving toward adulthood. She said, "but if someone's actively putting effort and succeeding and making steps, and then they have the maturity and everything, I feel like that's an adult." Bianca feels "super close" to being an adult, but her thinking about being an adult has yet to catch up to fully feeling like an adult. She confirmed this by stating,

I pay for things, I work, I make my decisions myself, I make my appointments myself, I do my own laundry, but it's just getting the feeling really. That's the adjustment that's taking a little while. It's like I'm 20, but it's like i still feel like a

kid. So that's ... So logically it's like I'm an adult, but it's also the feeling is taking a bit to catch up.

When Bianca recounted how her parents defined adulthood for her, she mentioned that her dad tried to get her to make her own decision and not give her a simple yes or no when she asked his advice. As we concluded our interview, she reflected on her parents' decisions about her. She believed they did the best they could and wondered, if in their place, whether she could make different decisions.

At one time, Mike thought that being an adult meant being financially independent, but that mindset has changed as he has encountered several of his peers who already meet this criteria. Mike recognized the individuality in defining adulthood; for him it means when he no longer needs his parents in his day to day life. He explained,

But I think when you get to a level where you still have your parents, and they still parent you, but in your day-to-day life, you don't need them, and I think once you have that subjective sense of independence, and you feel like you're on your own a little more in your day-to-day, and making your own decisions, and doing things for yourself, I think that's what being an adult is.

He added on with, “so for me, being an adult is once I'm at a point where if something terrible happened, my first step would be that I know what to do. Or I can go use a resource that isn't my parents.” In some aspects, Mike considers himself an adult, but he commented that being an adult is being viewed by others as an adult. When I asked for further clarification, he discussed the teacher/student hierarchy in college and how he has to provide his parents' information when he fills out forms. Mike realizes he has done the work to figure out who is and who he wants to be but credits his parents with shaping his identity through their support of him. As the interview

came to a close, Mike noted that he has differences with his parents, but that it comes more from being in different generations. As a fourth-year student, when Mike disagrees with his parents they can have mutually beneficial conversations where they “educate each other, as well, and help each other out.”

“Being 18” is how Panda, a third year, responded to the question what does it mean to be an adult today? In her explanation, she mentioned that adults can still live with their parents, be taking a high school class, or not have a job. She followed by saying,

so I'm not really sure if there's a really huge criteria for it. It would just be old enough to be considered an adult maybe, because anything that you really do while you're 18 and up, it can be considered an adult. You don't have to drive a car or have a lease or even be mature.

Later, she provided a different perspective when she talked about herself as adult. To Panda, being an adult means doing what she already does in terms of providing for herself and having a certain amount of freedom and independence— living on her own, paying her own rent, paying for groceries, making her own appointments, hanging out with her friends, choosing her own clothes, and doing her own hair. She certainly feels like an adult although she is still on her parents’ insurance.

Panda describes her dad as encouraging and easygoing, and he generally does not do anything she disagrees with in how he presents his adulthood to her. When talking about her mom, she mentioned that she can be a little hypocritical and doesn’t want to mimic that part of her mom.

As a first-year student, Christina understood societal adulthood - being married, paying your bills, and working – but noted the concept is self-defined. Christina’s concept of adulthood

centered on being a certain age, 18, like Panda. She viewed herself as an adult and provided being able to participate in this study without her mother's consent as an example of her adulthood. As we closed the interview, Christina remarked that her parents have been open about their adulthood struggles with her related to divorce and having religious differences. Christina said her were open with her in an attempt to have her learn from their mistakes. This is why Christina was adamant about marrying someone who shares her same religious beliefs.

For Meredith, adulthood was about being a grown-up. Grown-ups are adaptable, efficient, proactive, and reliable. Meredith did not consider herself to be those things yet because she was very dependent on her parents or other people. She feels a pull to be grown-up but is not there yet. She remarks, "I don't feel like I'm old enough, or I'm ready for that yet." In comparison, while she does not feel like a grown-up, she feels like an adult because of her time in college. Being at school, away from home, has caused her to be in limbo. She stated,

Sometimes, I'm like, well I'm all by myself, this is so cool. I love being an adult. And the other times if anything bad happens, I'm like, I want to go home, I'm not an adult. So, stuff like that. But it's like a weird mix of being alone, but also like still feeling kind of needy and you have no idea what's going on.

Lastly, Mary, a second-year student, has managed herself since her first year and mentioned to me that "I have literally been raised to be an adult" because her parents did not allow her and her siblings to "goof around." To her, an adult means being independent, being in charge of your money, and relying on yourself more than others. Mary believed that "you have to realize that some things now you are in control of." Further into the interview we discussed how Mary observed and learned about adulthood by watching her parents. She did not mention her mom specifically, but believes her dad works too much. She recalled,

I don't remember hanging out with my dad when I was little at all. I know that's why we're not close, but you cannot work three jobs and be a father in the house, you really can't. But, it's not that he didn't come to stuff either. I saw him, but so many people I've noticed around here, people actually hung out with their dads or hung out with their mom. They actually come to the games and stuff, I'm like where are my parents at you know. But it's fine, it's one of those things where you just have to get, I don't want to say get used to it, but sometimes you just have to.

Mary's tone of voice evoked sadness when she made this statement.

Near the end of each interview, I asked participants to reflect on their parents' role in their defining and learning who they are and what it means to be an adult. Students answered differently, but the overall sentiment was that their parent was active in helping shape who they are, good or bad, and who they hope to become once they are firmly in adulthood. Ashley, in her final year, responded, "I would say like both a passive and an active role in the sense of actively supporting me in my decisions but passive in letting me explore my options a little bit." Bianca, a third-year student, mentioned that her parents always encouraged her to learn about herself apart from others and to be comfortable being different because it inhibits having a "flock mindset." Christina, a first year student, talked about her parents' role through a lens of support, "I just always know that they're going to be there and that has made me more of – I mean you would think that would make me super dependent on them but like they've also let me be so independent that it's just like a really good balance I think." Kayla, a second-year student, said her mom "played the biggest role" because she has supported her in all possible ways from emotionally to financially, serving as a motivator and support system. When Mary, a second-year student, reflected, she commented, "they've treated me like an adult my whole life." She

enjoyed this structure because she noticed that some of her peers do not have it. This helped her most with thinking about her finances as a student and beyond.

When Meredith, a first-year student, responded to this question, she noted that her dad's goal was to provide a balanced approach, while her mom maintained an active approach. As she moves forward, she will "take them with me and always have them, but be confident enough that, like, I've grown up independently." Mike credited his parents with helping create his identity by their support, as well as decisions they made for him or with him as a child. Similar to other participants, Panda, a third-year student, stated how her parents' support helped her, "they would just pick up on what we wanted and just nurture that interest in any way they could, and they did. They just provided us with anything that would further our developing identities, really." Savannah shared that her identity development is a mirror of her parents. Lastly, Tyler, a third-year student, answered this question by saying that his mom challenges him to see and consider all of his options, but that she "lets me choose and make the final decision and go through with it on my own."

What society sets as a standard of adulthood and how participants themselves defined it did not always align. Overall, participants know and can describe the ways that their parents shaped their identity development. This took place not only by them living with their parents but also by having involved parents who actively worked to understand their child's interest or allowed their child to begin making their own choices. Parents remained involved, but what that involvement looked like adjusted over time based on their child's needs and interests. During the interviews, participants noted this feeling of in-betweenness when asked about their own sense of adulthood. When asked if they did adult-like things, all said yes, but none could fully commit to defining themselves as adults. Several students, mainly younger, tended to think of adulthood

in terms of external resources such as money, where some students focused on the internal feeling of being an adult when they used phrases such as “emotionally mature” and “self-sufficient.” In envisioning adulthood, participants were moving toward understanding who they are and how they relate to others around them, including their parents.

Chapter Summary

Ten participants shared their experience of identity development as emerging adults with involved parents using semi-structured interviews. Through data analysis, four themes emerged to describe the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents to answer the research question. They are experiencing a supportive parent structure, gaining independence, becoming equals, and envisioning adulthood. Each theme builds upon the other to provide a thorough and holistic perspective of participant experiences.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Identity development is often considered a crucial hallmark of student success in college. The central question of identity development is “who am I?” (Jones & Abes, 2013). Because college is a pivotal time for students, and many parents in 2018 are more highly involved than previous generations’ parents during their child’s college experiences, how students view the role of their parents during college provides a new context to consider their identity development in college. Parents are influenced by societal phenomena, leading to increased parental involvement. The phenomena include educational policies that encourage parental involvement at the K-12 level and loop parents into their child’s life in college, the media’s coverage that publicizes overbearing parents who interfere in their students’ lives, access to technology to stay connected, and rising post-secondary educational costs (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cutright, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). This is not an exhaustive list of phenomena increasing parental involvement across college campuses, but these are ones identified as most salient for this study.

There are varying opinions about a continued high level of parental involvement. Some assert that such parental involvement has negative impacts on mental health, leads to increased recreational drug use, and lessens overall well-being (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schifffrin, Liss, Miles-McLean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2013). Others focus on the positive aspects of parental involvement and the positive effects of attachment on development (Cullaty, 2011; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991, Kenny & Rice, 1995). At the same time, there are other voices that encourage

higher education professionals to become better informed about parents and the role they play in their child's life (Donovan, 2014; Dunn, 2015; Kohn, 2015). While there is a growing body of knowledge about parent-child relationships in college, focused on areas such as attachment, adjustment, sense of belonging, career development, autonomy, and independence, minimal research exists on parent-child relationships and both student development and further identity development (ASHE, 2015; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Taub, 2008). Increasing parental involvement in higher educational settings over the last 30 years warrants further discussion to expand the understanding of how parent-child relationships affect student development in college.

For my study, I interviewed 10 participants to explore the research question: *What is the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents?* Specifically, participants are 18 to 22 years old and enrolled at least full-time as undergraduate students; they communicated with a parent or parent figure at least once per week and lived with that parent or parent figure during high school. Arnett's (2000, 2015) emerging adulthood served as the framework to interview participants. Through his research, Arnett (2015) determined that emerging adulthood has five distinct characteristics, which he referred to as *features*. These features are identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism. In *identity exploration*, emerging adults seek to answer the question "who am I?" *Instability* describes the areas that are uncertain for emerging adults during this time such as love, work, and place of residence. *Self-focus* describes an internal focus where obligations to others play a less prominent role; *feeling in-between* is the transitional period between adolescent and adult; and *possibilities/optimism* are about the seemingly limitless opportunities to have transformative life experiences. In addition to using Arnett's features to develop my interview

guide, these features served as a framework to collect data, analyze data, discuss themes, and describe findings.

Revisiting Societal Phenomena Contexts in Higher Education

The societal phenomena impacting parental involvement in higher education help to situate parental involvement within the context of the themes. The phenomena include educational policies that encourage parental involvement at the K-12 level and loop parents into their child's life in college, the media's coverage that publicizes overinvolved parents who interfere in their students' lives, access to technology to stay connected and communicate frequently, and rising post-secondary education costs, all of which compound the current landscape of parent-child relationships (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Educational policies set an expectation that a supportive parental structure is integrated into educational policies that influence this group of participants and their parents such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the former No Child Left Behind (NCLB). During K-12, parents are strongly encouraged to show up for their child and provide them with a support structure. Participants talked about how their parents continue to be there for them in some way as a college student although the nature of the involvement has evolved to meet their needs as emerging adults. To some degree, the expectation for a continued high level of parental involvement has been set by educational policies for this parent-child generation. The intersection of educational policies such as FERPA or the former NCLB at the secondary level and involved parents creates the need for expanded discussion on the identity development of emerging adults and what facilitating identity development entails for higher education professionals (Cutright, 2008; Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). The expansion of this conversation is necessary to continue and increase conversations at the post-secondary level

about engaging students who have involved parents and what this means for their identity development. This study provides an understanding of how students view their parents and their parents' involvement. Participants viewed their parents as an integral part of their lives, and that integral role did not stop when the student enrolled in college. It is important to consider how we will respond once we know this about our students.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the media's coverage tends to publicize overbearing parents who interfere in their students' lives even when the student does not welcome it, but participants of this study did not feel their parents interfered at all. In fact, participants often looked to their parents for advice, confirmation, and assistance. For example, Tyler's mother, who creates a schedule for him, might appear overinvolved, but Tyler does not view it that way. Participants and their parents have developed a mutual understanding of how they will be involved in each other's lives. From my observations, Mike exemplifies a higher level of development, as reflected in his ability and willingness to manage his daily schedule and make decisions about his life and well-being. Conversely, while Tyler believes he will be able to do this when necessary, his current choice to let his mother manage things for him seems to reflect more self-focus and a level of development that is closer to adolescence than to adulthood. Pizzolatto (2010) noted that "development is predicated on the notion of dissonance as the catalyst for development, and dissonance is typically assessed through processing of situations with free choice" (p. 194). Tyler seemed comfortable with the way that his mother structures his life and tasks; he did not demonstrate any dissonance related to it. Without that dissonance, his level of development did not seem to be as high as other participants who have engaged in more identity exploration and moved to a stage of making more choices for themselves. Participants' view of their parents' actual involvement is creating a foundation for more secure identity exploration,

which counters the media's portrayal of parents as constraining their child's development through their continued involvement.

There are several mechanisms for parent-child connectedness when a child leaves for college. Various devices, such as smartphones and laptops, are available to help students and parents stay connected and communicate frequently. According to Arnett (2015), "Frequent contact with parents during emerging adulthood is motivated not only by the cheapness and ease of technology. It also reflects the closeness and harmony that typically characterizes emerging adults' relations with their parents" (p. 51). Involvement may mean communicating across different platforms multiple times during the day, once a day, or once a week. Participants generally communicated with their mother more than their father. Mike, a fourth-year student, showed that his parents are involved in his life, but their involvement is lessening as he learns what he needs from them to develop his own identity and capacity to manage as an adult.

Lastly, parents not only have an emotional investment in their child's success, but they often have a financial investment in their child's college education. As mentioned in Chapter 2, as post-secondary educational costs increase, so does parental involvement (Carney-Hall, 2008). While individual student debt has increased, mom and dad are incurring education debt for their children (Anderson, 2016). For traditional age students and their parents, the idea of a college education can elicit a high price tag (Cutright, 2008). While lower and middle-income participants talked more about working and providing for their educational and college-related expenses compared to higher income participants, they still described the financial investment made by their parents regarding tuition, books, rent, food, clothing, and other education-related needs.

In the discussion of findings section that follows, I make connections to the literature, societal phenomena impacting parental involvement in higher education, and Arnett's features, as appropriate to each theme. Next, study limitations are addressed. Then, implications for higher education professionals are articulated. Lastly, recommendations are included for further research exploration.

Discussion of Findings

Through data analysis, four themes emerged to illuminate the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. The themes are *experiencing a supportive parental structure*, *gaining independence*, *becoming equals*, and *envisioning adulthood*. I will discuss each of these themes in greater detail in the section that follows.

Experiencing a Supportive Parental Structure

All participants discussed their experience of having a supportive parental structure. For participants, this was paramount to beginning the process of identity development and reflected Arnett's feature of identity exploration, which can be a time of uncertainty. As highlighted by the Association for the Study of Higher Education, "given that students do not stop growing once they reach 18 years of age, the student-parent relationship does not cease to exist; therefore, parents and families continue to play a role in students' development" (2015, p. 38). This assertion was supported throughout participant interviews. Students come to college in part shaped by their parents. The role that parents play in their child's life and development does not stop when their child enrolls in college. In my study, participants valued their parents' supportive structure which provides them with the freedom to explore and decide who they are and what they want to become. This was salient during all participant interviews, but Savannah communicated it well by stating,

They're [her parents] my biggest cheerleaders. If I don't do as good on something, then they're like, "email the professor, see what you can do, just keep trying." I mean, if I cry to them, they always try to comfort me the best that they can. Now they're just like, get out there and just do what you can.

This quote illustrates the level of support experienced by Savannah from her parents, who have created a secure space for her to explore her identity.

Gaining Independence

Three cornerstones of becoming an adult are “accepting responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent” (Arnett, 2015, p. 50).

These hallmarks signify a child being independent from their parent(s) (Arnett, 2015).

Participants alluded to building aptitude in these areas, but they do not yet see themselves as adults because they continue to heavily rely on their parents for certain areas of financial or emotional support. All participants articulated a feeling of in-betweenness during their individual interview. Although participants felt in-between, they developed a level of confidence to continue their individual identity exploration journeys toward and eventually into adulthood. Students have an opportunity to explore who they want to be through the decisions they make on their own. One vivid example comes from Christina. She had to decide if she wanted to get a fake ID. It was a decision she made on her own. She told her mom after she decided what to do,

So getting a fake ID is like the rage, everyone does that. And over the summer I was so conflicted, I was like, is that something I have to do, is everyone going to be at the bars? But then I was like, stop, that is the dumbest thing, why would you ever even consider that, you know that's not who you are and who God made you to be, don't get a fake ID, don't drink. So I'm not doing that. That was a big

decision. I mean it shouldn't have been, that's like a no-brainer, but it was something I was really conflicted about for a while and other decisions I've had to make.

Participants identified multiple ways that they gain independence, which create opportunities to explore different facets of their identity to lead to further development. This exploration points inward as participants begin to make decisions that they think are best for them. Arnett (2000, 2015) discussed this feature as self-focus, meaning what the individual wants is more important than what someone else wants for them. As examples, students described handling financial decisions, deciding who to spend time with, selecting a place to live, and committing to a chosen major or career path. Additionally, Panda expressed gaining independence in her identification as heterosexual,

Being straight is also something. My parents were like, "You may feel confused right now, darling, but just wait until college. You'll figure it out." And I was like, "Okay, dad." My confidence in my identity with that is thanks to my dad, pretty much.

Meredith discussed self-focus as related to being a feminist,

Definitely being a strong woman is very important to me. I think also, because I have a very typically like a very typically liberal democratic family, and so like I'm not, I've even ... straight ... what's the word, strayed from that before and I've become ... like my own sense of political person. That's pretty important to me. I've never been afraid to voice my opinion, even if it's different. So, I guess another label could be a feminist, definitely.

As participants begin to gain independence, it shifts their perspective on how they saw

themselves in relation to their parents. Specifically, students noted that their parent-child relationship was changing to become more equal depending on the circumstance.

Becoming Equals

All participants described an evolving relationship with their parents. While some could not definitively state they were friends or equals with their parents, they acknowledged that a shift in the relationship had occurred or was occurring. Specifically, participants could better understand their parents as adults as they begin to transition from a state of emerging adulthood to adulthood. Arnett (2015), stated, “As emerging adults mature and begin to feel more adult themselves, they are more capable of understanding how their parents look at life” (p. 62). Participants reflected on their parents’ choices and, as a result, could better understand the difficulties and nuances of adulthood. This realization allowed participants to begin to imagine their own version of adulthood. The manifestation of seeing their parents as more than parents helped participants to envision adulthood for themselves, which begins to affirm their identity and sense of self. Bianca expressed the shift from child to equal as she talked about what she valued, which is good relationships. She stated,

It's just that I feel like our relationship's more matured. And I do value that though, that they, if they have a question about my sister for example they'll come to me and ask about it or talk to me, my mom will vent and talk to me about it ... And I value that, I value that I feel like I'm becoming more friends with my parents than just having a parent child relationship. I mean, my dad is talking about he's going back to school, and he's been talking about that and classwork and getting his master's. It's just talking about stuff like that and having more than just [a] parent-child relationship.

For six participants, becoming equals and developing a friendship with their parent exemplifies a certain level of trust and understanding from their parent as they begin to get a strong sense of how they want to appear to others. For most participants, it is more about being viewed as an equal and having a relationship that extends beyond their parent telling them what to do. For this feeling in-between stage with one or both parents, elements of becoming equal are present, but not yet well defined or clearly articulated. Arnett (2000, 2015) described this as the space between leaving adolescence and transitioning into adulthood. Their acknowledgement of this transition does not seem to be associated with age or distance from home. The shift from child to equal created space for students to make sense of their impending adulthood.

At times, participants noted the tension of transitioning from a parent-child relationship to one as more of equals. Panda considers herself as an adult and perceives that her parents view her that way as well, but comments her mom makes to her may suggest otherwise. About this Panda remarked,

If I come into the house wearing an outfit that doesn't match or that my mom doesn't like, she'll say something like, "You're 19. You should know by now not to wear that outfit outside the house." Or, "You should know by now. You're an adult. You should know by now not to wear your hair that way. It's not cute. You shouldn't do that." My mom's real critical about that. My dad hasn't really said anything in that regard. He's just like two thumbs up to whatever I do with my life ever since I moved out.

At a surface level, her mom acknowledges her as an adult, but the subtext suggests that she believes that Panda should know better and that as her mom she must point out what she

perceives as non-adult behavior. These are the nuances that exist in Arnett's conceptual framework as students navigate identity exploration and the feeling of in-betweenness.

Envisioning Adulthood

Overall, participants respect the decisions their parents made. When asked if they would do things differently than their parents, participants indicated that they would in areas such as education, romantic relationships, and work. As described by Kayla, this centered on completing her education sooner rather than later and considering her future romantic relationships based on observing her mother's decisions in these areas. Like Kayla, Christina expressed similar concerns about seeing her mom attend school later in life, but also expressed how being in a Christian-centered relationship is important to her. Again, these considerations come from observing her mom as a child and reflecting on how she wants to envision adulthood for herself. For all participants, envisioning adulthood is having some semblance of control in their life to make the decisions that are best for them. Because participants determine what might be better for them in adulthood, this allows them to become more confident in who they are and the decisions they make to create the life they want for themselves.

Discussion of Findings Summary

For Arnett (2014), identity development encompasses three pillars. The one most salient to this discussion is developing an ideology that helps the person make sense of their world. Participants' ideology is an extension of their identity development, and participants' parents help them make sense of the world through the outlined themes. When participants discussed their identity development, it was woven into the themes of experiencing a supportive parental structure, gaining independence, becoming equals, and envisioning adulthood. The themes build upon each other and establish the connection between parental involvement and identity

development. For participants, the themes are the factors that allow them to navigate identity exploration securely, which is crucial to identity development (Arnett, 2015; Erikson; 1959; Josselson, 1996; Marcia, 1966). For participants, parental involvement provides them with a sense of security and stability. For some participants like Christina, this meant going to concerts with her mother. For others like Bianca, it means sharing what she learns in class. Contrary to Mike's experience, which includes scheduling and managing his daily activities himself, Tyler's mother is very much involved in his day to day life as she creates calendars and lists for him to follow. This may be an example of the overinvolved parent based on media portrayals, but both Mike and Tyler like the level of involvement from their parents, and it works for them based on their parent-child relationship. From an identity development standpoint, Mike exemplifies a higher level of development through how he manages his day and makes decisions that will have a more long-term impact such as choosing a graduate school. During Tyler's interview, he conveyed that he can handle his schedule and he would begin to do in the future but has no desire to do so currently.

One criteria for my study was that students communicate with a parent or parent figure at least once a week by phone, email, text, video chatting, or another communication tool, so students who communicate less are not represented. However, except for Panda, who communicated with her parents together once a week by phone, all other participants shared that they talked to their parents at least once per day and often multiple times a day. This closeness and connectivity demonstrates how participants' relationships with their parents play a role in identity development. As participants continue to communicate with their parents, their parents help facilitate identity development. Meredith's parents help facilitate her identity through the security they offer by allowing her space to create her own identity, but also being available to

support her if needed. She knows that her parents are there even if she does not need them every day. She described the closeness by sharing,

I guess it's just like an extra friend to have while I'm here. I can talk to someone ... I don't want to try to like, I don't want it to undermine that she is my mom. She does have authority over me, but it's been very nice, I respect her so much and we have perfect boundaries where I can share anything and she won't judge.

Access to technology and media allow participants to communicate with and maintain a level of closeness with their parents in college. Ashley shared the following when she showed me a picture of her and her mom at her high school graduation,

So I think this was like one of those moments, mom is proud of me and still supporting me but also being a friend and saying, hey, if you ever want to talk about any of these things, you can come to me, I want you to come to me before you go to anyone else kind of thing.

Participants' frequent communication leads to a level of closeness that allows the students to feel and experience support from their parents. This support translates to becoming comfortable with discovering who they are through identity exploration and self-focus to develop greater independence separate from their parents. How participants described themselves during the early part of the interview provided insight into their identity exploration. Participants vocalized how they saw themselves in the world through how they described themselves to me, using identities such as Black, Jamaican, or Jewish. They also described how they wanted people to view them in terms of skills and personality, such as hard-working or outgoing. The way they chose to describe themselves provided insight into the identity development process; their choices reflect how they view themselves and how they want others to view them.

Experiencing a supportive parental structure becomes the platform for seeking out and testing participants' independence. For example, their independence casts a new perspective on how they view their parents and others they see as adults. Participants are beginning to view themselves as adults and envision their own adulthood apart from their parents' version of adulthood. Their connection to parents allows participants to feel secure enough to explore, become more self-focused, and develop rather than feeling constrained or limited by the connection. This scaffolding of how participants experience identity development provides clarity of the phenomenon which can be used to identify next steps at post-secondary institutions. Through their individual stories, I was able to understand the collective experience to address the research question.

Through this study, interviews served as the data collection method. As the researcher, I acknowledge that self-reported information can be challenging to decipher at times. In interviews, participants self-reported information based on their understanding or perception of how to best respond to my questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), but their descriptions of their actions and their self-perceptions did not always align. For example, some participants may not yet exhibit the actions of taking responsibility that are associated with adulthood, but they still consider themselves as an adult. For some participants this was a both/and perspective. For example, Tyler does not consider himself as an adult because he does not manage tangible things such as his schedule but does have an "adult mindset" when it comes to making decisions about his major, career path, where to live, and friend selection.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on a specific group of participants at Research University (RU), in the southeastern United States. As with all research, some limitations must be noted regarding this

study and the meaning we can draw from it. First, only two participants identified as male, which may have limited the opportunity to identify ways in which gender played a role in participant experiences. Second, all participants were from the same institution, which has a student population that is in some ways homogenous in regard to gender and in-state representation and is academically selective. Their experiences may have been more similar than a group that included students from a range of institutions.

Implications for Practice

With increased parental involvement in the lives of college students, higher education professionals must engage in important discussions about parents and identity development at the post-secondary level (Carney-Hall, 2008; Hamilton, 2016; Wartman & Savage, 2008). As outlined in Chapter 2, a growing discussion about the student-parent relationship in college demonstrates a need for higher education professionals to examine what this looks like on college campuses (Carney-Hall, 2008; Cullaty, 2011; Dunn, 2015; Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Merriman, 2007; Taub, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). This section will outline the implications for practice related to the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents.

As higher education professionals, we must be ready to respond and adapt to the needs of our students. This means that we may need to put student needs before our own expectations of what it means to come to college. Granted, we are here to challenge and support college students, but it is not our role or responsibility to tell a student how often they should or should not be talking to their parents. We can carry out our job responsibilities in tandem with the pre-existing parent-child relationship. Our sensitivity to this relationship is important and will help us execute and facilitate our role as higher education professionals. The students in this study

were well equipped to say what they want, what they need, and how they want to construct and continue the relationship with their parents in college. In listening to and analyzing participant data, I overwhelmingly heard participants state that they liked having their parents continuing to be involved in their lives. The media's coverage of parents suggests that parental involvement means that students do not have to take responsibility, make decisions, or become an adult, but aside from Tyler, students in this study expressed clearly how they take responsibility, make decisions, and are adults in their daily lives. Societal phenomena impacting higher education has made this increased parental involvement the rule and not the exception. From participants, I learned that they want, expect, and appreciate a regular level of involvement from their parents, and that this involvement helps to facilitate their development, rather than impede it. As higher education professionals, what can we do to adjust our processes, culture, and mind-sets to better integrate parents into higher education and facilitate their students' identity development? The potential adjustment is not a reaction to what students like, but a gesture to the value parents add to their lives, the stability parents provide during a time of transition and challenge, and the support parents display as students begin to create their own pathway in life. Our students can tell us what they need to feel supported as they navigate college and its impact on their identity development, but are we ready to listen and adapt?

The implications outlined below were generated from what I learned during the data analysis and theme generation process. Students know the extent to which they want their parent involved in their college life. Participants communicated with their parents frequently, sometimes even multiple times a day using different platforms. Students will determine what constitutes appropriate communication with their parents based on their circumstances. Additionally, parents offered a sense of support and stability for their student. This support and

stability encouraged participants to make decisions around short-term and long-term plans. Emerging adulthood is inherently a time of instability, but parents offer stability amidst other rapid changes such as moving to a new place, deciding on a major, and prioritizing college's many events and opportunities.

First, we must acknowledge that parents come to college with their students. While this is not literal, parents have likely shaped their student's sense of self for the last 18 years (ASHE, 2015). Acknowledging this can provide additional support to some students who may struggle with certain aspects of college life related to transition, mental health, identity development, or other factors that impact students in college. Institutions should understand the specific needs of students and their families. One suggestion is to reframe our perspective on how parents should support their students in college. This could include changing parent orientations and establishing continued communication with parents. For communication, institutions could consider creating a parent portal or other avenues for parents to find out information so that they then can potentially serve as a resource for their students (Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Price, 2008; Ward-Roof, Heaton, & Coburn, 2008). As an example, two participants shared how their parents provide them with school or career related information. Tyler's mom signs him up for pre-dental listservs. Bianca recalled, "Well, sometimes I know my dad will send me emails of, he finds an article that he thinks is really cool or if he finds an interesting internship opportunity he'll send it to me, or anything that he thought was really cool that he learned in school he'll send me pictures and stuff like that."

Institutions and higher education professionals should respect the student and their parent-child relationship and ensure our programs and services are responsive to a range of choices or patterns around parent involvement. Second, student identity development occurs

with support from higher education professionals, but in partnership with parents to best meet student needs. Institutions and higher education professionals can consider programming that facilitates students' exploration of their identity development with and without their parents. This can occur in residence halls, recreation centers, or late-night events (Patton et al., 2016). Working in concert with parents does not automatically impede our professional work with students but may actually enhance our identity development work with them. We should begin to view parents as partners and realize they have known their student for 17 or 18 years. They understand their child, and that can advance the work we do if we look to parents as experts. Third, participants expect their parents to stay engaged, which creates an opportunity for higher educational professionals to further explore the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. Lastly, parent involvement changes over time as does identity development. Students and parents may not need or want the same amount of involvement as students transition from the first-year of study to the final year of study. We can adapt our work on campus to meet specific student needs. This can be a positive source of support for the shift from identity exploration to identity development as students move from emerging adulthood to adulthood. Much of this work begins with assessing our campus to understand our students and the relationship they have with their parents (Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Ward-Roof, Heaton, & Coburn, 2008). Once campus needs are understood, institutions can begin to use "purposeful messaging to educate and reassure parents" (Price, 2008, p. 29). To ensure that parents remain supportive, we as higher education professionals should,

help prepare parents to be the most effective source of support for their students,
[and]...deliver messages to parents that focus on the college environment, campus
resources, the types of challenges their students may encounter, and how

institutions and parents can work together to overcome these challenges. (Price, 2008, p. 29)

Additionally, institutions, departments, and individuals can respond by designing professional development opportunities and needs assessments around this student population. Students can best determine who they are and who they want to be. As higher education professionals, we need to encourage and allow students to choose the path and people that serve them best through identity exploration to identity development. This can be done by acquiring additional knowledge on emerging adults through research articles, professional organizations, and professional development, as well as at the local level with needs assessment and other formal and informal data gathering to understand how emerging adults in a particular setting experience identity development with their parents.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study does not present finite answers for what will work for individual students, higher educational professionals, and institutions; additional inquiry is needed. This study serves as a starting point to understand and communicate the experience of identity development for emerging adults with highly involved parents. Parents are not highly involved because only they want to be, but the interaction is based on a pre-existing relationship characterized by involvement in each other's lives that started before college and is influenced by phenomenon around parenting (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Based on the findings, additional research should be developed to add to existing literature. Specific research foci that could be modified from this study include examining students from other identities and experiences, such as male students and students representing different institutional types, majors, or career paths. Also, understanding the role of other individuals, such as siblings, in a student's

life is another area for expanded research. Understanding how economic class plays a role in the parent-child relationship is another topic for consideration. Lastly, future research that involves both the student and their parent is necessary for a holistic perspective of this experience. If we know more about how the experience of identity development looks for different groups in different settings, we can better serve and meet the needs of students. Deeper examination in these areas would further the understandings related to this study's findings.

Due to the continued admittance and arrival of traditional age emerging adults with involved parents on campus, this and further research is timely. Exploring the experience of identity development for emerging adults comes at a critical juncture for higher education due to societal phenomena and parental involvement, both impacting higher education. Addressing this experience allows those working in higher education to better serve emerging adults.

Furthermore, this may provide insight into areas such as retention, degree completion, and institutional satisfaction. Parental support leads to enhanced adjustment to college, increased academic success, and higher retention rates (Wartman & Savage, 2008). As higher education professionals, it is important to understand what students need and adjust to meet those needs.

In our roles as higher education professionals, we need to understand that many students are looking to their parents for support and structure. That does not mean that we, as higher education professionals, no longer have a play a role in a student's life, but that we have to consider support and structure more holistically to include pre-college relationships such as with parents, siblings, or other important individuals in a student's life. Additionally, as we construct messages about parental involvement, emerging adulthood may be incorporated as a useful framework in our work to better understand college student experiences.

Researcher Reflection

Conducting this study is a testament to the complexity of identity development. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3 my original research design did not go as planned, which caused me to consider the best way to complete my data analysis and report the findings. As I reflected on this process, I have a better understanding of the complicated nature of qualitative work and how a researcher should respond when the process does not go as planned. Because of this experience, I have a better scholarly understanding of qualitative research and am more comfortable with adapting my procedures to remain authentic to the process to convey what I did in a meaningful way. The best lesson learned during this experience is to recognize when you have to shift what you planned to do and be comfortable with changing your approach. The shift occurred when I had to deviate from my proposed methodology during data analysis. The decision to shift my approach, after recognizing that my findings did not reflect a singular phenomenon, was difficult, but necessary to understand the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. The data analysis process revealed the progressive impact of participant relationships with their parents on identity development over time.

Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the necessity to discuss the experience of identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. Phenomena taking place at a macro-societal level call for a reexamination of identity development in college students who continue to maintain a close relationship with parents once in college. This has implications for higher education institutions and the professionals who work with students in these settings. There is an opportunity for higher education professionals to inform their work with students and parents to better understand the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents.

Arnett's (2000, 2015) emerging adult framework provides a nuanced approach to better understand the complexities of college students, their parents, and identity development.

Experiencing a supportive parental structure, gaining independence, becoming equals, and envisioning adulthood are the central components that build on one another to facilitate the experience of identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. The findings from this study emphasize the need for higher education institutions and higher education professionals to adjust our responses to students with involved parents to provide resources, services, and structures related to emerging adult identity development which allow students and their parents to decide for themselves, without our telling them, how to structure their relationship. The concept of emerging adulthood offers a newer lens through which to view the development of college students as a distinct group, representing a stage separate from adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2015). Several studies have asserted that students who have parental involvement and support have enhanced adjustment to college, increased academic success, and higher retention rates (e.g., Wartman & Savage, 2008). Additionally, parental involvement can positively impact students in regard to sense of belonging, career development, autonomy, and independence (ASHE, 2015; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Taub, 2008). For this study, students articulated a clear sense of belonging on campus, an understanding of how to set and meet career goals, a recognition of the importance of making decisions on their own, and a desire for their parents to stay involved in their daily lives.

While some higher education professionals may want students and parents to distance themselves from one another, participant interviews reflected a different scenario, where students communicate regularly with their parents and appreciate their involvement. As higher education professionals, we can facilitate student development through our student interactions and, at the

same time, respect parent-child relationships. For increased adjustment to college, increased academic success, and higher retention rates (Wartman & Savage, 2008), higher education professionals should consider additional mechanisms to support emerging adults and their parents. For emerging adults, this ties back to the study's findings. Experiencing a supportive parental structure becomes the platform for seeking out and testing their independence. Their independence casts a new perspective on how they view their parents and others they see as adults. Participants also began to view themselves as adults and envision their own adulthood apart from their parents' version of adulthood. Their connection to parents allows participants to feel secure enough to explore, become more self-focused, and develop, rather than feeling constrained or limited by the connection. These findings from their collective experience present an opportunity for institutions and higher education professionals to adjust how we view students and their parents and how that intersects with identity development. Those who work with this population can develop meaningful structures, programs, and processes, based on student need, to support the identity development of emerging adults while recognizing the positive role that parents may play in their growth.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT AND FOLLOW UP EMAILS

To: Email to Tiers 1, 3, & 4
 Subject: Seeking your assistance for a dissertation
 Good morning,

My name is Cara Simmons and I'm a doctoral candidate in the UGA College of Education conducting research about college students to complete my degree in Counseling and Student Personnel Services. I also work as the director of the Student Success and Advising Center in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

I am seeking currently enrolled, full-time, UGA undergraduates aged 18-22 for my study. The purpose of the study is to understand identity development for emerging adults with involved parents. My study has received approval from the UGA Institutional Review Board.

I am reaching out to ask you to share the email below and attached flyer with your current students. I appreciate your assistance with this project. Thank you in advance.

Cara Simmons
 Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Student Personnel Services

Tier One: Undergraduate Academic Advising Coordinators

Tier Two: Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

Tier Three: Center for Leadership and Service, Center for Student Activities and Involvement, Disability Resource Center, Greek Life, International Student Life, LGBT Resource Center, Multicultural Services and Programs, Recreational Sports, Student Veterans Resource Center, UGA Athletics – Academic Services, and the Division of Academic Enhancement.

Tier Four: Undergraduate research pools from the College of Education and the Psychology Department in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences.

To: Prospective research study participants
 Subject: I want to talk about you and your parent(s)

Hello,

I'd like to learn how your parents play a role in becoming who you are. Having worked with undergraduate students for over 10 years, I am interested in learning more about the students I work with on a daily basis to better inform my work.

I am looking for currently enrolled, full-time, UGA undergraduates aged 18-22 who communicate with a parent/parent figure at least once a week, and lived with that parent/parent figure during high school. Your participation would include meeting with me once, for approximately an hour. During the interview we will discuss topics such as your college experience thus far, your identity development in college, and how you interact with your parents.

I am conducting the study as part of my research requirement in my doctoral program. My advisor is Dr. Laura Dean, Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services. The information collected will be used to help me understand how students develop their identity during college. The study has been approved by the UGA Institutional Review Board (IRB).

If you meet the criteria outlined above and are interested in participating in an interview, please send an email to caraj@uga.edu. After receiving your email, I will follow up to schedule an interview and provide additional details.

Thank you for considering!

Sincerely,

Cara Simmons

Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Student Personnel Services

Follow up email

To: Research study participants

Subject: Research project: I want to talk about you and your parent(s)

Thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of my research project. I'd like to learn how your parent(s) play a role in becoming who you are. Having worked with undergraduate students for over 10 years, I am interested in learning more about the students I work with on a daily basis to better inform my work.

I am looking for currently enrolled, full-time, UGA undergraduates aged 18-22 who communicate with a parent/parent figure at least once a week, and lived with that parent/parent figure during high school. Your participation would include meeting with me once, for approximately an hour. During the interview we will discuss topics such as your college experience thus far, your identity development in college, and how you interact with your parents.

In the Doodle poll link below, select your availability to meet and then select save. Interview times are in 75 minute increments, but will likely last about an hour. The Doodle poll link is set up as a hidden poll where information is kept confidential from other respondents, including your name, comments, and times selected. Please fill out the doodle poll within 24 hours of receiving.

Insert Doodle Poll Link

IMPORTANT: When you come to the interview, please bring in an artifact that provides a sense of who you are, your identity development, and the relationship you have with your parent/parent figure. The item could be a photograph, jewelry, a piece of clothing, videos, text messages, or other item that holds value to you. Be prepared to discuss the items as it will serve as the starting point for our interview to help me get to know you.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate!

Sincerely,

Cara Simmons

Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Student Personnel Services

Follow up email w/ date, time, and location information

Thank you for your interest and support of my research project. Please review the information below carefully.

I have us scheduled for:

Date

Time

Location

If you're unfamiliar with the location of Dawson Hall, click [here](#). A picture of Dawson Hall is attached as well. Enter the building from the Sanford Street porch entrance. My office suite is on the left when you enter the building. When you enter the double doors, let the front office know you're here to see me. I'll let them know to expect you as well. They may ask you to take a seat in our waiting area while they let me know of your arrival.

If this location or date/time does not work, please let me know as soon as possible. If you need to reach me, feel free to use this email address. If something changes the day of I can be reached at (706)542-4847 or (706)461-2384.

IMPORTANT: When you come to the interview, please bring in an artifact that provides a sense of who you are, your identity development, and the relationship you have with your

parent/parent figure. The item could be a photograph, jewelry, a piece of clothing, videos, text messages, or other item that holds value to you. Be prepared to discuss the items as it will serve as the starting point for our interview to help me get to know you.

I'll send a reminder closer to our scheduled time. If you have any questions, please let me know.

I look forward to meeting and chatting with you.

Follow up reminder email

Sending a reminder about tomorrow. Don't forget your artifact. Looking forward to chatting with you. Please reply so I'll know you received this email. Thank you.

Follow up email to interested students not participating

Thank you for your interest. At the moment, I do not need any more participants, but will add you to my wait list in case additional participants are needed.

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT FLYER

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

*For a research study about students, parents, and
identity development*

WHO?

*Currently enrolled, full-time undergraduate UGA students aged 18-22,
Communicate with parent/parent figure at least once per week, and
Lived with that parent/parent figure during high school*

WHAT?

Complete one in-person interview

TIME COMMITMENT?

60-90 minutes

INTERESTED?

Email Cara Simmons at caraj@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you. If you are participating through an undergraduate research pool, please make sure you understand how this study impacts your grades or class standing. Your decision about participation will have no bearing on your grades or class standing.

Primary Researcher:**Cara Winston Simmons, M.Ed.**

Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Student Personnel Services
Department of Counseling & Human Development Services
College of Education
University of Georgia
706-542-4878
caraj@uga.edu

**Principal Investigator/
Major Professor:****Laura A. Dean, Ph.D.**

Professor, Counseling & Human Development Services
Department of Counseling & Human Development Services
College of Education
University of Georgia
706-542-1812
ladean@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to explore the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. Your participation is important to understanding this complex phenomenon. You have been asked to participate in this study because you fit the following criteria: currently enrolled, full-time, UGA undergraduates aged 18-22 who communicates with a parent/parent figure at least once a week, and lived with that parent/parent figure during high school.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face audio recorded interview. Additionally, you will be asked to bring in a personal artifact that reflects identity

development for emerging adults with involved parents. Following the interview, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. The interview and demographic questionnaire will last approximately 60-70 minutes. You will be asked to reflect on and respond to questions related to you, your parents, and identity development. Questions asked during the interview are not intended to be sensitive in nature, and you can choose not to answer any question. The same is true of the demographic questionnaire. that I will ask you to complete after the interview. If you need a break at any point, please let me know. You will have the opportunity to review your individual interview transcript and make clarifications or corrections as needed. Altogether, participation including the interview, demographic questionnaire, and transcription review should take no more than one and a half hours total.

Risks and discomforts

The risks and discomforts in this study should be minimal.

Psychological risks

While in the study, you might experience some mild psychological discomfort (e.g. stress, sadness, anxiety, etc.) as you reflect on your college experiences. If you feel any discomfort you may take a break or stop at any time.

Risk of Loss of Privacy

We will make every effort to protect the privacy of information provided during the study. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym that will be used throughout the research project, including in interview transcriptions, the final document, and any presentations or publications resulting from it. After data collection is complete, audio recordings will be tied to participant pseudonyms. All audio-recordings will be transcribed using their selected pseudonym. Audio-recorded interviews will be erased from the recording device and flash drive once transcribed and reviewed by participants.

Once transcribed and reviewed, there will be no audio-recordings of participant interviews. After transcription, pseudonyms which will be the only identifier. Pseudonyms only would be used for any future articles or presentations. Interview transcriptions, with pseudonyms, will be in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office until the manuscript is accepted for publication or after 2 years, whichever is shorter.

Benefits

Participants will receive limited direct benefits from participating in the research. You will be able to reflect on your college experience thus far. Findings from this study will inform higher education professionals who work with undergraduate students. This work may also inform how other disciplines or institutional types provide resources, programs, or personnel to undergraduate students and their parents.

Audio/Video Recording

Interviews will be audio recorded. This is necessary so the researcher can have an accurate account of your responses and review the interview in detail for emerging themes. Audio-

recorded interviews will be erased from the recording device and flash drive once transcribed and reviewed by participants.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used and will remain confidential through removing identifiers. Participants will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym prior to the interview. Individual identifiers will be removed during the coding process of transcribed interviews. Only the researcher will have access to the original data. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

If you have questions

The primary researcher conducting this study is Cara Simmons, doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Georgia. If you have questions now, please ask. If you have questions after completing the interview, contact Laura Dean, Major Professor and Professor at the University of Georgia at 706-542-1812 or ladean@uga.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. The purpose of this study is to explore the identity development of emerging adults with involved parents. Your participation is important to understanding this complex phenomenon. You have been asked to participate in this study because you fit the following criteria: currently enrolled, full-time, UGA undergraduate aged 18-22 who communicates with a parent/parent figure at least once a week, and lived with that parent/parent figure during high school.

You will be asked to reflect on and respond to questions related to you, your parents, and identity development. Identity refers to how you view yourself and could be related to your race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, politics, spirituality/religion, being a student, or other identities that you ascribe to yourself. Information collected during the interview will remain confidential. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. Questions asked during the interview are not intended to be sensitive in nature, and you can choose not to answer any question. The same is true of the demographic questionnaire that I will ask you to complete after the interview. If you need a break at any point, please let me know. You will have the opportunity to review your individual interview transcript and make clarifications or corrections as needed. Altogether, participation including the interview, demographic questionnaire, and transcription review should take no more than one and a half hours total. Additionally, you will need to think of a name that I can refer to you as during our interview.

I may take notes during the interview in case I want to come back to something you said, but do not want to interrupt your current thought. Also, I may look at my watch or phone to be mindful of the time. I am going to turn on the audio recorder and then ask your permission to record. Are you ready to begin the interview?

Today is DATE. The time is TIME. I am here with PSEUDONYM for this interview. PSEUDONYM, do I have your permission to audio record this interview?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Artifact

1. Tell me about the artifact you selected?
 - a. Who's in them?
 - b. Why did you select them?
 - c. What meaning do they hold for you?

About You

2. Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself?
3. What's important to you?
4. What identities are most important/salient to you?
 - a. How did you determine this? Did you experience anything for them to become important? (**Identity exploration**)
 - b. Are there identities that have become more important/salient since being in college? Less important/salient?
 - c. How do you think your parents have shaped the importance or saliency of those identities?

College Life

5. Tell me what college life is like for you.
 - a. How do your parents play a role in your college life?

About Your Family

6. Describe your family.

About Your Parents

7. Tell me about your parents.
8. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?
 - a. Since you've been in college?
9. How involved are your parents in your life? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. How do you feel about their level of involvement in your life?
 - i. How does that compare to before college?

Communication

10. How often do you communicate with your parents?
 - a. What do you use to communicate?
 - b. Who initiates contact?
 - c. What do you talk about? What don't you talk about with your parents?
 - i. Why?

Emerging Adulthood

11. What does it mean to be an adult today? What does being an adult mean to you? What are some examples? (**Feeling in-between**)
 - a. Do you consider yourself as an adult? Do you feel like you're an adult? If so, how? If not, why?
 - b. How do your parents view you in terms of being an adult? How do you know?
 - i. How does that make you feel?
12. What types of decisions have you had to make during college? (**Self-focus**)

- a. How do you go about making those decisions?
 - b. Are your parents involved in any of your decisions?
 - i. How do you decide when to include them?
 - ii. What does that conversation look like?
 - iii. When you make the decision do you think more about what you want or what your parent wants?
13. What are your dreams and aspirations? (**Possibilities/optimism**)
- a. Do you feel optimistic pursuing your dreams and aspirations?
 - b. What have you done or are doing to get there? Do you involve your parents?

Friends

- 1. Tell me about your friend groups?
 - a. Do your parents know or know about your friends?

Living Arrangements

- 1. Where is home for you?
 - a. Describe your house and who lives there?
- 2. Who did you live with before college?
- 3. How often do you go home to visit your parents?
- 4. Where do you live in Athens?
 - a. How did you choose where to live?
 - b. Who do you live with?
 - c. What is your relationship to them?
 - d. How would you describe your interactions with them?

Closing

1. During the course of our conversation, we've talked a lot about you, your parents, and identity development. I have a couple of wrap up questions.
 - a. What role has your parent/parent figure played as you have begun to define and learn about who you are? What you want to be? (ask about in college specifically)
 - b. How has your parent been involved in defining adulthood for you?
 - c. Do you disagree with how your parents present their adulthood to you? (ex. Relations, other beliefs/values, etc.)
2. Any final thoughts you'd like to share?

APPENDIX F

UNITS TO CONTACT TO RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Tier 1

Academic Advising Coordinators

Michael Merva – Franklin College of Arts and Sciences

Kelly King - College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Misha L Boyd - Odum School of Ecology

Heather McEachern - College of Public Health

Laura Clark - Terry College of Business

Christie Sanders - College of Engineering

Beth Rector - Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication

Trelle McGinnis Turner - School of Social Work

Matthew Zachary Head - Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources

Justin B Burnley - College of Education

Jennifer Eberhart – Exploratory Center

Paul Welch - School of Public and International Affairs

Rose Tahash - College of Environment & Design

Melissa Garber - College of Family and Consumer Sciences

Michael Bartlett - College of Pharmacy

Tier 2

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

Tier 3

Center for Leadership and Service, Center for Student Activities and Involvement, Disability Resource Center, Greek Life, International Student Life, LGBT Resource Center, Multicultural Services and Programs, recreational Sports, Student Veterans Resource Center, UGA Athletics – Academic Services, and the Division of Academic Enhancement

Tier 4

Undergraduate research pool - College of Education
Undergraduate research pool - Franklin College of Arts and Sciences.

APPENDIX G

CARA SIMMONS FACEBOOK POST REFERENCING PARENTS

Cara Winston Simmons
October 18, 2012 at 1:28pm · 8 Comments

student affairs prayer: Lord, don't let me be the parent or raise the kids we talk about in class.

Comment 1:
Do you think any of the Student Affairs aunties would let that happen?
October 18, 2012 at 1:44pm · Like · 2

Comment 2:
I think I am doomed. Already a helicopter parent.
October 18, 2012 at 1:46pm · Like

Comment 3:
Send Livie or MeMe to my school and see what happens...lol!
October 18, 2012 at 2:01pm · Like

Comment 4:
lol - you won't be 😊
October 18, 2012 at 2:20pm · Like

Comment 5:
I agree Cara, but you will be that helicopter parent, and we all know what we in Student Affairs think about helicopter parents. lol
October 18, 2012 at 3:24pm · Like

Comment 6:
You are soooooooo right!
October 18, 2012 at 3:24pm · Like

Comment 7:
Amen!
October 18, 2012 at 4:12pm · Like

Comment 8:
Amen!
October 18, 2012 at 11:51pm · Like

Write a comment... [emojis]

➦ Share

APPENDIX H
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Pseudonym:

Age:

Gender:

State or Country of Official Residence:

Major:

Race/Ethnicity:

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ White
- ☐ _____

How would you describe your socioeconomic status/income class?

- ☐ Lower-income
- ☐ Middle-income
- ☐ Higher income

What is the highest level of education of your parent/parent figure?

Parent/Parent Figure # 1:

Parent/Parent Figure # 2:

What does your parent/parent figure do for a living?

Parent/Parent Figure # 1:

Parent/Parent Figure # 2:

What is the income level of your parent/parent figure?

Parent/Parent Figure # 1:

Parent/Parent Figure # 2:

Did you travel or go on a family vacation with your family before coming to college?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, where did you go?

Were you the first in your family to attend college?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Are you responsible for paying any of your educational or non-educational expenses?

- ☐ Yes, all
☐ Yes, some
☐ No

Do you have a job?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, how many hours do you work per week?

- ☐ Less than 10 hours
☐ 11-20 hours
☐ 21 or more hours

Do you work:

- ☐ On-campus
☐ Off-campus

Do you have any scholarships?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Have you taken out any loans to pay for college or other expenses related to being in college?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have any siblings? Include how many & ages.

What best describes your marital status?

- ☐ Single, Never Married
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Living with a partner
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Do you have children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, how many children do you have? Ages?

APPENDIX I
MEMBERR CHECK EMAIL

Dear Participant,

Thank you again for taking the time to chat with me about you, your identity development, and your parent(s)/parent figure(s).

Attached you'll find your interview transcript. As you review, please do the following:

- *Focus on making any factual corrections and flag anything that might put you at risk. **Do not make any changes to the actual text.** Please use the comment option under the review tab in Word. You can also highlight or change the color of the txt, but it is important that you do not change the actual text.*

I will be sure to change or remove any specifics (like your name) before using this information in any quotes as I report the findings of this research.

Please send any corrections/flags, clarifications or additions back to me by 11:59pm on **Saturday, February 17, 2018**. If I do not hear from you by then, I will proceed assuming that you are comfortable with all the information included in this transcript not including any direct identifiers such as your real name if mentioned.

Thank you again for participating. I really enjoyed listening to your experiences!

Please let me know if you have any questions.