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EFFECTS OF THE FRONTIER ENVIRONMENT ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AMONG FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Kenli Ann Urruty

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Psychology

Approved:

Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D. Major Professor	Gretchen Gimpel Peacock, Ph.D. Committee Member
Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez, Ph.D. Committee Member	Susan Crowley, Ph.D. Committee Member
Troy Beckert, Ph.D. Committee Member	Byron Burnham, Ed.D. Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2011

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ABSTRACT

Effects of the Frontier Environment on Identity Development Among First Generation College Students

by

Kenli A. Urruty, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2011

Major Professor: Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.
Department: Psychology

The unique experience of first generation college students from frontier communities as they transition to college has not yet been explored in the literature. The current study was designed to explore those experiences and the ways the frontier context and first generation status shape identity development once these youth have left their families and home communities and made the transition to college. To gain a rich understanding of the experiences of first generation college students from frontier communities, this study employed a phenomenological qualitative design and the findings were interpreted through a social constructionist lens. Eleven emerging adults were recruited from Utah State University for the current study. In-depth interviews were conducted with all study participants. In addition, each participant brought an item of significance to the interview and responded to a member checking email.

Results of the study indicated that the emerging adults in the sample faced

challenges when making the transition to college, but that these challenges were also accompanied by positive experiences. Four themes emerged as relevant to the participants' identity formation in the college context: hard work, religion, appreciation for living simply, and importance of being a role model. For the current sample, their status as first generation students and the frontier context in which they were raised shaped their identities in unique ways. This interplay is discussed along with directions for future research.

(132 pages)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Postmodern qualitative research aims to understand the lived experiences of individuals by removing the authority of the researcher, thus it becomes important for the researcher to situate him or herself in the work (Glesne, 2006). As such, it is important that the researcher disclose the beliefs, values, views, feelings, and assumptions that he or she brings to the study (Norum, 2008b). Additionally, questions in qualitative research seek to contribute greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes. This aim is unlike the rationale behind typical research questions in quantitative research within psychology, which seek to identify the relationships between sets of variables (Glesne, 2006). Given the differences in qualitative and quantitative research and the tradition with psychology, the following introduction and literature review will attempt to satisfy the both the demands of a qualitative project, as well as those of a typical research study within psychology.

The Researcher

Growing up in a frontier community, I never thought about how that context influenced my development until I left my home town to attend college at a large out-of-state university. Upon my arrival on campus, I was instantly struck by the different contexts my peers and I hailed from and how these contexts suddenly became highly relevant to not only our life stories, but to the ways we engaged with the college setting.

Upon stepping foot on campus, I realized that the context in which I grew up was

relatively unique. The town I grew up in had three stoplights, several gas stations, a few fast food restaurants, and a downtown area that, with about seven businesses, seemed to me to be a bustling center of commerce. Shopping for groceries was a social event, as most everyone in the community knew each other and engaged in friendly conversation in the grocery aisles. The community connectedness of my hometown was an important part of my experience—because I had so many relationships, I felt like an important part of the community and was provided with an ever present social network.

Although I was not aware of it growing up, after leaving for college I soon realized that access healthcare and other services in my home community were scarce. For approximately two days each month my orthodontist travelled 220 miles round trip to serve residents of the community. While a dentist maintained a practice in my hometown, any specific needs were referred to a specialist whose practice was 170 miles away and in another state. Similarly, major medical problems were treated at medical facilities in neighboring states. The nearest Wal-Mart was 35 miles away and the nearest shopping mall a 110-mile drive. Needless to say, shopping trips were few and far between, thus they were a welcome and exciting activity. Growing up I never thought twice about travelling hundreds of miles and to other states to acquire needed goods and services.

My hometown has three schools—an elementary school, and middle school, and a high school. The schools really were the epicenter for activities in the community, and community members demonstrated great support for the local youth. Every week buses pulled out of the school parking lot, towing students to activities that took place in towns 30 to 200-plus miles away. Parents gladly followed in their own vehicles, as support for

youth was an important value in the community. Community members often travelled over 100 miles to watch local students participate in state tournaments. This community support was something I valued and it very much tied me to the community where I was raised.

The population of my hometown wavered between 3,000 and 3,800, with changes in job availability related to natural resource extraction creating an economic base that was somewhat variable. My hometown is the county seat, and there are several very small communities peppered throughout the county, most of which are not identified as towns in the US Census because they are unincorporated. At the time I was in high school, the school had about 350 students, some of whom travelled well over 20 miles one way to attend school each day. The small population within the school created an intimate environment where, truly, everybody knew everybody.

While the description above likely surprises many, it is a depiction of everyday life for those who reside in frontier communities. Moving to college and subsequently realizing the unique characteristics of the town in which I was raised sparked my curiosity in how sense of self is formed. Throughout my time as an undergraduate, I observed not only my own experiences, but the experiences of my peers as well. I found myself constantly questioning who I was and how that person was being shaped. At the time I was completely unaware of how my observations and the questions that circled in my mind would one day influence my professional interests.

As I moved on from my undergraduate work and progressed through graduate school, I became more and more aware of common developmental processes for

emerging adults. Through clinical training and involvement in research, I also started to think about the many ways context influences who we are as people. As I began to immerse myself in the literature on identity development, I became aware of the experiences of ethnic minority and sexual minority individuals as they go through the process of establishing identity and how their contexts influence that development.

Throughout the time I was learning about identity development and context, I was also pursuing clinical training in the field of psychology. This training encouraged me to question myself, my understandings of the world, and how who I am and what I know was developed. As I considered my own experiences and how they influence my work with clients, I also became aware of how who I am and where I come from influence my research interests. I came to the realization that my frontier upbringing is a central part of my identity, and that my experiences in a frontier context shape the lens through which I look at the world. From there I began to seek out literature on how the frontier context shapes identity as youth transition to college, and was surprised to find that this question has not yet been addressed in the literature to date. Subsequently, I chose to pursue this area of interest and my dissertation was born. Therefore, this project sought to tell a compelling story about how first generation college students from frontier communities in the Intermountain West construct their identities and self-understandings as they make the transition to college. In keeping with the qualitative tradition, this project was not formed on the basis of logical deduction or the need to identify particular interventions for the youth in my sample. Rather, this project is based on the need to tell the story of these individuals and make their experiences known. Potential interventions that may

arise from this work are a nice complement to it, but were not the driving force behind the project.

The Study

The transition from high school to college or university is often described as a time of increased freedom and greater opportunity for learning. During this time, lifelong friendships are formed; career decisions are made; and memories are created. Often the college years are remembered as some of the best of an individual's life. They are retrospectively described as a time of excitement, change, and growth as young adults attempt to answer the question, "Who am I now?" While many fondly recall this formative time in the development of identity, the context within which identity development occurs is inherently important to the process. Some college students hail from bustling cities, while others come from mid-sized towns, and yet others make the transition to college from small, isolated communities. Each of these contexts is important to the process of establishing an identity and must be considered in light of additional contextual variables.

While the transition to college is often viewed with much excitement, individuals who must leave home to attend college often feel particular distress as a result of the transition (Chow & Healey, 2008; Tagnoli, 2003). According to Yorke and Longden (2004, p. 40) students often find the first year experience "daunting, intimidating, and alienating." This distress may be particularly relevant for youth from frontier communities who are the first in their families to attend college. Many of these youth

grew up in close-knit, isolated communities where simply being themselves gave them worth, value, and purpose. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these young people generally either integrate their frontier identity into a new identity, or become so distraught with the challenge that they leave school and return to their home communities. These youth describe difficulty finding a way to acknowledge and preserve the frontier parts of themselves, while simultaneously building an identity that is functional across contexts. In addition, they are often faced with the challenge of navigating the college environment which is not only new to them, but to their parents as well. While the challenge of integrating one's frontier values and first generation status into a current self-definition is often described when emerging adults are questioned about their transition to college, it is a construct that has not been addressed in the literature to date. This gap in the literature is important to address in order to develop a better understanding of the unique process first generation college students from frontier communities undergo as they develop a sense of self away from their home communities.

Many models of identity development have been proposed in the literature. While some models propose identity development to be a linear progression (Erikson, 1950; Marcia, 1966), others suggest that identity development occurs in relation to context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In a special issue of the *Journal of Adolescence*, Bosma and Kunnen (2008) called attention to the importance of considering the person-context interaction over time in the process of identity development. They also highlighted the need for additional research on identity in emerging adulthood due to the significant identity development that takes place during this time. Given the unique implications of

the frontier context and first generation college student status on the process of identity development, particularly after emerging adults have made the transition to college, the current study and its attempt to tell the story of these youth will fill an important gap in the literature.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Given the dearth of literature on the process of identity development for first generation college students from frontier communities, the following literature review examines the literature on identity development processes generally, as well as variables that are likely associated with the identity development experiences of first generation students from frontier communities. Thus, the literature review will be broken down and discussed in the following categories: (a) contextual description of rural and frontier communities, (b) challenges and outcomes for first generation college students, (c) identity defined and models of identity development, (d) identity development among rural and frontier youth, (e) rural/frontier values, (f) community identity, and (g) the transition to college as a unique identity development context. The literature review will summarize research on each group of factors listed above, and special emphasis will be placed on their relevance for frontier-emerging adults.

Contextual Description of Rural and Frontier Communities

Understanding frontier communities and their unique characteristics is crucial to understanding how this context influences identity development. The following review will discuss rural communities broadly, and then transition into a specific discussion of frontier communities and the unique context they provide. The sheer isolation of frontier communities makes them different from rural and urban areas in the United States, thus emphasis will be placed on the pervasive influence of isolation on the frontier context.

Rural

Rural communities comprise an important, yet often overlooked sector of the United States. The US Bureau of the Census defines rural as an area of 2,500 or fewer persons or open countryside. In contrast, urban areas consist of cities with 50,000 or more inhabitants and the closely settled areas surrounding those cities that are economically tied to them (US Census Bureau, 2007). Additional definitions of rural have been proposed, yet no definition to date has entirely captured the varying composition of rural communities across the country. However, the undeniable thread that ties rural areas across the United States together is the invariably low population density (Stamm, 2003).

Rural areas of the United States comprise over 80% of the land and contain 20% of the population, which corresponds to over 54 million people. In the 1990's, rural areas saw a significant influx of residents, and boasted a growth rate greater than that of urban areas (Stamm, 2003). Johnson and Beale (1999) referred to this population increase as the "rural rebound," and noted that the Mountain West, Upper Great Lakes, Ozarks, and rural areas of the South and Northeast saw the greatest population gains. While no clear explanation for this growth has been identified, improved quality of life is assumed to be the reason for the increase.

Rural populations differ from urban or metropolitan populations in important ways regarding demographic information and health characteristics. Rural areas have a larger proportion of elderly residents and a smaller proportion of minority residents (Stamm, 2003). The self-reported health status of those in rural areas is more likely to be fair or poor, and the prevalence of physician-diagnosed chronic conditions is higher than

for those living in urban areas. In rural communities, income is lower, while poverty and unemployment are higher than in urban centers. Additionally, rural residents have lower levels of insurance coverage, a lower likelihood of receiving prescription drug coverage, and lesser benefits. Rural residents also face greater difficulty obtaining sufficient services. Rural areas have fewer health care providers who generally have less training than health care providers in urban centers. In addition to the lack of providers, residents often face longer travel distances to obtain services (Stamm, 2003).

Rural communities are often economically unstable as well. In many rural communities, particularly those that are located far from an urban center, there is little manufacturing. Primary sources of income are typically tourism, ranching, farming, logging, and natural resource extraction. Even subsistence economies, which rely on gardening, hunting, and gathering, are common is some rural areas (Stamm, 2003).

Frontier

When considering the unique characteristics of rural areas, it is important to discuss frontier America and the ways the frontier is different from even rural areas. The frontier is comprised of the most sparsely populated rural areas. Currently, a frontier county is defined as having a population density of fewer than seven persons per square mile. Given this definition, there are 394 frontier counties in 26 states. As a group, frontier counties constitute 45% of the land mass but less than 1% of the population (Frontier Mental Health Services Resource Network, 2011; Stamm, 2003).

States with frontier populations are identified and ranked based on two variables, the total population of a state’s frontier counties, and the percentage of frontier county

residents within a state. States are divided into Categories I through IV, with Category I comprised of those states with the highest number of residents living in frontier counties. In the United States, there are 26 states with frontier counties, and six states are considered Category I. Category I states are those with more than 15% of their population living in frontier counties, or a total frontier population greater than 250,000. The Category I states are Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Idaho. Of the six states, Wyoming has the highest percentage of the population living in frontier counties, with 18 of its 23 counties considered to be frontier (Frontier Mental Health Services Resource Network, 2011).

The majority of the frontier states are located in the Western United States, and are different from other rural areas, as well as the rest of the U.S. Individuals in frontier areas must not only overcome extreme weather conditions and difficult terrain, but also must deal with the impact of few people and long distances. It is not uncommon for individuals residing in frontier communities to drive up to 200 miles to receive health services, and some may even drive 50 to 100 miles just for groceries (Stamm, 2003). The lack of people, especially those who can provide health care, and the sheer distance to services, make living in frontier communities a challenge.

Duncan (1993) summarized the frontier experience and the influence of isolation and few people when he stated:

> People in these regions have always had to adapt to weather and terrain, but the counties of the contemporary frontier have made a further adaptation to their unique paucity of people. Healthcare, education, religion, politics, law and order, transportation, communication, sense of community, sense of self, even the act of finding a mate—virtually every human institution and activity demonstrates the impact of few people and long miles. (p. 17)

The above statement truly exemplifies the unique aspects of living in a frontier environment and the pervasive ways the isolation of frontier communities influences daily life. As Duncan pointed out, even sense of self is impacted by the frontier context. The dearth of literature on frontier areas in general, and the influence of the frontier on sense of self specifically, make the identity development experiences of emerging adults from frontier communities important to understand.

Challenges and Outcomes for First Generation Students from Frontier Communities

When addressing educational outcomes for first generation college students from frontier communities, it is important to address first generation college students and frontier youth separately. Because retention statistics for frontier youth specifically are not available, the following discussion will focus on rural youth. Within the literature, first generation college students have been identified as more at risk for college dropout than youth from rural areas (Gibbs, 1989; Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009). As such, the higher education outcomes for first generation college students will first be considered, followed by the outcomes for students from rural communities. This research is particularly important to consider because it highlights the challenges first generation college students and rural/frontier youth face as they make the transition to college, which may serve to inform the processes by which their identities are shaped during the transition to college.

First Generation College Students

First generation college students have been identified as at risk for completing college when compared to students whose parents hold college degrees (Ishitani, 2003; Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, & Carroll, 2001). Using data from a nationally representative sample of educational statistics, Horn and Carroll (1998) found that 10% of students whose parents held bachelor's degrees withdrew from college over the first year of enrollment at 4-year institutions. However, 23.4% of students whose parents held high school diplomas or lower withdrew during the same time period. Given the discrepancy in early withdrawal rates for first generation students and those students whose parents hold college degrees, it is important to acknowledge the factors related to this discrepancy that have been identified in the literature to date.

Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) found that parental involvement was highly predictive of educational attainment and postsecondary aspirations. However, parents who do not have college degrees might be unfamiliar with college life and expectations, thus creating a disadvantage for their children who aspire to attain college degrees (Martinez et al., 2009). In addition to the relevance of parents' educational attainment, first generation students also generally report feeling less prepared academically for college and have lower aspirations for degree attainment when compared to their peers (Bui, 2002).

Bui (2002) also acknowledged the financial difficulty many first generation students face. Many first generation students report that they lack funds to pay for their education. Self-reported lack of funds is well established as a correlate of attrition (Tinto,

1993). In addition, first generation students are more likely to hold full-time jobs (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terezini, 2004) than their peers, which has been highly correlated to attrition as well (Martinez et al., 2009).

In addition to educational and financial challenges, first generation college students often experience sociocultural challenges when transitioning to the college environment. London (1992) explored the cultural issues faced by first generation students and found that many related the transition to college as being like leaving one culture and moving to another. London also found that students reported that they experienced tension with family members when they engaged in “educated” activities, because family members perceived them as becoming estranged from their roots. Consistent with this theme, Bryan and Simmons (2009) found that most participants in their qualitative study of 10 first generation students described feeling like they were two different people after transitioning to college: one at home and one at school. Many of these participants also reported that going to college had magnified the differences between themselves and many of the people in their families and communities.

In summary, the challenges first generation students face in comparison to their peers cannot be ignored. First generation students face educational, financial, and sociocultural challenges that are unique to their status as the first in their families to attend college. Whether or not these challenges hold true for the youth in the current study will be important to explore as they provide important information about understanding the experiences of first generation students from frontier communities. In addition, results of the current study may present avenues for developing interventions to

meet the needs of these students.

Frontier Youth

While literature regarding educational outcomes for rural youth is available, frontier youth are not identified and described specifically within the literature. Therefore, this review will address retention rates for rural youth and will pay particular attention to the experiences of rural youth who attend large universities. Some of the themes described below will be particularly salient for youth from frontier communities, because frontier students come from environments characterized by even lower population density and less access to resources than youth from rural communities.

Surprisingly, data regarding the college retention rates for youth from rural schools compared to youth from urban or suburban schools are not typically obtained. In fact, neither Utah State University nor the Utah Board of Regents currently have any data on the higher education outcomes for students based on the communities they come from. Thus, this review will be based on the most recent comprehensive study of rural college student persistence available. In this study, Gibbs (1989) used a national sample to compare college attendance and persistence of 12,000 rural and urban students using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. From this review, Gibbs concluded that although rural students were slightly less likely than urban students to attend college, those who did attend college typically graduated at the same rate as urban students. A second study by Schonert, Elliot, and Bills (1991) examined the college persistence patterns of rural students from Iowa. The rural youth in this sample attended college and persisted at higher rates than the national average.

While the findings presented by Gibbs (1989) and Schonert and colleagues (1991) provide encouraging information about the college persistence of rural youth, they also reveal some surprising results. Schonert and colleagues found that the rural students in their sample who left college tended to have the highest leadership positions in their high schools and the highest standardized test scores, which is interesting because these are typically indicators of college success. The primary hypothesis for the finding was that rural students experience difficulty at large colleges and universities, and often transfer to smaller schools because they are unable to find what they need at a large university (Schonert et al., 1991). Aylesworth and Bloom (1976) came to a similar conclusion in their study of freshman at the University of Colorado. They found that attrition rates for rural students were consistently higher than for urban students. However, Aylesworth and Bloom discovered that the rural students who left the university tended to transfer to another institution, while the urban students typically left to get away from higher education all together. Thus, like Schonert and colleagues, they concluded that many rural students did not find what they needed at the large university where the study was conducted. While these studies are admittedly old, they provide important information about college retention rates for rural youth, as well as potential challenges frontier youth may face in attending a large institution, such as Utah State University.

Summary

The findings of the studies presented above provide important information that will likely pertain to the experiences of the students in the current study. Scanlon, Rowling, and Weber (2007) described the transition to college as an experience often

marked by lack of connectedness and involvement. They also acknowledged that students are likely to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. Given the educational, financial, and sociocultural challenges first generation college students from frontier communities are likely to face, they may be particularly vulnerable to difficulties as they make the transition to the large university from which the sample was drawn. Attending to these potential challenges and how they influence the students as they make the transition to college will be important in understanding how they construct their identities in the new environment the college context presents.

Identity Defined and Models of Identity Development

Before examining the identity development experiences of frontier emerging adults, it is important to first define identity and to then examine models of identity development that have been discussed in the literature to date. The following discussion of identity development models will focus on two primary conceptualizations of identity development: essentialist theories and social constructionist theories.

Identity Defined

For the purposes of the current study, a definition of identity proposed by Jossleson (1987, p. 10) was utilized. Josselson defined identity as:

> The stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. It integrates one's meaning to oneself and one's meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one's life. (p. 10).

In further discussion of identity, Josselson (1987) pointed to the importance of

contrasting ourselves with others to understand what is uniquely individual about each of us. She also discussed the ways that this aspect of identity formation results in self-construal in context. In other words, we are uniquely shaped by the contexts in which we live our lives. Given this conceptualization of identity, it makes sense that the frontier context would have a compelling impact on identity development.

Essentialist Theories

Evidence suggests that amidst the challenges of adolescence and emerging adulthood, youth work to define self-concept through increased emotional independence, as well as increasing autonomy (Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Erikson, 1950). Various theories lend support to the understanding of this process of identity development. Essentialist theorists hold that identity development is a linear process, in which one "achieves" his or her own identity through a series of stages. Two examples of essentialist theories are those of Erik Erikson and James Marcia. Berzonsky (1990) adapted an identity processing style theory designed to complement Marcia's model of identity development.

Erik Erikson's theory on the stages of development across the life span is well-known in the field of human development. Erikson's theory is based on the principle that development occurs in a series of stages, and that the resolution of early stages is necessary for the resolution of later stages (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). Erikson (1950) posited that there are eight psychosocial tasks, or crises, that take on special significance at different points in the life cycle. He outlined crises that occur during infancy, toddlerhood, preschool, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and

late adulthood. For Erikson, the salient crisis during adolescence is identity versus role diffusion.

According to Erikson (1950), the crisis of identity versus role diffusion involves the challenge of establishing a sense of ego identity. Ego identity results from accrued confidence that one's internal sense of sameness and continuity is congruent with the view of others. In essence, the people with whom the adolescent interacts serve as a mirror that reflects back information about who the adolescent is and ought to be. In Erikson's original work, ego identity was established when an individual could identify a "career." Erikson warned of the possibility that adolescents would experience role diffusion, rather than ego identity. Erikson described role diffusion as the inability to establish an occupational identity, which he viewed as quite disturbing to young people. Throughout his work, Erikson emphasized the importance of both social and mental processes in developing a sense of identity.

Marcia (1966) used the work of Erikson to develop a measure of the identity exploration process and psychosocial criteria for determining degree of ego identity. Marcia rated individuals on two dimensions: the degree to which they have made commitments, and the degree to which they engaged in a sustained exploration in the process of making commitments (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001). On the basis of these ratings, Marcia derived four statuses for characterizing an individual's development toward a mature identity: Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure, and Diffusion.

Marcia's model functions on the premise that self-exploration is a process of

examination and discovery of whom and what one might be, with commitment to an identity being the consolidation of this process (Berman et al., 2001). Thus, exploration is seen as a basic process underlying the formation of identity. As mentioned above, exploration is an essential dimension Marcia used to define the four statuses of ego identity. Marcia (1966) defined identity achievement as a status in which one has established a coherent sense of identity after a period of crisis and exploration. During moratorium the individual is in the middle of crisis and exploration, thus has not established a coherent sense of identity. Individuals in the identity foreclosure status have made commitments to a particular identity without a period of crisis and exploration. Finally, individuals in the identity diffusion status have not made commitments to a particular identity, but are also not currently engaged in the exploration process (Steinberg, 2008).

Berzonsky (1990) proposed that individuals within the various identity statuses outlined by Marcia (1966) adopt a characteristic style of processing information that functions within a particular status. He called these approaches to processing information identity processing styles. Berzonsky outlined three identity processing styles: informational style, normative style, and diffuse/avoidant style. According to Berzonsky, informational style is associated with achievement and moratorium, normative style is associated with foreclosure, and diffuse/avoidant style is associated with diffusion. Berzonsky considered his identity processing styles to be less developmental than the identity statuses proposed by Marcia. In Berzonsky's view, identity-processing styles are not used in the process of resolving identity versus role diffusion. Rather, identity

processing style is viewed as the type of social-cognitive strategy that individuals prefer in seeking successful identity resolution and is relatively stable over time.

According to Berzonsky (1990), individuals with the informational style actively seek out, evaluate, and use self-relevant information. These individuals are willing to revise aspects of their identity when confronted with feedback that is incongruent with their views of self. As such, this style is characteristic of individuals classified as achieved or in moratorium, due to their active self-exploration (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Individuals with the normative style of information processing deal with challenges to identity by conforming to the expectations of others. While they are conscientious and agreeable, they have little tolerance for ambiguity and a strong need for structure (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000). Therefore, they are classified as foreclosed according to Marcia's paradigm (1966) because these individuals commit to a particular identity without first partaking in a process of exploration. Berzonsky's third information processing style, diffuse/avoidant, is characterized by individuals' reluctance to confront personal problems and decisions. These individuals typically procrastinate, rely on others to make decisions, and utilize maladaptive decision making strategies. Given their lack of commitment to a particular identity, coupled with their disengagement from actively seeking an identity, diffuse/avoidant individuals would be classified in the diffuse status according to Marcia (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000).

Social Constructionist Perspectives

While Erikson (1950) and Marcia (1966) provided the foundational models for research on identity development, more recent researchers have rejected the essentialist

approach, stating identity development does not happen in a “linear, lock-step formation” (Savin-Williams, 2005) and have drawn on social constructionist conceptualizations of identity development for a more accepted understanding of this process. Rooted in Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) social constructionist perspective, recent researchers suggest identity development is a fluid process, gaining meaning within specific contexts and cultures. From a social constructionist perspective, we experience the world as orderly and structured. Through language, we make sense of worldly chaos and order, relating our experiences to others. These shared experiences themselves carry meaning only within particular societies and groups. Thus, through our social contexts we create, make, and define our experiences. From a social constructionist perspective, an emerging adult’s identity development experience is individual and unique, shaped by a myriad of contextual variables. Recently, researchers have focused on the contextual influences in sexual minority (e.g., Richardson, 1993) and ethnic minority (e.g., Mayeda & Okamoto, 2002) populations from a social constructionist perspective. Despite the importance of social context on the development of meaning and one’s identity, little research has addressed identity development among frontier populations, specifically frontier emerging adults.

Intersection of Essentialist and Social Constructionist Perspectives

While essentialist and social constructionist perspectives are often thought of as two distinct paradigms, there is in fact substantial convergence between the two (Lichtwarck-Aschoff, van Geert, Bosma, & Kunnen, 2008). Lichtwarck-Aschoff and

colleagues point out the emphasis Erikson placed on the continuous interaction between person and context. As Erikson (1968) stated, identity formation is "…a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (p. 22). Erikson (1968) also underscored the importance of the interplay between individual and context when he stated, "The identity formation of a person is always inextricably interwoven with his or her immediate and wider context. Person and context become inseparable in the process of development" (p. 24). Given this interplay, neither the essentialist nor the social constructionist perspective can be entirely rejected in favor of the other. However, developing an understanding of the identity development experiences of first generation students from frontier communities will be approached from a social constructionist perspective for the purposes of this study.

Given the importance of context outlined above, it is important to pay particular attention to the aspect of identity formation that is situated in attachment to context when developing an understanding of identity development during the transition to college. Milligan (2003) pointed out that a change of context (such as the move to college) may result in feelings of loss and subsequent identity discontinuity. This sense of loss resulting not only from the loss of social contacts, but also from the loss of place, necessitates the formation of a new identity (Scanlon et al., 2007). This emphasis on the identity reconfiguration that results from a change in context is also supported by the dynamic systems theory approach to identity development described by Lichtwarck-Aschoff and colleagues (2008).

Identity Development During Emerging Adulthood

Within a discussion of models of identity development, it is also important to note the origins of identity development as a construct primarily relevant to early adolescence. Despite the initial emphasis on identity development as a process salient to young adolescents, large scale demographic shifts in the age at which young adults get married and become parents have taken place since Erikson and Marcia first outlined their theories of identity development. This demographic shift led Arnett (2000) to outline the term "emerging adulthood." Emerging adulthood is a time when individuals have left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, but have not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative of adulthood. During this time period, emerging adults are actively exploring possible life paths related to work, love, and worldviews. Emerging adulthood is truly a time of life when many directions are possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, and when the scope of exploration of life's possibilities is at its maximum (Arnett, 2000).

Given the many possible paths associated with emerging adulthood, it is the time of life when most identity exploration takes place (Arnett, 2000). Thus, Arnett (2007) asserted that the identity crisis Erikson described as central to adolescence now takes place during emerging adulthood. Côté (2006) claimed that the new temporality of the identity crisis resulting from the prolonged transitional period between childhood and adulthood has unique implications for identity development. He called for new research aimed at examining the variety of experiences among emerging adults now facing the challenges and opportunities that come with emerging adulthood. Consistent with Côté's

call for further research, the current study sheds light on the identity development experiences a subgroup of emerging adults—first generation college students from frontier communities.

Identity Development Among Rural and Frontier Youth

Again, given the lack of literature on the experiences of frontier youth, the following discussion will review current research related to the identity development experiences of rural youth. The extent to which identity development progresses differently among adolescents living in urban and rural environments was reviewed by Nurmi, Poole, and Kalakoski (1996). In a sample of urban adolescents, Nurmi and colleagues found the relationships between levels of identity exploration and commitment and future education as well as identity exploration and future occupation, increased between the ages of 13 and 17. However, for rural adolescents, the authors found a weaker relationship between exploration and commitment and both education and future occupation. These results were assumed to reflect the lack of educational opportunities and career prospects in rural regions. The results also indicated that adolescents living in rural areas demonstrated higher levels of exploration related to future family than those living in urban areas. These findings are important because they suggest that age-related increases in identity exploration and commitment may be dependent on the sociocultural context in which adolescents live. Additionally, these results indicate that the social values typical of the context the adolescent lives in may play an important role in identity formation.

Rural/Frontier Values

The identification and discussion of rural values is relevant in the conceptualization of contextual influences on identity development. Rural values are aspects of life that are particularly salient to rural communities and are fundamental components of rural livelihood. Very little research exists which examines frontier values specifically, and as such, the limited literature related to currently held beliefs about rural values will be discussed below.

Community Attachment

Community attachment is a concept that encompasses residents' emotional and sentimental attachments to a particular community, and is a noteworthy area of interest in relation to rural communities (Brehm, Eisenhauer, & Krannich, 2004). Ties to a particular community are often considered to be a value of rural residents and are thought to play an important role in retaining residents in a particular community. Two dimensions of community attachment have been delineated by researchers: the role of social relationships and the role of the natural environment (Brehm et al., 2004). Brehm and colleagues collected data on two communities in the Intermountain West: Star Valley, Wyoming and Wayne County, Utah. They found social relationships to be important to residents' wellbeing. They also found that social relationships were highly tied to religion in the study sample. Both communities in the study had a high percentage of residents who belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), which provided a profound social attachment for church members. Additionally, length of residence was a

strong predictor for social attachment, with those who had resided in the communities longer indicating higher social attachment. Thus, both church involvement and length of residence were strong predictors for connection to the social environment.

With regard to youth, Pretty, Bramston, Patrick, and Pannach (2006) highlighted the importance of community attachment in their study of 3,023 rural Australian adolescents (13-18 years) with their finding that adolescent sense of community and social belonging was linked to intention to remain in their home communities. Similarly, Pretty, Chipuer, and Bramston (2003) found a stronger social sense of community was a discriminating factor for both adolescents' and adults' belief that they would like to stay in their particular community. As such, social relationships are important in the development of a strong sense of community attachment.

Brehm and colleagues (2004) also addressed the role of natural environment in community attachment. They noted that, although both length of residence and religion are associated with strong social relationships, they were unrelated to natural environment attachment. This research evidence indicates that community attachment extends beyond the social relationships that occur in a locality, and supports the commonly held belief that ties to land are an important rural value. Thus, the land, particularly public land, is an integral part of communities and provides a crucial link to community identity (Brehm et al., 2004). The importance of land was also emphasized in a qualitative study of the ways rural farm women in Ontario, Canada shape their identities (Cummins, 2005). In her review, Cummins found that the material possession of the farm, and more specifically the land, was important in the construction of self and

identity for women. This research suggests that not only public land, but privately owned land as well, provides a crucial link to identity among rural residents. Similar findings have been demonstrated in samples of elderly rural residents (e.g., Cook, Martin, Years, & Damhorst, 2007; Dorfman, Murty, Evans, Ingram, & Power, 2004; Shenk, David, Peacock, & Moore, 2002).

Self-Reliance and Resilience

Self-reliance and resilience are also commonly considered to be values among residents in rural communities. In a study of the strategies of health-information seeking among a sample of 40 rural women in Ontario, Canada, Wathen and Harris (2007) found that self-reliance was a dominant theme in many interviews. Women often mentioned the importance of being prepared to personally deal with health situations that arise. Participant statements highlighted the personal importance of knowing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and having the knowledge to manage one's own health problems. One woman mentioned letting her husband sleep while she tried to work through significant chest pains with her *Doctor's Book of Home Remedies*. Another woman did not visit the emergency room after breaking her arm because she did not want to "bother the doctor or tie up the emergency room" (Wathen & Harris, 2007, p. 643). Dorfman and colleagues (2004) also highlighted the importance of self-reliance as a salient rural value in their interviews conducted with 37 rural elders in a small Midwestern community.

Leipert and Reutter (2005) highlighted the importance of resiliency in their assessment of women living in northern British Columbia, Canada. In their study 25 women engaged in qualitative interviews over a two year time period. Specifically, the

authors studied the women's responses to health risks related to geographical isolation and lack of access to resources. Leipert and Reutter outlined three strategies by which northern women developed resilience. First, participants believed that to live in the North, an individual needed to be hardy, characterized by an increased feeling of confidence and the ability to carry on despite adversity. Secondly, participants described making the best of their lives in the North, utilizing available resources. Third, the women also described their attempts to supplement and enrich the resources available, thereby minimizing the negative influence of factors such as geographical isolation and lack of goods and services. In all, participant statements highlighted the theme of resiliency as an integral part of survival in isolated, northern communities.

Religion

Religion is commonly considered to be another important rural value. In a qualitative study of the identity formation experiences of 22 rural Canadian adolescents, Good and Willoughby (2007) found that church-attending adolescents expressed greater feelings of connectedness to their community than adolescents who did not attend church. Additionally, adolescents who did not attend church indicated that they planned to migrate from their rural hometown to pursue careers in urban centers more frequently than their church-attending peers. Good and Willoughby suggested that church involvement facilitates community connectedness for adolescents, although it is not the only route to connection with the community. Similar findings of religious participation and community connectedness have been highlighted in older adult samples (Dorfman et al., 2004; Shenk et al., 2002).

Given the above findings, it is important to draw a distinction between values and practices. In the case of religion, it appears as though religion is in fact a practice that facilitates the values of community connection and relationship formation. Thus, it is likely more accurate to say that the practice of religion provides a means through which the rural values of community connectedness and community attachment play out.

Gender

Within a discussion of rural values and their impact on rural culture, it is important to mention gender role socialization within rural communities. It is a commonly held conception that gender roles, characterized by males as providers and females as caregivers, are a fixture in rural culture and the rural idyll (Little & Panelli, 2003). Researchers have noted that rural communities are often patriarchal in nature, with men experiencing substantial authority and control. At the same time, the expectation of women is that they nurture and maintain care giving practices within the community (Dempsey, 1992; Poiner, 1990).

Stamm (2003) discussed the unique characteristics of rural men. She stated that rural men typically adhere to a more traditional code of masculinity that prescribes rules such as “real men don’t cry,” and that also prohibits emotional expression. Stamm acknowledged that rural men are typically focused on preserving public image and reputation, given their residence in communities where “everybody knows everybody.” However, despite the emphasis on emotional suppression, rural men tend to be relationship oriented due to the intimate interactions that come out of living in a small community. As such, rural men are more likely to lend a hand to neighbors, or even to

relative strangers, than urban men.

Women in rural and frontier communities also experience a unique set of gender role expectations. Little and Panelli (2003) discussed the ways that typical rural leisure activities, such as rural sports, are in fact masculine contexts that have significant implications for women. In addition, the traditional agricultural jobs in rural communities are stereotypically constructed as masculine occupations. Despite the masculine construction of agricultural jobs and the emphasis on women as nurturers, women in frontier communities regularly engage in physical work on farms and ranches (Stamm, 2003). Therefore the gender role values in frontier communities allow women greater flexibility in their work roles, although rural women still face barriers to working off the farm, such as access to childcare and low wages (Little & Panelli, 2003). Stamm (2003) pointed to the need for greater research on the gender role expectations of rural women in light of the diversity of rural residents as well as rural women's underrepresentation in the literature.

Considering the gender role socialization experiences of males and females in rural communities, Morris (2008) completed an important ethnographic study of a small, rural high school in Ohio. He sought to explore the achievement gap between boys and girls in the school, as girls were consistently outperforming males academically. Morris collected field notes and conducted interviews with 15 students over a period of 2 years. Morris concluded that gender is not the cause of academic differences between boys and girls, but rather academic behavior is employed in constructing gender. His findings indicated that boys seek masculine privilege in a way that hinders them academically.

Thus, gender differences in academic achievement are the result of males seeking superiority and masculine dominance. He attributed this behavior to the ways in which rural masculinity is defined, which encourages males to behave in ways consistent with physical prowess and involvement in physical labor, rather than intellect and academic success.

Given the research on rural gender role socialization as a whole, it will be important to attend to the ways in which participants understand how they have been influenced by gender roles. While Morris (2008) found that rural boys often underachieved academically in order to assert their male privilege through physical pursuits, it is unlikely that the gap in male and female academic achievement will be as dramatic in the current sample due to the college enrollment of the participants. It is likely that the participants, particularly males, have rejected pieces of the gender roles and, in fact, value academic achievement. Despite this probable difference, the socialization experiences of rural males and females will undoubtedly influence the sample and will be mentioned when the findings are discussed.

Community Identity

While the research described above delineates commonly held rural values, it is important to note that research also suggests that popularly held beliefs about the differences between rural and urban environments impact individuals' experiences of living in rural communities. In fact, research suggests that many individuals move to rural communities due to popularly held ideals such as community closeness, slow pace

of life, and closeness to nature (Bell, 1992). As such, many rural residents believe that they belong in a community characterized by typical small-town ideals. Therefore, community identity—or the interpretation that one uses community as a locus of attachment and an image for self-characterization (Hummon, 1986)—is highly relevant to the identity development of frontier emerging adults.

In a study analyzing how United States residents choose a community identity as a city person, suburbanite, small-town person, or country person, Hummon (1986) found that individuals who characterized themselves as small-town or country people often rejected what they perceived to be “city” ways. In his interviews with 77 people from California, Hummon identified numerous ways country people used images of rural life to construct their identities. Reflected in many of these images are the commonly held rural values discussed above. For example, many noted that they were interested in nature and the outdoors, and had interests such as hunting and fishing. They also described country people as open and friendly, independent and self-sufficient, and practical. Many people believed that rural life gave them a broad background of experiences. One individual described himself as a jack-of-all-trades and acknowledged that he felt better-rounded when he began college because he knew how to cook and tune-up a car, which other students did not know.

Bell (1992) reported similar findings among residents of England. In his study, rural residents echoed the importance of commonly held rural values, such as slow pace of life, rejection of materialism, and perceived safety, as important pieces of their community identities. In fact, in his study Bell found that participants in the rural

community where data were collected used four general rules to determine whether an individual could be considered a “real” country person. The first, localism, referred to long-term residence in the town. The second rule, ruralism, referred to long-term residence in any rural community. The third, countryism, referred to participation in country activities such as farming and hunting. The fourth and final rule, communalism, referred to the residents’ participation in community activities, such as church committees and community sports teams. Bell found that these four rules were salient in rural residents’ individual community identities, as well as to their recognition of others as true community members. From the studies mentioned above, it is clear that rural values are important in establishing a community identity. However, the way community identity impacts the identity development of emerging adults after they make the transition to college is not yet well understood.

Emerging Adults’ Transition to College

The rural context, rural values, and community identity are all important to understanding the process of identity development for frontier, first generation students, and the transition to college provides a developmental challenge that may also highlight the unique experiences of frontier youth. Developing an understanding of the typical experiences youth have as they transition away from home is important to understanding the identity development experiences of first generation students from frontier communities. Leaving one’s family of origin or leaving one’s home community is a common experience as youth transition away from childhood and adolescence and move

toward emerging adulthood. Factors such as changes in identity, place attachment, and homesickness, are important to understanding emerging adults' experiences as they leave home.

Changes in Identity

Some literature has addressed changes in identity as adolescents move away from home and make the transition into emerging adulthood. Cassidy and Trew (2001) surveyed a sample of 292 emerging adults during their final year of high school and again during their first year of college or university. To their surprise, identity appeared to be considerably stable despite the transition, although students reported less centrality, or importance, of previously held identities. For example, students frequently reported less centrality of religious and political identities, but greater centrality of student identity and identities based on personal relationships. Cassidy and Trew attributed this finding to the greater heterogeneity of the university campus, which allowed both exposure to and opportunity to explore possible identities. While Cassidy and Trew's study did not address identity changes for those moving to college from a rural environment, the exposure to a more heterogeneous environment will be particularly salient for frontier emerging adults, who often come from communities that are homogenous in regards to ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation.

Jordyn and Byrd (2003) found that college students' place of residence impacted the process of identity development. Jordyn and Byrd examined the relationship between university students' living arrangements, identity development status (Marcia, 1966), and life difficulties. They found that students who lived on their own, rather than with their

families, felt they were under more time pressure and were more subject to annoyances. Additionally, those in moratorium (Marcia, 1966) were less likely to use coping strategies to manage their environments when living independently. The authors interpreted their findings to suggest that, while most feel pressure to leave home to establish an adult identity, some individuals may leave home before they are ready to cope with the challenge of independent living. Therefore, readiness for making the transition away from home will be important to consider when developing an understanding of the process of identity development among emerging adults. Additionally, given that most frontier emerging adults must move away from their family of origin to attend college, understanding readiness to leave home becomes particularly salient.

The social constructionist theory of identity development (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) is salient to the work of Scanlon and colleagues (2007). They asserted that many emerging adults leave college or university before completion due to their lack of social capital, lack of preparation for their new student role, difficulty understanding academic communication, and feelings of anonymity in regards to both university staff and other students. Scanolon and colleagues acknowledged that successful formation of a new student identity is essential to completion of college or university. They stressed that identity is formed through interactions situated within contexts, and that the change in context that results from the transition to college results in changed interactions, and thus identity discontinuity. Therefore, establishing relationships with peers and instructors is critical for student retention. They also asserted that to do so, students must be actively involved in shaping their experiences and seeking out relationships. This may be

particularly difficult for students from isolated, frontier communities who may not have had to actively seek relationships and establish their own place within a context before making the transition to college.

Identity Status and Identity Processing Style

Berzonsky and Kuk (2000) assessed successful adaptation to college using the identity status theory proposed by Marcia (1966) and the identity processing style theory proposed by Berzonksy (1990). Their results indicated that those students who engaged in more self-exploration were better prepared to operate in a more autonomous and self-directed manner. Additionally, those individuals who actively sought out, evaluated, and used self-relevant information to revise their self-conceptions were the most well-equipped to operate within the university setting and were most likely to establish and maintain supportive social relationships. These findings will be important to consider as rural youth, who may have engaged in little self-exploration, make the transition to college.

Place Attachment and Place Identity

Place attachment and place identity have both been discussed in the literature as important not only to the rural context, but to emerging adults as they transition from their home environment to a new environment away at university. Place attachment and place identity are often used interchangeably, and there has not been common consensus in the literature regarding the definition of each. For purposes of this research, place attachment and place identity will be used interchangeably to refer to the affective bonds

between an individual and place that in turn influence behavior (Chow & Healey, 2008).

In their study of first-year undergraduates who relocated from their homes to university, Chow and Healey (2008) identified changes in people-place relationships as the students transitioned to university. The emerging adults in their sample initially discussed their feelings of displacement and dislocation as they left the familiarity of home. Home was typically identified by the students as representative of physical place, as well as the location of their family and friends. Feelings of dislocation had three primary effects on the students' experiences. First, it undermined their sense of place and "insideness," or the sense that they are familiar with and understand their community. Second, it resulted in a lost sense of belonging. Finally, the dislocation lead to loss of the physical places the undergraduates typically used as symbols of self.

Despite the initial feelings of dislocation and loss reported by the students, changes in place attachment/identity emerged over time. Chow and Healey (2008) discovered that the process of socialization and the establishment of new peer relationships were essential to successful attachment/identity change over time. This is consistent with Scanlon and colleagues' (2007) observation that peer relationships are essential to student retention. Over time, students' relationships with friends from home began to weaken. This weakening of past bonds, paired with the establishment of new relationships, allowed students to create a sense of place in their new environment. From this, Chow and Healey concluded that identity exists within context and that place identity/attachment engenders movement and change. For the students in their study, place attachment/ identity to their home communities decreased over time relative to the

accessibility of, or relative location of, home. Chow and Healey concluded that students often became integrated with two distinct places, home and university. This research suggests that the transition to university may result in loss of connection to the home community for frontier emerging adults, but that some aspects of home can be retained as central aspects of identity.

Homesickness

Homesickness, defined by Fisher and Hood (1987) as "a complex cognitive-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for, and being preoccupied with thoughts of home" (p. 426) was addressed in a research study by Tagnoli (2003). The study consisted of two groups of first-year college students attending school in New York City. The first group came from homes located less than 50 miles from the city and the second group came from homes located farther than 100 miles from the city. Self-reported homesickness was greater for those who came from homes farther than 100 miles away, and was primarily focused on yearning for friends and family from the home community. Those students who lived closest to their chosen college, or who were able to visit home frequently, were found to navigate the transition most easily. Additionally, forming new friendships was found to be important to the successful transition to college.

While Tagnoli's (2003) study utilized a sample of emerging adults from an urban area, homesickness and distance from home has direct implications for young adults from frontier areas. Due to the isolation of frontier communities in the United States, the majority of frontier youth will attend college a long distance from their home communities. Their experience of homesickness, and factors that influence it, will likely

be important to understanding their identity development experiences as they undergo the transition to college.

Summary and Objectives

Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionist theory provides a foundation for exploring the influence of the frontier context on identity development. The current literature does not address the influences of the unique context of frontier communities, such as physical isolation and limited availability of resources (Stamm, 2003), on the identity development experiences of frontier youth. However, it is likely that values such community connectedness, ties to the land, self-reliance, and religion (Brehm et al., 2004; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Leipert & Reutter, 2005; Wathen & Harris, 2007) will be reflected in the identity development experiences of emerging adults raised in frontier communities. As the identity development experiences of first generation students from frontier communities are considered, typical experiences of college students, such as changes in identity, readiness for the transition, place attachment, and homesickness (Cassidy & Trew, 2001; Chow & Healey, 2008; Jordyn & Byrd, 2003; Scanlon et al., 2007; Tagnoli, 2003) must also be taken into account.

While recent researchers have highlighted the importance of contextual influences on the development of one's identity (e.g., Mayeda & Okamoto, 2002; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000), little research has been done to investigate the role the frontier context plays in the process of identity formation among adolescents and emerging adults. The purpose of the current study is to examine the interplay between one's frontier

upbringing, first generation student status, and the development of identity in a sample of emerging adults. The proposed study was guided by the following questions.

1. How do first generation college students from a frontier community describe the impact of their frontier upbringing on the development of their identity during the transition to college?

2. What specific challenges do these emerging adults face in the process of establishing an identity away from their home community?

3. How do frontier emerging adults see a frontier background as a source of strength or as a challenge to making a successful transition to college?

4. How do first generation college students from a frontier community integrate pieces of their frontier identity into a new identity within the college setting?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The current study explored the subjective experiences of first generation college students from frontier communities as they make the transition to college and further develop their identities as emerging adults. Given the aims of the current project, a qualitative approach was most appropriate. As Glesne (2006) pointed out, qualitative research is used to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved and to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural milieu. Further, qualitative research within the field of psychology has been identified as the appropriate method for gaining partial access to the subjective experiences of others, therefore making it an ideal method for recording and understanding the voices that compose personal meaning and experience (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003).

For the current study, a phenomenological design was utilized to understand the lived experiences of first generation college students from frontier communities and the ways their experiences influence their identities. Phenomenological research is valuable in investigating how a human being experiences the world. Phenomenological design attends to the concrete details of daily life, as well as the subjective roots of meaning, the complex relationship between language and experience, and the cultural and gendered contexts of interpretive meaning (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Thus, phenomenological analysis provided a framework for understanding the experiences central to helping first-

generation college students further develop their identities as they immerse themselves in the college environment, away from the frontier communities in which they were raised.

Researcher as Instrument

Within qualitative work, the researcher is the most important tool utilized in the research process (Brodsky, 2008). In qualitative studies, the researcher's individual characteristics influence every step of the research project, from topic selection, to participant interviews, to the ways the data are interpreted and analyzed (Glesne, 2006). Different qualitative researchers may look for, see, experience, and interpret data differently based on their different life experiences, skills, and interests. Because one cannot attend to all the nuances of even a single interaction, the pieces of the interaction which receive focus and attention are a reflection of who the researcher is. Furthermore—once data have been collected—analysis, interpretation, and meaning making come from the researcher. The researcher uses the entirety of his or her personal and professional skills, knowledge, training, and experience as an instrument to produce an authentic picture of the research as the researcher saw and experienced it (Brodsky, 2008).

Given the role of researcher as instrument, my own knowledge, skills, and experiences undoubtedly influenced my analyses and interpretations in the current study. Due to my desire to hold true to the nature of researcher as instrument, I did not have someone from outside the study read and code the transcripts. Instead, I opted to complete all analyses independently. To attend to the ways my experiences shaped my interpretations, I kept a journal throughout the process and looked for quotes, themes, and

codes that were surprising or inconsistent with my experiences and viewpoints. The participant descriptions below are just one example of the way researcher as instrument played out in the current study. The pieces of the participants' lives I chose to capture in this document are a reflection of the way I saw and experienced the current project.

Participants

Eleven emerging adult (aged 18-19 years), first generation college students raised in frontier communities were recruited at Utah State University. Initial recruitment was through announcements made to general psychology classes. Additionally, recruitment flyers were posted around campus when recruitment from the general psychology classes did not yield sufficient participants for the study. Flyers were posted in the major classroom buildings on campus (i.e., Engineering Building, Business Building, Biology/ Natural Resources Building, Education Building, Old Main), in the Taggart Student Center, and in the library coffee shop. Of the 11 participants recruited for the study, 6 were female and 5 were male. Recruitment was ongoing until saturation was reached within each gender, as well as across all participants. Table 1 provides information regarding each participant's chosen pseudonym, age, gender, race/ethnicity, item of significance, and town and county demographic information. In addition to the table, information about each participant is included below to provide a richer contextual description of the participants described in the study. The additional information also provides readers with information salient to understanding the participants' developmental trajectories and the life experiences that have influenced their identities as

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ethnic background	Hometown population	County population density persons/ square mile)	Item of significance
Samantha	18	Female	Caucasian	4,306	5.7	Ballet shoes
Hayley	19	Female	Caucasian	3,342	5.9	Pictures of animals and landscape around hometown
Britney	18	Female	Caucasian	2,998	6.8	Book of Mormon
Jane	19	Female	Caucasian	1,764	1.3	Work gloves
Katie	18	Female	Caucasian	621	6.4	Picture of her goat, pictures of her nieces and goat
Katelyn	18	Female	Caucasian	2,227	5.9	Picture of her family
Baron	18	Male	Caucasian	448	6.4	Picture of him riding a horse as a child
John	19	Male	Mexican American	990	3.9	Bicycle (this he could not actually physically bring with him)
Rick	18	Male	Caucasian	1,771	4.3	Pocket knife, lyrics to an LDS hymn
Robert	18	Male	Caucasian	149	3.9	Work gloves
Jeff	19	Male	Mexican American	4,212	6.5	Book about hometown

they transition to college. Providing rich contextual descriptions of participants is characteristic of qualitative research (Glesne, 2006).

Samantha was an 18-year-old Caucasian female who was raised in Idaho. She described her home community as an agricultural community. She stated that people in her home community are “really nosy, but nice.” Samantha underlined the importance of participating in extracurricular activities to fit in to the community. She talked about being enthusiastic to leave her hometown upon starting college, but then quickly realizing

how much she misses her hometown and her life there. Samantha stated, “I go home a lot…I wouldn’t mind raising my family there someday.” Samantha described making the decision to attend college on her own during her junior year of high school, as not to “stay here and just rot in this small town like my family did.” She described her family as supportive of her going to college, but acknowledged that they expected her to stay in her hometown. Samantha also described the frustration she feels when she tries to talk to family members about her experiences in college or seek support from them because they do not understand college or what it’s like to live with roommates.

Hayley was a 19-year-old Caucasian female from Idaho. Hayley was raised in a farming community and described getting two weeks off from school each fall for “spud harvest,” a time when local youth worked harvesting potatoes to raise extra money and help their families. Hayley acknowledged that, while her home community was “very small,” there was “a lot to do” because of all the outdoor activities in the area. When talking about her hometown and the area surrounding it, Hayley described the lack of resources and the nearest mall being 45 minutes away. Hayley was highly involved with extracurricular activities in her high school, participating in debate, band, cheerleading, soccer, and softball. Hayley regarded extracurricular activities as an important part of her experience in high school. Hayley reported being one of the only students in her high school who was not a member of the LDS church. She described attending college as an expectation within her family.

Britney was an 18-year-old Caucasian female from Idaho. When describing the resources within her home community, she reported that the town had one grocery store

and several fast food restaurants. Britney then stated, “we have two stop lights [laughing], that kind of shows how small it is, we’re proud of our two stop lights.” Britney described being highly connected within her home community and that within her high school “everybody accepted everybody else.” Britney described her involvement in the LDS Church as an important part of her life, and acknowledged that most of the people in her home community were also LDS. Britney talked about making the decision to go to college because she realized she “wanted a little more” than what her parents had. While her parents were supportive of her decision to attend college, they did not understand the logistics of college or the application process in order to help her. Thus, Britney’s older brother helped her access the appropriate resources to complete the application process.

Jane was a 19-year-old Caucasian female from Idaho. As Jane talked about her experiences growing up in a frontier community, she described her hometown as being “the middle of nowhere.” Jane traveled an hour each way to school every day, carpooling with her cousins in “a big white van.” Jane grew up on a large farm, where her family raised cattle and a variety of crops. While describing the way her upbringing has influenced her Jane said, “I guess no matter where I go I’ll just still be a small town farm girl and I don’t really think I’ll ever change.” Jane described her home community as tight-knit and believes that she has a stronger attachment to her home community than most people do. Jane was highly involved in sports in school, and reported that most youth in her hometown are involved in multiple extracurricular activities. Jane described making the decision to attend college on her own because her parents expected her to stay on the farm and work. Jane acknowledged feeling guilty about being in Logan because

she is unable to help her father on the farm.

Katie was an 18-year-old Caucasian female from Utah. Katie grew up in the country and had three acres behind her house with a barn and horses. Katie's hometown had a small gas station that also carried necessary food items, such as milk and bread. Katie reported that her home community is close-knit. She described having the same friends throughout her life. She believes that she and her friends from home are different than "city kids" because they were not interested in material items and were also expected to work from a young age. Katie described feeling overwhelmed by the size of Logan and referred to it as "the city." Katie discussed the importance she places on relationships at length, and emphasized the importance of her relationships with family members. Katie is the first person among both her parents and her nine siblings to graduate from high school, let alone attend college. Katie talked at length about what it means to her entire family that she is in college and the pride her family has in her for what she is accomplishing. Katie did not know how to access the necessary resources to apply for and pay for college, and received help doing so from her boyfriend's parents. Katie stated, "I couldn't have come here if it hadn't been for my boyfriend's parents, because I didn't know anything about college and my parents didn't know." Katie also received substantial academic scholarship and noted that she would not be able to pay for college without it.

Katelyn was an 18-year-old Caucasian female from Idaho. Katelyn described her hometown as a tight-knit community where "everyone knows everyone." She described strong cohesiveness within her school and believes that everyone got along. Within the

community, resources were scarce. The town where Katelyn grew up has a grocery store, gas station, and bank, but the community lacks a hospital or fast food restaurants. The town "revolved around the education and the schools." Katelyn was highly involved in extracurricular activities, participating in National Honor Society, basketball, volleyball, track, and cheerleading. Katelyn enjoyed being involved in her school, and reported that all students were encouraged to do the same. Katelyn described school sports as "the heart of the community," and reported that the entire town came to the school to send teams off to state tournaments. Katelyn's parents always emphasized the importance of her supporting herself, and not relying on anyone else to support her. Thus, college was important within her family and "was always the plan, it was never an option." Even though Katelyn always knew she would attend college, she acknowledged feeling as though her parents pushed her to attend Utah State University rather than a community college near her hometown. Katelyn acknowledged "resenting" them for that at the beginning, but reported that now she believes it was the right thing to do.

Baron was an 18-year-old Caucasian male from Utah. The economy in his hometown was primarily based in agriculture, although Baron acknowledged that "a lot of older people live there too." Baron talked about knowing "everyone" in town, and how that was meaningful to him and lead to him feeling well-integrated into the community. Baron acknowledged that the LDS influence in the community was important to him and is where he learned many of his current values. Baron's parents were divorced, and he received more verbal support and encouragement to attend college from his father than his mother. Baron's father works in a factory and his mother works as an office assistant

in town. When describing his father's desire for him to attend college Baron stated, "My dad was always saying, 'I wish I went to college. Do good in school so you don't have to have a job like me.'"

John was an 18-year-old Mexican American male from Idaho. His family lived and worked on a potato farm approximately 20 minutes outside of town. John spent most of his time outside school on the farm, spending time with his brothers while his parents worked. John described feeling somewhat isolated from the other students in his school due to the difficulty of traveling back-and-forth to town. He acknowledged having strong friendships, but wishing he could see his friends more often. John reported that no one in his family expected him to attend college, or really understood what college is about. John was introduced to the idea of going to college when his brother's girlfriend helped him get into the Gear Up program, which put him into contact with Utah State University. John received a substantial scholarship through the Gear Up program, which has allowed him to attend college. John reported that attending college is important to him so that he can be a role model for his family and show his brothers that "they can do it too."

Rick was an 18-year-old Caucasian male from Idaho. Rick's hometown has one "gas-station size" grocery store that sells necessities, with the nearest large grocery store about 45 minutes away. The town has a small clinic for basic medical care, a dentist's office, and one gas station. Rick noted the importance of school sports within the community, and described elderly couples in the community who attended every home basketball game each season. For Rick, involvement in basketball was an important part

of his social life, and has become an avenue for making friends in college as well. Rick's father was the person who gave him the most encouragement to attend college. Rick also acknowledged the importance placed on pursing a college education within his high school. Rick described a scholarship fund that is founded in a donation from a former community member, which grants up to 50 students $3,500 per academic year to attend college. Rick was a recipient of the scholarship and reported that it had significantly impacted his ability to attend college.

Robert was an 18-year-old Caucasian male from Utah. Robert described his home community as "really close-knit, like everyone works together." The town had one general store, a jerky factory, and a post office. Robert spent 45 minutes riding the bus to and from school each day. He noted the importance of extracurricular activities in his school, and believes that going to a small school gave him opportunities he would not have had in a large school. Robert participated in basketball, and noted that basketball was so important in his school that the school shut down for basketball tournaments so that all the students could attend. His most notable extracurricular activity was representing Utah in the National History Fair. Through his participation in the National History Fair, Robert was named a Sterling Scholar for the state of Utah. He attributes his success as a student to the involvement and encouragement of his teachers. Robert reported that his parents always expected him to go to college, but always told him that they would not pay for it. Robert received multiple academic scholarships, and acknowledged that he would not be able to attend college without them.

Jeff was an 18-year-old Mexican American male from Utah. His mother owns a

restaurant in his hometown, which integrated him and his family into the community. When Jeff's mother was uninsured and diagnosed with breast cancer a year before he participated in this study, the community organized fund raisers to collect donations to pay for her treatments. Jeff described the town as "a good place to live." He noted that the town has a medical clinic and a couple of grocery stores. A Wal-Mart was recently built in a town nearby, and Jeff described Wal-Mart as "the place to be." Jeff was highly involved in extracurricular activities in his school. He was the student council vice president and was involved in football, tennis, basketball, and baseball. Jeff described extracurricular activities as "the most important thing" in his home community and within the culture in his school. Jeff reported that, even though he was always a successful student, his family never expected him to attend college, but thought he would stay in his home community. Jeff described a strong desire to leave home and "do something more" with his life than what he could do in his hometown. Jeff's family supported his decision to attend college and provided financial support when they could, but he also worked two jobs to support himself as he went through school.

Procedure

Interviews

Participants were recruited through advertisements in the general psychology classes and recruitment flyers posted on campus at Utah State University (see Appendix A). Interested students contacted the student investigator by email. Initial screening was conducted to confirm that students met eligibility criteria (i.e., under 20 years of age, first

generation college student, and from a frontier county). The student investigator used the most current census information (2009) to determine if interested students were raised in counties categorized as frontier. Participants were also required to be in the first year of college at the time of the interview, thus this criteria was also included in the initial screening. At the time of the interview Brittney, Jane, Katie, Katelyn, and Rich were in their first semester of college. Samantha, Hayley, Baron, John, Jeff, and Robert were in their second semester of college at the time of the interview. A total of 27 potential participants contacted the researcher, of which 16 did not meet criteria for eligibility. Of the 11 study participants, 7 responded to announcements in the general psychology classes and 4 responded to flyers posted on campus.

After the initial screening a data collection appointment was confirmed. Participants initially participated in an in-depth interview regarding their perceptions of the impact of their frontier upbringing on the development of their identity. Interviews took approximately 60 minutes and were audio recorded. Interview questions were developed based on the recommendations of Glesne (2006). Interview questions addressed general demographic information, experiences growing up in a frontier environment, readiness to attend to college, the transition to college, and the interaction of these experiences with the development of identity (see Appendix B). Informed consent was obtained prior to participation (see Appendix C).

Triangulation

Triangulation within qualitative research is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as a combination of methods used to study interrelated phenomena from multiple and

different angles or perspectives. Thus, triangulation of data is used to identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of the study, and as such strengthen the findings and enrich the interpretations made within a particular study (Rothbauer, 2008). In the current study, triangulation was achieved through participant interviews, member checking, items of significance, and relevant literature. The triangulation method utilized is typical in qualitative research, and is suggested by qualitative experts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Rothbauer, 2008).

Item of Significance

The use of artifacts or archival materials is a common triangulation technique in qualitative research (Norum, 2008a). Researchers often request that participants provide documents (i.e., diaries, journals, letters, photographs, drawings, etc.) during the research study which take the form of artifacts. These documents provide contextual dimensions to the participant interviews and allow the researcher to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Glesne, 2006).

Artifacts were used in the current study to further analyze the relationship between the participants' frontier upbringing, their first generation status, and the development of identity. For purposes of the current study, the artifact was referred to as the *item of significance.* Participants were asked to bring their item of significance to the interview. The researcher did not specify a particular type of item, but simply asked that participants bring something from their frontier upbringing to the interview that was representative of their identity in some way. Participants were asked to expound upon the significance of the item and its relationship to his or her identity during the interview.

Member Checking

Member checking (Glesne, 2006) was conducted by emailing the interview transcripts to the participants. Participants were given the opportunity to make comments via email to further clarify portions of the interview. Participants were also asked to add any comments they felt were important to the interview content, but were not mentioned during the interview.

Monetary Incentives

Participants were given the option to earn course lab credit for participation or receive a modest monetary incentive upon completion of the study to encourage participation. Participants who chose to receive monetary compensation received an incentive of $15 after the researcher received their response to the member checking email. Six participants chose to receive course lab credit and five participants chose monetary compensation for their participation.

Data Analyses

Interviews were transcribed and reviewed throughout the data collection process. This was done to focus and shape the study as it proceeded by initiating thematic analysis and identifying participant saturation. Pseudonyms selected by the participants were used when transcribing interviews to maintain participant confidentiality. Thematic analyses of interview content were conducted using guidelines presented by Glesne (2006) and Camic and colleagues (2003).

Assessing Saturation

Data saturation is the point at which no new or relevant information emerges; thus when the data appears to be robust, with no gaps or unexplained phenomena, saturation has been achieved. However, it is important to note that reaching saturation is considered to be somewhat relative because if a researcher continually collects new data and looks for new information, eventually something new may emerge. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers cease collecting data and determine that they have reached saturation when collecting new data results in diminishing returns (Saumure & Given, 2008). In the current study, the researcher determined that saturation had been achieved when participant interviews did not reveal new and emergent themes. The researcher transcribed and reviewed each transcript immediately following each interview to stay appraised of themes identified throughout the data collection process.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The interviews, member checking responses, and items of significance for all 11 participants were analyzed for emergent themes following the data analysis process suggested by Glesne (2006). Through careful thematic analysis of the interviews, important information about the transition to college and identity development experiences of first generation students from frontier communities emerged. The experiences of these youth are best understood by discussing the themes in three broad categories: the challenges these youth faced in transitioning to college, the positive aspects of the college transition, and the ways their identities were shaped after moving away from their home communities. Thus, the following presentation of findings will be organized based on the three broad categories, with the main themes described within each section.

Challenges in Developing Identity During the Transition to College

Each participant in the study was asked to share specific aspects of the transition to college that had been difficult. From this discussion two themes emerged: difficulty establishing new social relationships and difficulty adjusting to and understanding university culture. However, throughout the interviews participants also reflected on their experiences in their home communities. During the discussions of participants' experiences before leaving for college, themes related to involvement in extracurricular activities and community connectedness frequently emerged. As participants shared their

stories, many of the challenges associated with transitioning to the college environment were related to the stark juxtaposition of their feelings of connectedness within their home communities and schools, and feelings of isolation resulting from the lack of community connection they experienced at the university and in the town of Logan. Thus, the participants' feelings of connectedness within their home communities will be discussed first, followed by the subtheme related to their difficulty establishing new social networks in the college environment. Finally, the second theme of participants' difficulty adjusting to university culture will be discussed.

Social Networks at Home and at the University

Connectedness within home community. As discussed above, many of the participants in the study noted feeling close ties to their home communities and feeling that they were an important part of both the towns and the schools from which they came. Important to this feeling of connection was participation in extracurricular activities, which participants described as giving them a sense of purpose within their communities. For example, when describing his involvement in his school Jeff stated:

> I tried to do as much as I could. I was vice-president for the school for three years…it was good having all that because I did feel like I had an impact on our school because I was in charge of a lot of dances and a lot of fun assemblies…. Then I was also in International Group…. I always did a sport. I did like football and tennis and baseball and basketball…. I loved having people around me at high school…. I always had things to do and stuff like that, I was always involved in something.

Participants frequently described extracurricular activities as an important tie to other members of their home communities. For example, extracurricular activities made them

more visible within the community and helped them become more established members of their home communities. The tie to the community resulting from extracurricular activity participation is denoted in Katelyn's description of her experience in her hometown.

> I definitely felt like I was a part of the community just because I was really involved in everything. I was in National Honor Society and things like that so I got to meet with the Kiwanis organization and things like that so I definitely knew people outside of the education part as well as inside. I think that was just because I was really involved with a lot of different things and I was able to meet a lot of different people that way…. I definitely knew a lot of people in the community and we were close-knit.

The feeling of connectedness within the home community was also exemplified by the majority of participants by the ways members within their communities looked out for and supported one another. Participants described times when their communities came together to provide food and other support for community members who were sick. For example, during Jeff's senior year of high school his mother was diagnosed with cancer. He described the support the family received from the community when he said:

> When my mom got sick it was really bad because she didn't know she had cancer until it was really late, so it was kind of hard because she was really sick and she didn't have insurance…the community helped out a lot because we had so many benefits for my mom, like car washes, relays, stuff like that.

Participants also noted a tendency for community members to collaborate to accomplish difficult tasks and meet the needs of the collective whole. Robert described this aspect of community connectedness when he stated:

> I'd say it's really close-knit. Everybody works together; everybody assumes the best of everybody. I live on a dirt road and its pretty well just people on my dirt road work together. During the snow storms and stuff we all get together and plow out the roads. We all do a certain portion of it. We're not like separate households necessarily. Like we are, but it's more that we're all working together

toward the same goals to make the best of things we can.

As the descriptions above demonstrate, participants in the study perceived their schools and communities to be close-knit and supportive. Given the theme of community connectedness, it is also important to mention the frequency with which the common saying in small towns that 'everybody knows everybody' was mentioned by participants in the current study. For example, when describing her hometown, Katie mentioned, "Everyone out there is friends with each other. Everyone knows everyone out there. So, just the kids that you grew up with, we kind of grew up being friends with." Britney also noted this theme, stating, "[My hometown] is a smaller town, less than 4,000 people, and so everybody just kind of knew everybody." Katelyn described her affinity for "everybody knowing everybody" and the subsequent relationships within her hometown when she stated:

> Where I come from, everyone knew everyone and it was a very small tight-knit community…. I loved it. I loved being raised there and having such good friends throughout my whole life, not just changing friends every year but having the same ones and getting to know people really well because you are with them practically your whole life.

Hayley also appreciated the relationships she developed through growing up in a small town and going to a small school. Her sentiment was indicated in her statement:

> High school was a lot of fun for me and I think that's because I went to such a small high school. My graduating class was only about 90 kids, and so I knew everybody and I grew up with almost all of them, from Kindergarten to my senior year of high school. So we all knew each other really well and there was always a lot going on, so all of the extracurriculars I did were with them. I really like that I went to small school.

Difficulty establishing new social networks at college. Given the close ties the participants felt to their schools and communities, it is not surprising that they described

difficulty establishing new social networks as they made the transition to college. In fact, most participants were still feeling quite isolated in the new environment at the time of the interviews. Two of the participants had identified new social outlets and were working to become more engaged on the university campus and within the community of Logan. Katelyn had joined a sorority because she believed that could be a place where she "fit" within the university community, and John had joined the Latino Student Union to develop relationships with other Mexican Americans. Despite the attempts of two participants to integrate themselves into the university community, feelings of isolation and difficulty establishing new relationships were mentioned by every participant in the study.

While every study participant mentioned difficulty establishing new relationships in the college environment, females noted more distress about feeling alone and the loss of previous relationships than males generally did. Jeff described his experience with the most emotion, stating, "It's kind of hard going from where you know everybody and all this and that, and then coming here and to have pretty much nothing but one friend and a house. I feel alone all the time, all the time." Robert described some frustration with his inability to know everyone on campus due to the sheer number of people. He stated, "There're too many people to know. My natural instinct is to get to know somebody and call them by name as I pass them. But I can't do that here because there're too many people."

When portraying their experiences, Baron and Rick expressed some disconnect between themselves and others, but did not describe distress related to that experience.

Baron's experience may have been tempered by knowing one other person from his high school during his first class on campus. He stated:

> One of my friends [from high school] ended up coming in to my class so…it kind of helped having him there. But at the same time looking back on it, I feel like since I knew someone I didn't really care about meeting other people because I knew one person.

Rick described his experience of being isolated in a matter-of-fact tone, stating:

> I don't really know anyone in my classes; I'm just kind of there on my own. I don't really hang out with anyone outside of class. My roommates are pretty much the main people I hang out with, and even then just at the apartment given that I don't share many things in common with them.

When they described their experiences, the females in the sample were more distressed by their feelings of isolation in the university community than the males were. They also talked about the experience of not knowing how to meet people as being a significant barrier to making friends. Nearly every one of the females also related this experience to growing up in a small town where they never had to meet anyone because, as mentioned above, "everybody knows everybody." As Jane talked about this experience she said:

> It's still kind of hard because in my school I had a lot of friends and everything and then coming here I was like "I've never had to actually make friends before," and I never have. Here no one knows about my family, no one knows even where I come from, and I've never had to deal with that before.

Katelyn reflected a similar sentiment when she stated:

> I always knew everyone, everyone knew me. They knew my past. It takes me a long time to get to know people so I loved that part…that everyone knew each other's past and how they were. Then coming here and not knowing anyone, it was just like, "I don't know anyone, and I don't know if I can trust them because I don't know where they came from and how they really are."

Tied to this lack of understanding about how to meet people and make friends,

came the realization for four of the six women that they are “shyer” or less extraverted than they ever knew they were. Jane somewhat sheepishly said, “I’ve noticed that I’m a lot shyer than I thought before...before a crowd was 30 people and now…just presenting in front of a class, I just am a lot more shy.” This realization is also evident in Katie’s statement:

> I’ve always been a really social person, but that’s because I’ve been with the same people growing up and I never realized that until coming here. At first it was really hard to talk because I didn’t know what to talk about—no one knew anything I knew. So I’ve never had to have those new interactions with people I didn’t know. I realized I wasn’t as extraverted as I thought I was.

Samantha described a similar experience when she said:

> In high school I had a lot of friends. I think it was mostly because everybody was comfortable with everybody…. I came up here and realized I don’t attach to very many people. I thought I had all these friends and hung out with everybody and when you get in a place where you haven’t grown up with the same people all the time…. I don’t make a lot of friends.

The realization that they are not as outgoing as they once believed had meaningful implications for how the women in the sample constructed their identities after transitioning to college. Additionally, the ways in which study participants used the experience of being isolated and less socially connected was important to how they understood themselves in the new environment and to what they learned about themselves while transitioning to college. The interplay of the social environment with the identity development of these youth is particularly important to consider given the social constructionist perspective utilized in this study. Thus, the ways the changes in the social context have influenced the way the youth in the sample understand themselves is an important aspect of their stories and experiences. This interplay will be discussed in

greater depth later in the document.

Difficulty Adjusting to University Culture

Considering the first generation status of the participants in the current study, it is not surprising that they consistently commented on the difficulty understanding and adjusting to what I have called 'university culture' (e.g., scheduling classes, acquiring financial aid, living in a dorm, living independently). For many of these students, active discussions of what college would be like, what would be expected of them at college, and how to prepare for the transition to college were not part of the discourse within their homes, due to their parents' lack of experience with the university context. Baron reflected the difficulty associated with being a first generation student when he said, "It was really hard because being the first generation it's kind of like a new world—you're just throwing yourself into it. I guess college is so big now that people tend to think that you know what to do." In addition to the challenge of being first generation students, the participants were also transitioning to a university with a student enrollment that far exceeded the population within the communities from which they came. As the participants described their transition to the university context, they specifically noted difficulty related to managing courses, understanding the credit system and financial aid, and adjusting to a new living environment.

Managing courses. Not surprisingly, participants consistently mentioned the differences in course requirements and expectations between high school and college as a primary challenge in adjusting to life at the university. Included in the challenge of

managing coursework was the necessity of making adjustments in the way students prepared for tests and completed assignments within their classes. Baron was surprised by the extra work that was expected outside of class. He also had to adjust to the extra demands of tests in college, “In high school pretty much everything that was going to be on the test the teacher would say, ‘this is going to be on the test.’ Now I have to read the textbook to find things that weren’t covered well in class.” Katelyn also noted the increased demands of classes when she said:

> I definitely had a hard time adjusting to the way classes work, as far as you don’t have assignments that you take home and do, it’s just studying on your own…. I have to constantly be doing things in order to learn the material…. I actually have to work a lot more here.

Samantha shared Katelyn’s feeling as indicated by her statement:

> Well, it was kind of a culture shock. Classes are shorter in college than they were in high school and you don’t have them as often, but they’re harder. The curriculum is a lot harder and they don’t care if you come to class. Studying for each class takes a lot of time.

In addition to the shock of increased workloads, participants consistently noted confusion regarding the way classes are scheduled. Coming from high school, the students in the sample were accustomed to course schedules that followed the same timeline each day. John was particularly challenged by the way classes are structured and scheduled in college. He stated:

> My classes were set up in a strange way. More different than I’d expected…all of this was confusing me, like in high school you have a set schedule every day from a certain hour to a certain hour. Here you just choose whatever class you want at whatever time…. I was confused a lot.

Understanding the credit system and financial aid. Participants also noted confusion about the credit system and obtaining financial aid. Both of these constructs

presented new experiences for the participants in the sample. When describing their difficulty understanding how credits work and what they mean, many reflected on their high school experiences and reported never paying attention to credits before. They also noted confusion about what a credit means regarding the amount of time spent in class and the amount of work required by a class. Rick and I discussed his experiences as he was enrolling for classes for his second semester of college. He described his confusion regarding credits when he stated:

> Well, I never truly understood the credit system and signing up for classes. I was baffled by the fact that I could take just three classes and that would give me 12 credits. The classes themselves, ranging from one hour to three hours, I haven't quite gotten used to that.

When discussing the financial aspect of paying for college, many students reported that they had received substantial scholarships which allowed them to attend school. This aspect of their experience will be discussed in the next section outlining the positive experiences of participants in the current sample. However, those students who were not receiving a substantial portion of their funding through scholarships noted difficulty navigating the financial aid system. As part of this discussion, they always noted their parents' lack of awareness of how to get funding and, once obtained, how and when repayment would begin. Jeff talked about this confusion we he stated:

> A lot of it's still confusing to me. Like paying for college, because I did get a grant and I know I have to pay like—because I did get I think an unsubsidized loan—so I know I have to pay that back but no one's really come up to me and told me. I have to go on my own, but it's still like I haven't had time to go sit down and talk to them about how I'm going to pay this back and that back.

Adjusting to a new living environment. Another challenge noted by the participants in the current sample was the difficulty associated with adjusting to a new

living environment. Many of the participants noted the increased diversity on the university campus relative to their home communities. For some participants, this was seen as a positive change, but for others it came as a difficult adjustment, particularly if they were faced with increased diversity within their living environment. For example, Robert compared living with a roommate who did not share his religion to dealing with sibling rivalry when he stated, “Like in a family there’s a lot of sibling rivalries, but it’s not at the same level as having non-LDS roommate, so there’re different ideologies that mix in a room that’s different than normal.”

Jane and Katie had a hard time adjusting to the increased activity that resulted from moving away from a small, quiet community to a larger and busier town. Jane described her feeling when she said, “There’re people everywhere. Before when I wanted to go to sleep it was quiet and stuff and now I can hear people in the other apartment and it’s like, ‘Really? I’ve been around people all day. Just go to sleep.’” Katie even called Logan “the city” and used that term throughout our interview. Her understanding of Logan and her adjustment to the new living environment are apparent in her statement:

> The environment is—just the feeling of being in a big place—is almost nerve racking, kind of scary. My first night here I walked outside and looked up, I don’t know, there are so many street lights and so much going on. It’s just not the same…. I don’t understand because I never had those things at my house, so everything is different. It’s definitely weird.

Additional themes related to difficulty adjusting to a new living environment that ran through the interviews included learning how to cook, clean, and manage finances. Additionally, learning to manage conflict with roommates was another challenge these youth faced in their transition. For example, Katelyn stated, “I like being on my own, but

sometimes I don't. Sometimes I'm kind of a neat-freak and my roommates aren't, so that's hard because you definitely have to learn to deal with little conflicts and how to resolve those."

While the difficulties associated with adjusting to the more rigorous course requirements of college, understanding the credit system and financial aid, and adjusting to a new living environment are not unique to first generation students from frontier communities, they are nonetheless challenges that are salient to the current sample and are important to consider when understanding their experiences. In the next section positive experiences associated with the transition to college for youth in the current sample will be discussed.

Positive Aspects of the Transition to College and Establishing an Identity

Throughout the interviews participants were asked to reflect on aspects of their transition to college that were positive, or that had gone well for them. In their reflections, participants discussed experiences related to the general theme of developing an understanding of their resiliency or ability to overcome obstacles. They also noted the importance of scholarships to not only their transition, but to their ability to engage with the college experience in general. Finally, several participants noted the importance of mentoring relationships with members of their home communities in helping them through the transition to college.

Resiliency and Ability to Overcome Obstacles

Within the general theme of resiliency or ability to overcome obstacles, participants indicated feeling empowered by conquering some aspect of the new context or discovering they could handle a particular situation. Topics participants mentioned included developing mastery of university technology, learning their way around campus and the city of Logan, becoming more responsible, and trying new things. Participants noted a sense of pride or increased self-efficacy that resulted from their ability to overcome obstacles related to the environment. Often participants noted feeling surprised by this ability, because they were unsure of whether they could handle the challenges presented by going to college.

Rick noted that he was not only pleased by the access to resources Utah State University provides through their website, but also shared his delight in his ability to discover little known resources when he talked about finding a GPS tracking system for the university buses. He described the discovery:

> It [GPS tracking system] was amazingly easy to find, just through the school's search engine. We found it and we sat down and had breakfast. I showed it to him [roommate] and was like, "the bus comes in 6 minutes." He was able to get out the door and to the bus on time. I'm pretty sure that from this time forward he's going to use that a lot. But yeah, just the availability of things here on campus has made it really easy.

Baron was also delighted by his ability to live independently and take care of things on his own. He stated, "The things I've learned when it comes to responsibility and having to make sure that I'm doing all the work I need to and keeping up on my apartment. That's been a positive because it's preparing me for the rest of my life." Jeff reported

being surprised by the discoveries he made about himself upon transitioning to college, “I can be dependent on myself for things. I’m a lot more determined than I thought I was, a lot more responsible. I do hold two jobs and go to school.”

Statements made by Samantha and Katie are informative in understanding the experience of self-efficacy participants experienced from branching out and trying new things. For Samantha, the self-efficacy came from her ability to navigate campus and the town of Logan. She stated, “I love it when someone comes up to me holding a map, and I know all the abbreviations for buildings and stuff. It’s really cool to know my way around campus and Logan and know where everything is.” Katie noted initial resistance to branching out and trying new experiences, and described wishing she were back at home where she could engage in her normal routine. However, she also mentioned a sense of pride in the following statement:

> So, coming here it really is helping me because I’m learning how to go and do stuff. It’s still weird for me because I find really weird stuff fun, like just hanging out and sitting there is fun to me. I don’t, I am trying to go out of my way to go do stuff and go have fun and experience stuff and experience the world.

Katelyn, who spent much of the interview talking about the difficulty of the transition and her resistance to leaving home to attend college was also able to identify the silver lining and how much she has learned about her ability to overcome obstacles, “I’ve realized that I can handle any situation, even though I may not be enjoying it, I can definitely handle it and if I’m thrown into something I can adapt to it well even though I may not want to.”

While participants were not always surprised by the same experience that helped them understand their ability to master their new context, they were consistently

surprised by their ability to push themselves outside their comfort zone and grasp new opportunities. It appears that the pride, self-efficacy, and sense of mastery participants established through these experiences were crucial to their belief that they could succeed in the university environment. This has meaningful implications for how they construct their identities as they transition into this new context, and it is likely that these experiences help them continue to build self-understandings as competent students as they progress throughout the emerging adult years.

Importance of Scholarships

Eight of the 11 participants stated that scholarships were an important part of their decision to attend Utah State University and those scholarships had a significant impact on their ability to attend college at all. Given the rising cost of college tuition and their status as first generation students, it is not surprising that scholarships emerged as an important theme for the participants in the current study. However, the emphasis the participants placed on scholarships, and the central focus of scholarships in many interviews, was surprising. Baron described the importance of scholarships when deciding which university he would attend, “I was able to get a better scholarship at Utah State, and so that made the decision. So where I went to college it was really where I could pay the least amount of money for.” John also acknowledged the influence of scholarships on his ability to go to college. He did significant work on his own to identify resources to help pay for college:

> I want to teach or be a counselor. I was always trying to find ways to—because I knew college was expensive—so I started finding out places where I could go to get help, to get to know about college or pretty much just information about it. I

> heard about this program called Gear Up which gave me a scholarship so I could come here. If it wasn't for that, I doubt I would be here right now because of financial problems.

Participants frequently expressed sincere appreciation for the scholarships they received. When discussing the importance of her scholarship in her ability to attend college Katelyn said, "It covers my tuition completely, and so that's huge…it definitely allowed me to be able to come here…without my scholarship I probably wouldn't be here and so I'm definitely grateful for it." Similarly, Katie expressed her gratitude for the scholarship and grant she received because she would not be able to attend college without them, due to her family's limited financial resources. Several times during our interview she commented on how appreciative she was to receive the financial support she had. This gratitude is indicated in the following statement:

> I got a really awesome scholarship. So, I get $3,000 a year, so that's an awesome scholarship. Then I got a full grant, and so I'm really lucky to be here because I'm not having to pay for anything…so I'm lucky that I got my scholarship and my grant. So lucky…. I wouldn't be here had it not been for that.

It is also important to mention the frequency with which participants indicated support from teachers or community members in obtaining scholarships. Katie mentioned that the owner of a restaurant where she worked in high school was on a scholarship committee at Utah State University and played an important role in helping her through the process of applying for and obtaining a scholarship. In Rick's high school, an alumnus donated a substantial sum of money for use as a scholarship fund. He stated, "My school was very pro-college and very pro-education. One of the scholarships through the school grants kids a little over $3,500 per year and I was able to get that. It funds—I think—it's going on 50 students currently." Robert also talked about the

importance teachers played in helping him access scholarships and pursue a college education:

> Scholarships are the reason why I'm here. I couldn't be here without them. Being a smaller school, again going back to that, it's actually given me a lot more opportunity to gain these scholarships for all these different events. I was able to get one-on-one time with the teacher so I could learn about these scholarships better so when I applied to them I'd seem like a more appealing candidate. It just worked together so I could get the best academic advice possible.

Mentorship from Others

The important role family and friends played in mentoring participants before they actually left for college was noted as an important positive experience for several of the people who participated in the current study. Often the mentorship was around how to go through the process of actually applying for college and how to complete important tasks during the application process. For example, Katie noted that her boyfriend's parents were a tremendous source of support and guidance during the application process and helped her fill out the appropriate documents:

> I couldn't have come here had it not been for my boyfriend's parents because I didn't know anything about college, my parents didn't know. I mean, how do I get scholarships, how do I get grants, how do I pay for that? His dad had to help me fill out my FAFSA and everything because I didn't know, and my parents don't know.

Britney also received support throughout the process of applying for college. She noted that her brother was on a mission for the LDS Church while she was going through the application process, but that he continued to provide guidance nonetheless. She commented, "He would email me saying I need to do this and that, so it was really good. I didn't know all that stuff, so he would make sure I took my ACT's and filled out the

FAFSA."

Despite the challenges transitioning to college the participants shared during interviews, they also noted positive experiences that resulted from their transitions. For many, a positive part of the transition was their own enlightenment about their ability to overcome obstacles. In that way, the difficulty of the transition was often framed as a positive experience because it helped participants understand their own strength and develop a sense of self-efficacy. They also developed a sense of self-efficacy from their ability to navigate the new environment. In addition to the discoveries participants made about themselves, they also noted an overwhelming importance of scholarship funding, while several participants also reflected on the importance of mentoring relationships. All these experiences provide important information about the way the frontier youth in this sample construct their identities in the college environment.

Shaping a New Identity in the College Context

Linking the current self with where one has come from is an important part of constructing identity in a new context (Jones, 2009). As Jones described that as humans we cannot separate ourselves from the contexts in which we grew up, because these experiences so intimately influence what stands out as important to us as we shape our identities and reflect on our position within social structures. This is important to consider when describing the identity development experiences of the current participants as they made the transition to college. While the identities they had constructed in their home communities were challenged upon beginning college, they integrated pieces of the

identities they had established in their home communities in important ways in the college environment. Four themes emerged as the participants described the pieces of their frontier and first generation selves that were integrated into the identities they were constructing in the new context: hard work, religion, appreciation for living simply, and importance of being a role model. Each of the themes will be addressed and expounded upon below.

Hard Work

Many of the youth in the current sample were raised in agricultural communities and engaged in farm and ranch work as part of their experience growing up. For example, Hayley talked about getting two weeks off of school each fall so that students in her high school could “work in the spuds,” or in other words, help with the annual potato harvest. Two of the current participants did not come from agricultural communities, but in their hometowns mining was the primary economic base. These two participants also perceived mining to be a trade characterized by tireless work. For all participants, physical labor was an important part of how they understood work. In addition, many commented on observing the physical work their parents did, and noting the impact that had on their value of work. John watched his parents farm potatoes as a child and recalled standing near them as they picked the potato lines. Jane grew up on a large farm and throughout our interview noted how proud she is of her ability to work hard. This was clearly depicted in the pair of work gloves she brought as her item of significance and her description of their relationship to who she is. She also pointed out the value of hard work to her upbringing when she said:

> I think a lot of what made me who I am is being raised on a farm and having to work because a lot of people have never worked 24-7. I think that was the thing that has most made me who I am—working hard and seeing the work you accomplish after you do it.

Many of the participants also commented on their belief that hard work—typically manual labor—is something that is valued in rural communities. Katie described "rural kids" as being different than "city kids," and one of the characteristics she believed differentiated the two was the ability to work hard and "get your hands dirty." Katie described how the importance of hard work continues to influence her identity when she stated, "I have a good work ethic because I've been working hard since I was young, so I'm not afraid to get down and get my hands dirty. Because of where I grew up I have a very strong work ethic. *Very* strong." Robert, who also brought in work gloves as his item of significance, shared this belief when he described himself as a "rural type." When I questioned him further about what he meant by that, the importance of hard work was depicted in his description of "rural type." He talked about the importance of hard work and physical labor in his upbringing when he said:

> Everyday you'd work. Kind of like the movie *Holes*—after you get back from school we dug two holes a day and then we can go in and have dinner, and then after that we had some free time we could do whatever we wanted, but I mean work was a part of life. We dug holes for fences, we dug holes for posts, there's lots of stuff that we did and it was just flat out work every day. It was actually really fun after a while because you felt like you'd accomplished something. That's really translated to a lot of how I am in college where I value physical, physical results, and while I still value the grades and everything, if I can't show anything from those grades I still kind of feel dismayed because I don't feel like I've accomplished as much because everything where I come from is measured in how much you've accomplished.

Thus, for the emerging adults in the current sample, the importance of hard work is an experience and value they have carried with them from the contexts in which they

were raised into the new context at Utah State University. Their self-description as people with a strong work ethic has truly become a salient part of their identities as college students. It is also important to note that many of these participants also acknowledge in some way the privilege they have to be in the college environment, because they have seen the work others have done to help them get to where they are now.

Religion

The importance of religion to identity also emerged as a theme within the current sample. This is not particularly surprising given that the sample was recruited in northern Utah, where a large portion of the population identifies with the LDS religion. Nine of the participants were raised in the LDS Church and reported experiences related to religion as important to identity. Britney even brought her copy of the *Book of Mormon* to the interview as her item of significance. As she talked about how religion has been important to her identity she said, “I’ve had to stand up for my beliefs and tell people what I believe in, but when that happens it’s pretty easy because I’ve grown up and I’m not ashamed to be who I am.” Baron also described the importance of religion in his home community and the subsequent influence that context had on his identity when he noted, “It’s a very religious community, so everyone believes the same you know…so it helps seeing other people live that way and that’s how you want to end up living, so religion plays a really big role in who I am.” For Rick, the importance of religion in his understanding of identity was not truly apparent until he made the transition to college. He described the experience of coming to an understanding of the salience of religion when he said:

> It's [coming to college] made me realize that I'm much more religious than I thought I was. I care a lot more about my religion I guess than I initially had. Through high school I thought, "I can't wait until I'm in college and I can get out of this." But being in college has made me realize I really need it, and it's an important part of my life.

While the majority of participants noted their close ties to the LDS church, two of the participants were not raised LDS, and described the challenge of that experience both in high school and in the college context. Hayley described growing up in a predominantly LDS community and the influence that had on her experience there:

> There was one part of the community I never really felt included in. The community is predominantly a Mormon area, and I'm not LDS…most of my friends are Mormon and I've done a lot of the LDS activities. It's all centered around the LDS theme…. I'd probably say that maybe 90% of the community is Mormon.

In the above statement, Hayley notes feeling a sense of disconnect with her community due to the difference in her religious upbringing. This is interesting given the high sense of integration she felt within the community as a whole, particularly within her school. Jeff also noted difficulty being Catholic at Utah State University given the large number of students who identify as LDS:

> It's hard meeting people that relate to you, like I'm not saying it's bad or anything, but a lot of kids are really LDS here. I'm not against it or anything, but I'm not—I'm Catholic—so it's kind of hard to like meet kids that are on your same level with religion and stuff because a lot of kids are really into their religion.

For both Hayley and Jeff, being outside the predominant religion was a challenging experience and is something that appeared to be important to their identities. Interestingly, they were both cautious when describing their status as non-LDS students because they did not want me to think they were "slamming" or "bashing" the LDS

Church. They were even apologetic about mentioning their status as non-LDS as a source of tension or disconnect. However, it was clear that they saw themselves as different from their peers because they were not part of the dominant religion.

Regardless of whether the participants identified as LDS, non-LDS, or as members of another religious group, religion was an important part of the context in which the study participants were raised and is also an important contextual variable in the college environment. Thus, religion is important to consider when working to understand and portray the stories of the participants in the current study.

Living Simply

Throughout the interviews the participants in the current study described an increased awareness of their affinity for living simply. This often involved rejection of materialism or a newfound appreciation for recreation activities that are inexpensive or involve nature. For example, Katie used rejection of materialism as another feature for differentiating “rural kids” and “city kids.” She said, “I’m not trying to be stereotypical…but a lot of the kids that grow up in the city with big houses and big yards have a different way of living than kids that grow up on a farm…. Materialistic things aren’t that important.”

Participants consistently mentioned their appreciation for nature and the outdoors as a part of their identities that came from growing up in a frontier environment. They often juxtaposed this interest and way of spending leisure time to what people in large towns do for recreation, which they often described as going to movies, shopping malls, and bowling alleys. When talking about how the frontier context she was raised in

influenced her Katelyn said:

> Being raised in a rural community kind of affected what we did when we were younger…sports were really encouraged and things like that, but a lot of my friends…we did 4-H because that's just what we did…. Like we couldn't, you know, go hang out at the mall or movie theaters or things like that because we didn't have them. So when we were younger we always had to find things to do that were kind of out of the box a little bit. We always went and toilet-papered people. We all rode horses and so that was a big part of things. We camped a lot. We did things that were kind of rural I guess, rather than city life.

Hayley also shared the belief that her frontier upbringing influenced how she sees recreation and her use of free time. This was even reflected in her item of significance, as she described the meaning of the pictures she brought of animals and the scenery around her hometown. As Hayley described how her home community influenced her perception of recreation she said:

> A lot of people where we were from are really outdoorsy people. There's a lot to do…there's a lot of boating, lakes, 4-wheelers, camping, and then also the town I live in has sand dunes so there's a lot of 4-wheeling and dirt biking there. So there are a lot of outdoor activities to do. So it wasn't like there wasn't anything ever to do.

Rick brought a pocket knife in as his item of significance. While he described the way the pocket knife reflects his identity metaphorically, he also mentioned the importance of the pocket knife in helping him engage in leisure activities. He said, "I love to camp. I love hiking and stuff. Just through scouting you always had your pocket knife with you when you were outdoors." This appreciation for simplicity and engaging in outdoor activities was a prominent theme that emerged from the interviews. Katie summarized the sentiment of the participants and their belief that "fun" does not have to be expensive or involve activities that can only be found in more urban contexts when she said:

> When I was growing up…having fun for me was going to play out in the barn

> with my horses or going to play with my goat…that was what I did for fun, and here people are like "hey let's go to the movies, or let's go to the Fun Park" and all this, and it's like, "can't we just go do something that's cheap?" You know it's really easy for me to have fun because that's how I grew up. I had to make that stuff fun because that's all we really had to do, and so I would have gone crazy if I didn't enjoy that stuff.

Importance of Being a Role Model

An important part of the college experience for many of the participants was their status as a role model for those at home. Undoubtedly, this theme emerges out of the participants' status as first generation college students. However, some also mentioned the importance of leaving their home communities and making something of themselves in ways they have not seen others do. For the participants, it was important that they model new ways of living and becoming successful for those they left behind, particularly siblings and community members who were important to them. Baron shared his desire to be a model for his siblings and show them that they too can be successful in college when he noted, "I'm the oldest in my family…so I want to set an example, so hopefully my siblings see it and they will do the same thing. I try hard in school and I try hard to be a good example." Jeff expressed his desire to be a role model for his family and show his siblings that they too can break the cycle in their home community when he stated:

> They're [family] glad I'm in it [college] because like I said, nobody has ever done that in the family. I do feel like they look up to me, especially my younger cousins and my siblings. I hope they look up to me because that's what I want. I want things to change with them. I don't want them to have kids at 18 or 16, and stuff like that.

Although John was the youngest member of his family, he also hoped to be a role model

for his siblings and show them that it is possible to get a college degree. He noted:

> I think what motivated me was that I could be the first one and show everyone else in my family that it's not that hard—it may be difficult at times, but you can overcome that fear of knowing you're going to be the first one. You know, I overcame that, so I think all my brothers can do it too.

For some participants becoming a role model also included an element of proving to themselves, their families, and the world that they can do what no one else in their families have done. Samantha portrayed that desire to do things differently when she stated:

> It's kind of hard [being a first generation student]. That is kind of where I do feel the pressure. Just that neither of my parents made it as far as I made it, so I feel like there's more pressure to finish and to make something of my life. Even if I graduate and I don't use my career—I become a mom and stay at home with my kids—that I still did it and I still have an education, and I'm not a statistic.

As she described the influence she hopes to have on the broader world Britney said, "I feel like there's a stigma to growing up in small towns because everybody assumes you're a hick or something like that…[I want to prove] you can grow up in a small town and still be an influential person."

Conclusion of Identity Formation in the College Context

Collectively, these themes paint a compelling picture that informs us of the ways first generation emerging adults from frontier communities integrate their experiences during childhood and adolescence into their identities in the college environment. As the stories of the participants for this project unfolded, it became clear that participants carried values related to hard work, religion, living simply, and acting as role models into the identities they were creating in the college context. These values and how they relate

to the participants' positive and negative experiences during the transition to college provide a rich understanding of the unique experiences of first generation college students from frontier communities in the Intermountain West.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Recent research has established the importance of contextual influences on identity formation (e.g., Mayeda & Okamoto, 2002; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). While both common sense and anecdotal evidence suggest an individual's upbringing as a first generation college student in a frontier community has an impact on identity, empirical research has not yet examined the interplay between first generation status, frontier upbringing, and identity development. Situated within a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the purpose of this study was to examine the ways being a first generation college student from a frontier community influenced identity development after beginning college.

Research suggests that identity is an emergent phenomenon that is always in the process of developing and becoming (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasized that identity is specific to situations, thus to acquire an identity is to be given a specific place within the world. This framework for understanding identity is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of the participants in the current study, who were in the process of constructing their identities within a new context.

Scanlon and colleagues (2007) noted that an important part of the contextual influence on identity formation is attachment to context. This attachment provides stability and continuity of identity. Therefore, when context changes—such as when emerging adults make the transition to college—feelings of loss, displacement, and

identity discontinuity often emerge. This identity discontinuity results not only from the loss of social contacts, but also from the loss of place (Scanlon et al., 2007; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). This was evident in the current study by the participants' reported feelings of connectedness within their home communities and subsequent difficulty establishing new networks within the college context. Therefore, the contextual influences on identity development for the current sample can be viewed from a lens that frames the transition to college as a loss experience which then results in identity reformation. The following discussion will provide an in-depth exploration of how rural values identified in the literature influenced the construction of identity for the current sample. Novel themes that emerged will also be discussed.

Components of Identity: Replicating Rural Values

Jones (2009) underscored the important role the context in which one was raised plays in shaping identity in new sociocultural environments. Therefore, it makes sense that the emerging adults in the current sample integrated pieces of their experiences in their home communities into their identities after transitioning to college. In the present study, major themes emerged which coincide with previous research findings related to rural values. Specifically, community attachment (e.g., Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Brehm et al., 2004; Cook et al., 2004; Pretty et al, 2006), self-reliance and resilience (Dees, 2006; Dorfman et al, 2004; Leipert & Reutter, 2005; Wathen & Harris, 2007), religion (Dorfman et al., 2004; Good & Willoughby, 2007; Shenk et al., 2002), and community identity (Bell, 1992; Hummon, 1996) are constructs that have been identified in the

literature that also informed the experiences of the participants in the current study.

Community Attachment

Perhaps the rural value most salient to the participants' experiences was connection to their home communities. As mentioned, the strong attachment participants had to their home communities and their description of coming from a context that was markedly close-knit appeared to result in feelings of alienation and isolation within the university context. This was most noted by participants' difficulty establishing new social connections after transitioning to college. Scanlon and colleagues (2007) also noted this in their study, and found that their participants initially felt anonymous in their new location in the college context. For the emerging adults in the current sample, who as previously mentioned, perceived themselves as "knowing everyone" in their hometowns, this feeling of anonymity was both striking and quite disconcerting.

Dees (2006) found that rural youth experienced some degree of acculturative stress upon transitioning to college due to both the new sociocultural context of college and the material presented in classes, which often challenged his participants' fundamental values and beliefs learned in the rural environments in which they were raised. This is also important to consider in light of community attachment, because youth are not only attached to the environment and people in their home communities, but also to the ideas, values, and beliefs they were taught there. In many ways the educational experiences college provides may add to the feeling of disconnect and alienation for youth who are likely exposed to new ideas for the first time. Participants in the current study also noted this challenge to their past belief systems as they shared their

experiences. For example, Katelyn noted, “Being raised in a small farming town definitely gives you political and religious views and things like that.” She later went on to describe how those views were challenged after entering university.

It is from the connectedness to the people, places, and ideas within their home communities that the most pervasive challenge upon transitioning to college—establishing new social networks—appeared to stem for the current participants. This challenge is particularly interesting to consider in light of what it means for establishing an identity. Chow and Healey (2008) and Scanlon and colleagues (2007) highlighted the critical importance of developing friendship networks in reducing feelings of alienation, increasing students’ belief that they have some sense of control in their new environment, and in forming identity. However, establishing networks appeared to be quite a formidable challenge for the current participants who frequently reported that they did not know how to meet people, did not know what to talk about, and did not previously realize their shyness. This aspect of the construct, which essentially highlights establishing social networks as a skill set these youth have never developed, is something that has not been identified in the literature to date, but has meaningful implications for how interventions or support systems are developed for youth making the transition to college from small communities. Thus, the community attachments the youth made prior to beginning college, and what that means regarding their understanding of social support networks, are important to consider when designing potential interventions or support programs to help youth make the transition.

Self-Reliance and Resilience

Self-reliance and resilience have been consistently reported in the literature as important rural values (Dees, 2006; Dorfman et al, 2004; Leipert & Reutter, 2005; Wathen & Harris, 2007). In the current study, this value was noted in the emphasis participants placed on hard work as a piece of their current identities that originated in their frontier communities. The importance of hard work also originated from the participants' experiences as first generation students, who had watched their parents work long hard hours at manual labor jobs to make a living.

The theme of self-reliance and resilience was also reflected when participants noted experiences consistent with resiliency and overcoming obstacles as positive aspects of the college transition. Even though participants often described situations that had not necessarily been positive for them, the pervasiveness of the importance of resiliency was highlighted by the way they framed their experiences as important opportunities for self-discovery and coming to an understanding of their true fortitude. Participants also noted a sense of excitement or pride in this self-discovery, which is consistent with the value placed on overcoming obstacles in their home communities. For the participants in the current study, integrating the work ethic and the resiliency they had modeled for them and learned to value in their home communities became a salient and compelling part of their identities in the college context.

Religion

Religious participation is another rural value that emerged as an important theme in the current study. As mentioned previously, given the high percentage of people who

identify with the LDS Church in the geographical area in which the sample was drawn, it is not surprising that this theme was identified in the current study. Previous research has documented the ways in which religious organizations have served a role in the development of social connectedness (e.g., Good & Willoughby, 2007) for rural youth. For the participants in the current study who identified as part of the dominant religion, their church membership undoubtedly bolstered their feelings of connectedness with their home communities. Participants also explicitly noted the ways their religious upbringings had shaped their values and beliefs, frequently noting the importance of family, serving a religious mission, and honoring their bodies as values that were learned through their church involvement. In these ways, religion had a lasting impact on how the emerging adults in the current study understood themselves, their experiences, and how they formed their identities.

As noted, two participants in the current study did not identify as members of the dominant religion. This separation from many of the members of both their home and university communities had a lasting impact on their identities too. Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) stated that, for members of out-groups, their out-group membership can also have important implications for how identity is constructed. For Hayley and Jeff, the importance of tolerance for those who are different than themselves became an important component of their identities that arose from their lack of affiliation with the LDS Church. They also noted their ability to adapt to and experience situations (i.e., going to church, participating in church traditions) that could help them form an increased affiliation with the community to which they did not belong. Interestingly,

neither of the participants acknowledged anger or resentment toward the dominant religion, but pointed out how their experience as non-members helped them build character.

Community Identity

Within the literature, community identity underscores the idea that popularly held beliefs about the differences between rural and urban environments in fact impact individuals' experiences of living in rural communities. The community identity construct is highly salient to the identity development experiences of the current sample because it frames the community as a locus of attachment and an image for self-characterization (Hummon, 1986). Constructs related to community identity that have been identified in the literature include rejection of "city ways," interest in nature or the outdoors, rejection of materialism, and an understanding of rural people as self-sufficient (Bell, 1992; Hummon, 1986). These constructs align with the theme of living simply that was identified in the current study.

Participants in the current study held the differences they perceived between rural and urban communities as important pieces of their identities. For example, Katie talked at length about the differences between her peers from her home community and "city kids." She identified rejection of materialism as one of the key attributes that differentiated her from the urban peers she has met since coming to college. Throughout the interviews participants noted an appreciation of "simple things" (i.e., inexpensive clothes, practical vehicles) as a value they were raised with. Of course, this appreciation may be tied not only to rural values, but also to the participants' socioeconomic status

given their standing as first generation students.

In addition to rejection of materialism, participants consistently noted their appreciation of the outdoors and the importance of engaging in activities that involved nature. Embedded within this appreciation was the understanding that outdoor activities have a more pure, simple, and organic quality than the "city" activities of their urban counterparts, such as going shopping and going to movies. Thus, this appreciation of the outdoors was another way the participants differentiated themselves from emerging adults who were raised in more urban areas. Many times the appreciation of the outdoors overlapped with the farm and ranch experiences of the study participants. The interview responses of the participants in the current study suggest that the idea of community identity, or that frontier ways provide an important basis for self-characterization, is important to helping the participants understand themselves in the current context. Jane epitomized the influence of community identity on the identity development of participants in the current sample when she said, "No matter where I go I guess I'll still be a small town farm girl and I don't think I'll ever change."

Integration of Values and Context

The findings of the current study suggest that frontier communities are unique and qualitatively different than rural communities or small towns. Undoubtedly, the low population density and subsequent isolation, not only from people, but from goods and services as well, create an environment that does not exist outside the frontier context. Isolation and few people also result in a unique mentality among frontier residents. This mentality is marked by an emphasis on independence and self-reliance, while at the same

time substantial value is placed on community and connectedness to others. The unique focus on taking care of oneself, and at the same time taking care of community members within a close-knit environment, was clear in the themes that emerged in the current study. Thus, the findings suggest that frontier residents hold both independent and interdependent values. It is probably most accurate to say that frontier residents hold an independent sense of self and an interdependent sense of community. The marked importance of both independence and interdependence in frontier communities sets them apart from rural and urban areas in the United States.

Components of Identity: Being the First

In addition to rural values, the participants' status as first generation college students also played an important role in how they shaped their identities as they transitioned to college. The participants in the current study consistently acknowledged challenges associated with being first generation college students related to difficulty adjusting to and understanding university culture, including difficulty managing courses, understanding the credit system and financial aid, and adjusting to a new living environment. These challenges have been identified in other samples of first generation students as well (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Martinez et al., 2009), but understanding what these challenges mean for the current participants is valuable in understanding the complexity of their experiences and appreciating their stories.

In many ways, the difficulty adjusting to university is a common experience for first year students regardless of parental academic attainment (Scanlon et al., 2007), but

this difficulty is compounded for first generation students who do not have anyone at home who can understand the complexities of the new context in which they have been immersed. Bryan and Simmons (2009) also identified this challenge in their sample of first generation college students from rural Appalachia, and they concluded that first generation students do not get the same levels of family support as students whose parents attended college. This lower level of support adds to the stress of the transition to college and likely influenced the feelings of alienation the participants in the current study felt in the new environment.

For the participants in the current study, the lack of ‘college knowledge’ (Bryan & Simmons, 2009) was somewhat attenuated for participants who had a strong mentoring relationship with an individual who assisted in the process of applying for college. As reported, the participants noted substantial gratitude for their mentors, which resulted from their recognition that they had no one else who could understand the process they were going through. This mentoring relationship had important implications for the sense of self-efficacy and support participants in the current study felt as they made the transition to college.

As a whole the difficulty adjusting to university culture, or the lack of college knowledge (Bryan & Simmons, 2009), of the participants in the current sample had undeniable implications for their construction of identity. Many participants did not know where to go to seek the information or support they needed once arriving on campus, which in many ways led them to feel as though they had left one culture and moved into another. Thus, the participants in the current study were often constructing identities as

outsiders, or individuals who did not necessarily fit into the new world. At the same time, they were moving further away from inclusion in their home communities after having left to enter this new context. The experience of moving further from their home communities was particularly relevant for participants' who noted that their families questioned their decision to go to college or frequently told them they could return home if college did not work out. This status of being between two worlds is important to consider when conceptualizing the experience of the participants in the current study.

Components of Identity: New Findings

Given that this study is the first to explore the identity development experiences for first generation college students from frontier communities, it is not surprising that new themes emerged which can add to the literature. Two themes that are not documented in previous research emerged from the present study, thereby extending this body of research. The first is the importance the current participants placed on acting as mentors or role models for family and community members. Given the unique construction of this sample—participants who were both first generation students and from frontier communities—it is likely that the study drew from two contexts in which going to college is a unique experience. It is possible that modeling became a particularly salient experience for these youth because they were not only changing the course taken by members of their families, but by members of their collective communities as well. This finding also makes sense considering research highlighting the importance of social connectedness in rural communities (Brehm et al., 2004); because these youth likely

valued the continued connection to their communities and sought to use their experiences to help those they had to leave behind to attend college.

The second theme that has not yet been identified in the literature is the importance of scholarships in funding the educational opportunities for the emerging adults in the current sample. Current literature consistently acknowledges the financial difficulty many first generation students face and the likelihood that first generation students will hold full-time jobs to help remedy some of the financial strife (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Bui, 2002; Martinez et al., 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004). However, recent studies have not reported that first generation students who are in college attribute their academic funding to scholarship support.

Given the attempt this study made to gain a rich understanding of the participants' experiences, the importance of scholarship funding is a meaningful finding and can potentially be used to inform policies for first generation as well as rural students in both high schools and colleges. The policy implications of these results are particularly salient in the current economic, political times as universities balance budgets and the national government proposes to completely eliminate the Pell grant system. The findings of this study suggest that those changes could have devastating consequences for youth who wish to attend college, resulting in lost potential for many students from families of low socioeconomic status.

Components of Identity: The Interplay of First Generation Status and Frontier Upbringing

The results of the current study underscore the multifaceted nature of the identities the current participants were in the process of developing. From the findings it is clear that the change in context upon beginning college resulted in the necessity of identity renegotiation for the participants. The emerging adults in the current study brought with them values acquired in their frontier communities—hard work, religion, and living simply—to the new identities they were constructing. These rural values were also integrated with their experiences as first generation students, which likely resulted in the importance they placed on acting as a role model for family and friends in their home communities. Additionally, it is likely that the rural values of hard work and living simply, as well as their first generation status, contributed to the participants' tendency to frame their challenging experiences as opportunities for growth, instead of viewing challenges as insurmountable obstacles to completing college. In many ways, this type of resiliency that was learned in their home communities contributed to participants' ability to persevere despite the challenges they faced in the new context.

When discussing the integration of first generation status and frontier upbringing, the connectedness participants felt within their home communities cannot be overlooked. While the connectedness they experienced is a construct of small, isolated communities (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Brehm et al., 2004; Cook et al., 2004; Pretty et al., 2006), it is likely influenced by their first generation status as well. Past research has shown that there is often a cultural norm within first generation families who reside in rural

communities that reinforces the expectation that youth remain in their hometowns for life (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). While many study participants noted that they knew they had to leave their towns to make more of their lives than those who stayed, the knowledge that they were leaving their families behind created tension that added to the alienation they experienced in the university context. For these emerging adults, being in an environment where they did not have established relationships was both a new and challenging experience. Thus, at the time this study was conducted, negotiating and establishing new relationships was in important part of their lives, and informed the way they understood themselves and their identities.

The findings of the current study indicate that first generation college students from frontier communities comprise a unique part of the population. While these students face similar challenges to first year college students from rural, suburban, and urban areas, such as to scheduling classes, living with roommates, and choosing majors, they are faced with additional challenges given their frontier upbringing. Their independent sense of self and resilient nature allowed these students to overcome obstacles in making the transition to college, and to view their ability to overcome obstacles as a positive aspect of the experience. At the same time, their interdependent sense of community was reflected in the difficulty students had to adjusting to an environment in which they knew no one and did not have a sense of community attachment. The unique sociocultural context from which these students hailed made their transition to college experiences, and subsequent identity development experiences, different from the experiences of their peers.

Recommendations for Support

The current study sought to examine the identity development experiences of first generation students from frontier communities during the transition to college. Although it was not an aim of the study, the findings can inform potential supports and interventions for frontier youth and first generation students. Most notably, interventions and supports would be useful in helping students develop social connections and relationships in the college environment. One avenue for this would be to provide students with an opportunity to develop a sense of community in a small group within the larger university context. In the current study Katelyn sought to do this by joining a sorority so that she could have a small social network within the larger university context. Directing participants from small towns who are most at risk for feeling alienated on the college campus toward clubs and organizations that are congruent with their interests is one option. Yet another potential avenue would be to develop small classes or seminars for first year students that provide the students with an opportunity to establish relationships within a small group.

The study also points to the importance of providing information and education about the university system to students and parents. Bryan and Simmons (2009) suggest working to increase college knowledge by offering workshops on the procedures and terminology associated with the university environment to both parents and students. It would also be helpful to offer first generation students additional support and guidance throughout the enrollment process and during the first year of college, particularly regarding registering for classes, obtaining financial aid, and managing independent

living. Finally, making counseling services available on campus known is another potential for support, given the positive effects they have been shown to have on academic performance and retention for first year students (Lee, Olson, Locke, Michelson, & Odes, 2009).

Conclusions

Given my connection to the topic, it is not surprising that completing this work was a powerful and meaningful experience for me. At the time I started writing this manuscript, I had hypotheses about what my findings may be, but was driven by the need to give a voice to a population that has not yet received attention in the literature. Little did I know that by going through the process of making participants' voices heard, I would gain insight into my own experiences.

Through interactions with the study participants and making meaning within those interactions, I saw some of my experiences emerge with the current themes. I now have a greater understanding of, and words to describe, the independence I feel as a person that is often juxtaposed with the strong connection I feel to my home community and my desire to replicate that feeling in the new communities I inhabit. As participants described the isolation they felt upon moving to college, and articulated their difficulty finding new social networks, I saw myself reflected in the participants' experiences. This reflection provided compelling evidence about the true cultural transition that takes place when frontier youth leave their home communities to attend college, particularly at large institutions.

I left home for college 10 years ago, and in that time, have often felt that the community in which I was raised was different than the towns or cities my peers came from. The current study has helped me understand that it is different—the frontier town where I grew up is different than rural towns and urban centers, but it is strikingly similar to other frontier communities in the Intermountain West. While some participant experiences were different than my own, particularly because I am not a first generation college student, I was consistently surprised by the ways in which the participants' stories resonated with my own. As whole, this study provides important information about the unique identity development experiences of first generation college students from frontier communities.

Through the interviews with the study participants, it is clear that their experiences as first generation college students from frontier communities have shaped their current sense of self. Their experiences resonate with the social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), underscoring the importance of social contextual influences on emerging adult identity development. The findings of the present study provide a compelling look into the transition to college experience of a population that is not yet identified in the literature. Additionally, the findings gleaned in the current study provide important information for developing possible interventions and supports. In times of transition, the individuals represented in the current study may experience greater psychosocial distress as they are faced with the challenge of integrating seemingly different aspects of their identity into a cohesive self-definition. The distress experienced as a result of this challenge should not be overlooked; first

generation frontier youth who have made the transition to college must work to renegotiate their identities in a new contextual setting. Therefore, these youth may benefit from supports designed to help them make new social connections, understand the university environment, and identify counseling services as they seek to integrate seemingly disparate parts of their identities.

Limitations and Future Directions

From the perspective of traditional dissertations within psychology, the influence of researcher as instrument is a limitation in the current study. The results and interpretations in the current study are based on the perspective of the researcher, and are thus influenced by her personal and professional knowledge, skills, and experiences. Therefore, the findings of the current study are not objective outcomes, but portray the meaning created between researcher and the study participants.

Due to the dearth of literature exploring frontier influences on identity development for first generation youth, this is a promising area of research. This study looked at first generation frontier emerging adults who had recently made the transition college, but research regarding individuals from varied educational, geographical, and cultural backgrounds would enrich our understanding of rural and frontier influences on adolescent and emerging adult development. Additionally, further research on the ways individuals from varied contexts integrate pieces of their previous identities into the identities they construct in new environments would be a compelling area for further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Recruitment Flyer

We are inviting participants for a study of the development of first generation college students from very small towns or extremely rural communities.

You are invited to participate if:

- you are between 18 and 20 years old
- you are the first person in your family to go to college
- you were raised in a very small town or an isolated rural community

Participation will involve a 60—90 minute interview about your upbringing. Following the interview, you will be asked to review and comment on a transcript of your interview. Participants will have the option to receive course lab credit or monetary reimbursement of $15.00 for their participation. If you meet the above criteria and are interested in participating, please contact Kenli Urruty at k.urruty@aggiemail.usu.edu or at (307) 620-0151.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your upbringing. How do you describe the community you grew up in? Probe for:

- physical environment
- social networks
- perception of available resources (stores, medical care, opportunities for activities, etc.)
- integration into the community
- attachment to the community
- desire to leave community

2. How do you think the community you grew up in and your experiences there impacted who you are? Probe for:

- worldview
- views of relationships
- professional/occupational/educational choices
- spirituality/faith
- future plans

3. What aspects about yourself have you noticed since you came to USU? Probe for:

- experiences
- new understandings
- habitual patterns that have been highlighted
- social interaction styles, etc.

4. How was the decision for you to go to college made? Probe for:

- Impact of first generation status on decision
- Impact of obligations at home on decision
- value of education
- family support/involvement or family resistance

6. How did you make the decision to attend USU? Did you consider other colleges or universities? Probe for:

- appealing characteristics of USU
- concerns about USU
- features of USU that impacted the decision (e.g., closeness to home community, size of school, etc.)

7. Tell me about your transition to USU? Probe for:

- Positive experiences—what went well?
- Challenges—what was challenging?
- Adjustment to university culture (e.g., class scheduling, anonymity of students in large classes, dorm life, cafeteria, etc.)

8. How would you describe your readiness to leave home at the time you began college? Probe for:

- Readiness to leave home, readiness to live independently, etc.

9. What item of significance did you choose to bring to our chat today? How does this item reflect on who you are? How does it reflect your frontier upbringing?

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Professor Renee Galliher and graduate student, Kenli Urruty, in the Department of Psychology at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about the ways that young adults raised in frontier communities describe the impact of their frontier upbringing on their identity. The goal of this study is to examine the interplay between frontier upbringing and the development of identity in a sample of young first generation college students. You have been asked to take part because you identify as a first generation college student who was raised in a frontier community. There will be approximately 10-12 participants at this site. There will be approximately 10-12 total participants in this research.

Procedures If you agree to be in this research study, 1) we will arrange a time we can meet for an interview with an expected duration of 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be casual, and we can meet in a location that is comfortable for you. Our interview will be audio-recorded. 2) We will ask you to bring in one item of significance from your frontier upbringing to the interview. You will be asked to discuss the item's significance and how it relates to your identity. 3) We will provide you with transcripts of the interview and ask you to make comments and further clarify portions of the interview. You will also be asked to check the transcripts for accuracy.

New Findings During the course of this research study, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either good or bad), such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participation in the research, or new alternatives to participation that might cause you to change your mind about continuing in the study. If new information is obtained that is relevant or useful to you, or if the procedures and/or methods change at any time throughout this study, your consent to continue participating in this study will be obtained again.

Risks There are minimal anticipated risks involved in this study. It may be uncomfortable for you to be audiotaped and to answer some questions or share your item of significance. There is a possibility that you will remember events or discuss experiences that were uncomfortable for you.

Benefits There may not be any direct benefit for you from participating in this study. However, you may enjoy the opportunity to reflect on your formative years and how your experiences shaped who you are now. The investigators will gain insight into the influence the frontier environment has on identity development.

Explanation & offer to answer questions Kenli Urruty has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Dr. Renee Galliher at 797-3391 or Renee.Galliher@usu.edu.

Extra Cost(s) There will be no extra costs to participation in this study.

Payment/Compensation You have the option of receiving lab credit or monetary payment for your participation in this research project. If you choose to receive monetary compensation, you will be paid a total of $15.00 for your participation in this study. You will receive $10.00 after the initial interview and $5.00 for responding to the follow up email containing the interview transcript. If you will receive payments, gift cards or similar items of value for participating in this research, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has determined that if the amount you get from this study, plus any prior amounts you have received from USU since January of this year total $600 or more, USU must report this income to the federal government. If you are a USU

employee, any payment you receive from this study will be included in your regular payroll.

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. You may be withdrawn from this study without your consent by the investigator if it is determined by the investigator that you do not meet the sample criteria.

Confidentiality Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator and the research assistant will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked room. All electronic recordings will be stored in a secure database accessible only to the research team. A pseudonym of your choice will be used. The recording of your interview will be destroyed after the project is completed.

IRB Approval Statement The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at USU has approved this research study. If you have any pertinent questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu. If you have a concern or complaint about the research and you would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator to obtain information or to offer input.

Copy of consent You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and retain one copy for your files.

Investigator Statement "I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

Signature of PI & student or Co-PI

Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.	Kenli Urruty
Principal Investigator	Student Researcher
435-797-3391	435-797-8254
Renee.Galliher@usu.edu	k.urruty@aggiemail.usu.edu

Signature of Participant By signing below, I agree to participate.

Participant's signature	Date

CURRICULUM VITAE

KENLI URRUTY

1693 N 400 W #E201
(307) 620-0151
Logan, UT 84341
k.urruty@aggiemail.usu.edu

Education

Ph.D. 2011	Utah State University, Logan, Utah Combined Clinical/Counseling/School Psychology (APA accredited) Dissertation: *Effects of the frontier environment on identity development among first generation college students*. Chair: Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.
M.S. 2009	Utah State University, Logan, Utah Counseling Psychology Thesis: *Factors associated with physical activity behaviors among rural adolescents.* Chair: Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.
B.S. 2005	Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO Psychology Honors thesis: *Effects of birth order on the facets of extraversion.* Chair: Eric Heggestad, Ph.D.

Clinical Experience

Clinical Assistantships:

8/10 – 5/11 **Graduate Assistant**
Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services
Logan, UT
Conducted individual and group therapy. Conducted skills training workshops for college students. Performed outreach on the university campus. Attended regular case conferences, staff meetings, and professional development seminars. Supervised an undergraduate peer social skills trainer.
Total hours: 653 *Direct contact hours:* 256
Supervisor: Mark Nafziger, Ph.D., LuAnn Helms, Ph.D.

6/08-6/10 **Graduate Assistant**
Utah State University Center for Persons with Disabilities
Clinical Services, Logan, UT
Performed psychoeducational and Autism/Asperger's Disorder assessments for children, adolescents, and adults. Conducted psychological assessments for adults referred for evaluation by Vocational Rehabilitation and Social Security Disability Insurance. Regularly administered and interpreted the following assessment measures: WAIS-III, WAIS-IV, WISC-IV, WJ-III, and Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS). Other responsibilities included conducting clinical interviews, writing psychological reports, and participating in weekly multidisciplinary staff meetings.
Total hours: 2,000 *Direct contact hours:* 325
Supervisor: Robert S. Cook, Ph.D.

Practicum Experience:

8/09-5/10 **Student Therapist**, Practicum in Counseling Psychology
Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, UT
Conducted individual therapy. Gained experience in formulation and implementation of interventions with college students who presented with diverse concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety, relationship problems, life cycle transition difficulties, sexual orientation concerns).
Total hours: 306 *Direct contact hours*: 110
Supervisor: Amy Kleiner, Ph.D.

8/08-5/09 **Student Therapist**, Practicum in Clinical Psychology
Utah State University Psychology Community Clinic, Logan, UT
Provided individual therapy to adults and behavioral parent training for child and adolescent clients. Provided behavior management and cognitive-behavioral interventions for disruptive behavior disorders, anxiety, and depression for children.
Total hours: 347.5 *Direct contact hours:* 108
Supervisors: Susan Crowley, Ph.D., Melanie Domenech Rodriguez, Ph.D.

8/07-5/08 **Student Therapist**, Practicum in School Psychology
Utah State University Center for Persons with Disabilities
Clinical Services, Logan, UT
Performed and interpreted psychoeducational assessments for children and adults using the WAIS-III, WISC-IV, and the WJ-III. Other responsibilities included conducting clinical interviews, writing psychological reports, and attending weekly multidisciplinary staff meetings.
Total hours: 265 *Direct contact hours:* 35
Supervisor: Robert S. Cook, Ph.D.

1/07-5/07 **Student Therapist**, Adult Counseling Practicum
Utah State University Psychology Community Clinic, Logan, UT

Provided individual psychotherapy to adults. Conducted full length clinical interviews and worked with various presenting problems, such as relationship issues, anxiety, depression, and the effects of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.
Total hours: 156 *Direct contact hours:* 18
Supervisor: Melanie Domenech Rodriguez, Ph.D.

Additional Clinical Experience:

5/09-12/09 **Student Therapist**
Utah State University Psychology Community Clinic, Logan, UT
Provided ongoing individual therapy to adults and behavioral parent training for child and adolescent clients.
Total hours: 111 *Direct contact hours:* 31
Supervisor: Susan Crowley, Ph.D., Gretchen Gimpel Peacock, Ph.D.

1/07-8/07 **Graduate Assistant Instructor**
Career Services, Utah State University, Logan, UT
Led one-time workshops focused on assisting students with career and major exploration. Discussed approaches to the career decision making process. Interpreted the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Strong Interest Inventory for students going through the major and career decision making process.
Supervisor: Margaret Hennon, M.S.

Clinical Outreach:

9/09, 9/10 **Student Therapist**, Utah State University Anxiety Screening
Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, UT
Provided interpretation of anxiety measures and consultation to students attending the USU Counseling and Psychological Services anxiety screening day.

4/10 **Student Therapist**¸ Utah State University Alcohol Screening
Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, UT
Provided interpretation of alcohol screening measures and consultation to students attending the USU Counseling and Psychological Services alcohol screening day.

1/10, 1/11 **Student Therapist**¸ Utah State University Depression Screening
Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, UT
Provided interpretation of depression measures and consultation to students attending the USU Counseling and Psychological Services depression screening day.

4/10, 3/11 **Outreach Presenter**, Types and Applications of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, UT
Presented information about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to a class of approximately 20 undergraduate students majoring in Nutrition.

3/11 **Outreach Presenter**, Mental Health Stigma and Self Care

Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services, Logan, UT
Presented information about the stigma associated with mental health and self-care strategies to the Sigma Chi Gamma Kappa fraternity.

Research Experience

9/06-4/07 **Graduate Assistant**
Career Services, Utah State University, Logan, UT
Responsibilities included managing, coding, and entering data for a staff research project on undergraduate use of Career Services.
Supervisor: Margaret Hennon, M.S.

8/04-5/05 **Undergraduate Research Assistant**
Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO
Assisted with research examining personality predictors of pro-social whistle-blowing. Assisted with collection of published studies, facilitated large study sessions involving a confederate stunt, interviewed participants following the study sessions, provided participants with information during debriefing, and entered data collected during the study.
Supervisors: Zinta Byrne, Ph.D., Rachel Johnson, M.S.

Teaching Experience

1/09-5/09 **Independent Instructor**
PSY 2100 - Developmental Psychology: Adolescence
Department of Psychology, Utah State University, Logan, UT
Responsibilities included on campus lectures, development of course material, grading, and office hours for a class of 55 undergraduate students. Supervised one teaching assistant and one undergraduate teaching fellow.

1/08-5/08 **Teaching Assistant**
PSY 4230 - Psychology of Gender
Department of Psychology, Utah State University, Logan, UT.
Graded weekly written assignments and exams and dealt addressed undergraduate student concerns.
Supervisor: Camille J. Odell, M.S.

7/07-12/07 **Teaching Assistant**
PSY 6530 - Developmental Psychology
Department of Psychology, Utah State University, Logan, UT.
Graded weekly written assignments and exams and dealt with student concerns for graduate course.
Supervisor: Camille J. Odell, M.S.

8/04-12/04 **Undergraduate Teaching Assistant**
Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO
Facilitated 10 students in a 1 credit discussion based class on controversial issues in psychology. Arranged weekly lesson plans and facilitated discussion. Graded 3-page papers written weekly and evaluated the content as well as the use of

APA format. Assigned grades according to participation, attendance, and the quality of students' papers.
Supervisor: Frank Vattano, Ph.D.

Guest Lectures:

10/13/10 **Guest Lecturer**
PSY 2950, Introduction to Psychology as a Major and Career
Department of Psychology, Utah State University, Logan, UT
Conducted a guest lecture on ethical principles in psychology for an undergraduate course in psychology as a major and career.

4/16/07 **Guest Lecturer**
PSY 1010, General Psychology
Department of Psychology, Utah State University, Logan, UT
Conducted a lab on schizophrenia for an undergraduate course in general psychology.

Manuscripts Under Review

Urruty, K., &, Galliher, R.V. (under review). Sport participation as a critical context for physical activity among rural adolescents. *Journal of Rural Community Psychology*.

Presentations

Urruty, K., & Galliher, R.V. (2011, February). Effects of the frontier environment on identity development among first generation college students. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Research on Identity Formation, Daytona Beach, FL.

Urruty, K. (2010, October). Who am I now? Identity and the transition to college for youth from rural communities. Workshop presented at the annual Utah University and College Counseling Centers Conference, Park City, UT.

Urruty, K., & Galliher, R.V. (2010, March). Sport participation as a critical context for physical activity among rural adolescents. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Philadelphia, PA.

Urruty, K., & Galliher, R.V. (2010, March). Factors associated with physical activity behaviors among rural adolescents. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Philadelphia, PA.

Grants Submitted

Effects of the Rural Environment on Identity Development. $679.00. Psi Chi Graduate Research Grant, Kenli Urruty, Principle Investigator, and Renee Galliher, Ph.D. co-investigator. Submitted November 1, 2009.

Leadership Positions

8/09-5/10 **Graduate Student Representative**
Department of Psychology, Utah State University, Logan, UT
Elected by peers to represent the students of the Combined Clinical/Counseling/School Psychology program. Attend faculty meetings and run monthly student program meetings. Serve as a liaison with faculty for student concerns. Help coordinate and plan interviews with the admissions committee.

Other Professional Experience

5/05-5/06 **Counselor**
Turning Point Center for Youth and Family Development, Fort Collins, CO
Worked with a group of twenty adolescent females in a residential treatment center, focusing on behavior management. Wrote treatment plans for 2-3 primary clients and updated the treatment plans monthly. Attended monthly meetings with parole officers and case workers to discuss clients' progress in treatment.
Supervisor: Colleen Tempe, L.C.S.W.

Awards and Honors

2011 Psychology Department Travel Award, $300, Utah State University
2010 Dissertation Fellowship, $5,000, Utah State University
2010 Graduate Student Senate Travel Award, $300, Utah State University
2010 Psychology Department Travel Award, $300, Utah State University
2005 University Honors Scholar, Colorado State University
2005 Cum Laude, Colorado State University
2004 Mortar Board Honor Society, Colorado State University
2004 Psychology Undergraduate Scholarship, $1,000, Colorado State University
2004 Natural Sciences Undergraduate Scholarship, $1,000, Colorado State University

Professional Affiliations

American Psychological Association – Student Affiliate
Division 17 Society of Counseling Psychology – Student Affiliate
Utah Psychological Association – Student Affiliate
Society for Research on Adolescence
Psi Chi

Specialty Training/Workshops

04/11 Addictive Behaviors with Jason Kilmer, Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services
Logan, UT
04/10 An Integrated Approach to Complex Psychological Trauma with Steve Briere, Utah State University Counseling and Psychological Services
Logan, UT

02/10	The Dynamics of Gottman Couples Therapy with John Gottman, Department of Workforce Services and the Utah Commission on Marriage Salt Lake City, UT
01/10	Loving, Hating, and Knowing: Relational Group Psychotherapy with Richard Billow, International Psychotherapy Institute Salt Lake City, UT
11/09	WAIS/WMS/WIAT Advanced Training, Utah Psychological Association Salt Lake City, UT
10/09	GLBT Allies on Campus Training, Utah State University Logan, UT
06/09	Legal and Ethical Aspects of Supervision with Steven Behnke, Utah Psychological Association Logan, UT
01/09	Ethics Workshop with Steven Behnke, Utah Psychological Association Logan, UT
10/08	Utah State University Multicultural Workshop Logan, UT
10/08	WAIS-IV Workshop, Utah Psychological Association Salt Lake City, UT