RENEGOTIATING IDENTITY: UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNICATIVE
NEGOTIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT IDENTITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

BRANDY JADE HINSON STAMPER. Renegotiating Identity: Understanding the Communicative Negotiation of Community College Transfer Student Identities. (Under the direction of DR. RYAN A. MILLER)

Literature on community college (CC) students transferring to four-year institutions sufficiently addresses aspects of pre-transfer success indicators, transfer process barriers, and post-transfer outcomes. Yet, research frameworks in post-transfer adjustment and engagement have not taken into account how identity is shaped and renegotiated by CC students. This phenomenological study explored the identity experiences of fifteen community college transfer (CCT) students one year after they transitioned to a large, public four-year institution. The purpose of the study was to understand how CCT students' lived experiences inform their student identities. The communication theory of identity (CTI), served as the study's theoretical framework, focusing on the manifestation of identities through communicative interactions and expressions with others. Primary data collection occurred through two rounds of semi-structured interviews with each participant. Data analysis followed a procedure of categorizing the participants' statements into meaning units that represented the layers of identity being examined. The process of data categorization, reduction, and theme

identification resulted in two overarching themes, four subthemes, and 16 distinct identity

manifestations. The first theme demonstrated that CCT students engage in careful and

purposeful positive student identity development behaviors while in community college.

The second overall theme illustrated how CCT students renegotiated their previously

formed student identities at their four-year receiving institution. The study's findings

provide possible student engagement and institutional-based suggestions on how to serve

CCT students. The conclusions drawn from the study and their implications for theory

and practice are also presented.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends who are my source of encouragement and support.

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This dissertation reflects the efforts of my dedicated "doclife team" whose mentoring, insights, and support have allowed me to pursue this lifelong goal.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The life of a transfer student is like the life of a college freshmen. Nerves of not knowing anyone or where classes are and the stress of making new friends creeps up the night before right before you had a solid six seconds of mental peace. As school continues, the months go by and the fear dies down. But nothing is really the same after transferring.

—Cole Swanson, The life of a transfer student, Oct 13, 2016

Student transfer is an area of higher education scholarship receiving increased attention. Transfer students represent a diverse, distinctive, and steadily growing population among four-year institutions (Greenfield et al., 2013) in comparison to students who begin and complete their postsecondary education at one institution. An astounding one-third of all degree-seeking students transfer at least once during their collegiate career, and of those students, 25% change institutions at least twice (Marling, 2013). Among the transfer student population, vertical transfer, where students from two-year institutions, or community college, move to four-year institutions, is the most commonly known. (Patton et al., 2016).

Community college students represent approximately 45% of all undergraduates (Ginder et al., 2014), with 81% of first-time students entering community college expressing a desire to earn a four-year degree (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). The number of students attending community colleges and then transferring to a four-year institution is on the rise due to various financial factors. Tuition and fees at four-year institutions are increasing and are significantly higher than those at community colleges (Zumeta et al., 2012). Additionally, the prices for college textbooks have increased by 90% from 1998 to

2016, as opposed to recreational consumer book prices, which have fallen by 35% (Perry, 2016). During the 2015-2016 academic year, the average U.S. undergraduate student attending a public four-year institution spent around $1200 per year on textbooks (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2016). The skyrocketing prices of textbooks for students, coupled with the higher price tag of tuition and fees at four-year institutions, make community colleges a viable choice in saving money.

Despite the increased presence of community college students in four-year institutions, many fail to persist and complete their degrees (Kuh et al., 2007). Failure to complete a four-year degree is particularly concerning since many community college students come from underrepresented populations and would greatly benefit from a bachelor's degree. Hershbein and Kearney (2014) found that students who earned a baccalaureate degree grossed about $1.2 million over a lifetime—approximately $300,000 more in salary than students who only completed an associate's degree. Likewise, four-year graduates tend to have greater job stability, access to better quality healthcare benefits, and job options (Ma & Baum, 2013; Snyder et al., 2010).

This chapter begins with an overview of the research surrounding community college transfer students providing context and background of the current study. The problem statement, research purpose, and research questions are then presented. A brief overview of the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study, along with the methodology, is highlighted. The significance of the research is discussed next, drawing connections to the potential benefits of the work. Finally, a discussion of assumptions and delimitations are reviewed, before finally defining terms to ensure a common understanding of concepts.

Background of the Problem

Despite the growing presence of community college transfer (CCT) students, a recent report by Jenkins and Fink (2016) indicated that the national baccalaureate degree completion rate among CCT students is only 14%, compared to 42% of non-transfer students who complete their bachelor's degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Completion rates among the CCT student population have been attributed to significant transitional and adjustment challenges (Lewis, 2013; Nora et al., 2006). The context of community college and the process of transition and adjustment to four-year institutions is a challenging and complicated process, which contributes to the unique nature of CCT students (Hills, 1965; Silverman et al., 2009). These students differ from beginning first-year students due to their prior community college experiences, possibly creating a false perception of four-year institutions. For example, community college students are accustomed to non-threatening learning environments consisting of personalized interactions with faculty and smaller classroom settings (Jackson & Laanan, 2015). Once community college students transfer to the four-year environment, they encounter larger class sizes limiting student-faculty interaction (Flaga, 2006). This lack of personalized contact can contribute to negative perceptions of faculty's approachability (Roberts & Styron Jr., 2010).

The CCT student population vastly differs from beginning first-year students, as they are more likely to be employed while enrolled, are ethnically diverse, tend to be first-generation college students, and receive some form of financial support (Cohen et al., 2014; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Silverman et al., 2009). Alfonso (2006) suggests that students who attend community colleges do not persist for long because

most of them come from low-income and disadvantaged families compared to those who enroll in four-year institutions. Traditionally, CCT students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and face contextual factors (e.g., working while enrolled), making this population more sensitive to cost; thus CCT students base their four-year institution selection on tuition (Doyle, 2009; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Melguizo et al., 2011).

Transfer capital, as defined by Laanan, examines how factors such as CCT students' range of academic skills, knowledge, and community college experiences affect their success at four-year institutions (Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010). Over the past few decades, researchers have focused on practices that assist CCT students upon their initial transition to four-year institutions, such as articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions, transfer student orientations, and transfer student seminars (Grites & Farina, 2012; Jain et al., 2011; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Research has also highlighted practices that aid in persistence to graduation. However, the literature primarily focuses on out-of-classroom experiences that are typically geared towards beginning first-year students, especially those who live on campus (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). Community college students are more likely to work full-time and live off-campus, which makes many out-of-classroom initiatives less accessible (Cohen et al., 2014).

The method in which CCT students acclimate to their four-year institution, also known as integration, is an essential aspect that researchers have considered (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). When examining academic and social integration elements as crucial factors in student persistence, Tinto's longitudinal model

of institutional departure (1993) remains at the forefront of this discussion. Tinto's integration model (1975, 1993) suggests that students are more likely to commit to an institution and persist if they are academically (attached to the intellectual life of the institution) and socially (creating relationships outside of the classroom) integrated within the institution. One area of minimal inquiry involves how CCT students' integration happens from an identity development perspective.

Statement of Problem

The postsecondary educational landscape at four-year institution is changing, with an increasing number transfer students, including students from community colleges (Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2018), 25%-35% of community college students transfer into four-year institutions. Yet, of those students, only 14% will graduate within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). CCT student literature has examined pre-transfer success indicators (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Ishitani, 2008), like academic readiness (Hagedorn et al., 2008), and post-transfer outcomes, such as retention (Dennis et al., 2008) and persistence (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Researchers have also examined the post-transfer student experience, from transfer process barriers (Packard et al., 2013), academic adjustment (Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010), and social adjustment (Astin, 1984; Flaga, 2006) issues, to student engagement pertaining to academic and social integration elements (Bahr et al., 2012; Jackson & Laanan, 2015; Townsend & Wilson, 2009).

Research frameworks in post-transfer adjustment and engagement (Jain et al., 2011) have not taken into account how identity is shaped and renegotiated by CCT

students. A student's identity can influence college experiences, and this is evident in the literature on beginning first-year students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schuh et al., 2017). CCT students' identity development in community college and the interpretation of their identity or status as a transfer student at their receiving four-year institution is virtually unknown (Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2016).

Exploring CCT student identity negotiation at four-year institutions will allow this unique population's voices and experiences to be investigated. Identities are manifested in the interactions with other social actors and are expressed using language. This study will build upon the issues addressed in the transfer student literature, utilizing the communication theory of identity as the theoretical framework to illuminate other ways in which this population can be served. The communication theory of identity (CTI) is a framework used to explain the broader sense of identity as "the processing of social identity through interaction" (Hecht et al., 2004, p. 261). CTI's focus on communication depicts a key difference from the broader framework of social identity theory's focus on structures, roles, or group classifications (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) as well as Chickering's psychosocial identity development. Specifically, CTI asserts that the construct of identity infuses not only an individual awareness, but also the articulation of identity via behaviors, relationships, and community membership (Hecht, 1993).

As the number of CCT students continues to rise, it is vital to fill this gap in the literature regarding the communication of CCT students' identity post-transfer, providing further insight into this population's experiences and possibly paving the way for further research in this area.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand how CCT students negotiate their student identities one year after transferring to a large, public four-year institution. Exploring how student identity is constructed and enacted across various institutional contexts for CCT students may help to extend our understanding of CCT students' identity experiences post-transfer. Additionally, this study could offer practical guidance for institutional leaders, administration, faculty, and staff who are interested in maximizing CCT students' educational experiences. This research will provide the groundwork needed to extend the conversation surrounding student identity development during CCT students' post-transfer experiences. The researcher sought to capture the participants' unique voices and experiences to establish an in-depth understanding of how CCT students experience student identity negotiations at their receiving institution guided by the following research questions:

RQ: How do CCT students' lived experiences inform their identities as college students?

Sub Question 1: How do CCT students' community college experiences shape their student identities?

Sub question 2: How do CCT students (re)negotiate their student identities post-transfer?

Theoretical Framework

Developmental researchers have acknowledged how psychosocial growth occurs throughout students' post-secondary educational journeys, and more scholarly attention is needed to understand how development happens in diverse student populations (Gardner, 2007; Patton et al., 2016). Silverman and colleagues (2009) suggest that transfer students

are developmentally different from beginning first-year students, but do not specify how they differ. Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity served as the theoretical framework for this study because of its focus on the manifestation of identities through the interactions with other social actors and expressions of those identities using language. Identity is a process constructed as a result of experiences and perceptions (Kegan, 1994), serving as an anchor in an individual's core beliefs, values, and attitudes (Scott et al., 1998). According to CTI, identity is situated within four different "frames": (1) personal, (2) enacted, (3) relational, and (4) communal (Golden et al., 2002). These layers are positioned to reflect the holistic approach in which identity resides: within a person (personal), within the interaction (enacted), within a relationship (relational), and within a group (communal) (Hecht et al., 2004). Hecht's (1993) work around the four layers of identity shaped both the data collection and analysis process.

Methodology

The research questions provided the basis for this study's research design and methodology. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand how CCT students negotiate their student identities after one year at a large, public four-year institution. Qualitative research, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). As such, the use of qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration and detailed understanding of the complexity of CCT students' experiences and identity negotiations. This qualitative investigation utilized a phenomenological design (Husserl, 1989), in order to understand the nature, essence, and meaning of CCT students' experiences (Husserl,

1989; van Manen, 2014). While there are several different phenomenological approaches available to researchers, van Manen's (2001) hermeneutic phenomenological approach most closely aligns with the present study. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses specifically on constructing a full interpretive description of the phenomenon instead of utilizing purely description (van Manen, 2014). The purpose of the present study is to interpret the lived experiences of CCT students through their narratives, making hermeneutic phenomenology well suited for this investigation.

This hermeneutic phenomenological (van Manen, 2001) study involved seven to 15 community college transfer students enrolled in a top-ten transfer-serving institution in the Southeast for at least one year. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive criterion and maximum variation sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015) to ensure specific participant attributes and participant diversity to address the research questions. Primary data collection took place through a two-interview structure where the researcher worked with the participants over a three-week period. Two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to allow participants the opportunity to voice their unique perspectives (Duggleby, 2005; Zorn et al., 2006). Interview questions during the initial interview focused on the participants' community college background and their transfer experiences at their receiving institution. The second interview focused on how the participants' experiences at their receiving institution informed their identity as a transfer student. Member checks of interview data occurred through participant transcript review (Creswell et al., 2007) and participant review of the study's preliminary findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Significance of the Study

The experiences of CCT students after their initial transition to their receiving four-year institutions are critical, especially since the actions taken by the institutions can have lasting impacts on student success (Tinto, 2006). In addition to the aforementioned research questions highlighting the current lack of literature available regarding CCT student identity development after initial transfer, this study also has significant implications for policy, practice, and research.

In regards to policy, the study's findings could potentially provide possible suggestions for institutional changes in CCT student culture, such as the need for additional institutional support services and aiding in college student success. By exploring this population through the lens of identity, it can assist institutions in understanding how to engage and serve CCT students. While Bahr and colleagues (2013) point out that "both the community college and the four-year institution share responsibility for the outcomes of community college transfer students" (p. 10), four-year institutions need to view CCT students as an integral part of their institutional fabric, not just as additional students or separate entities who come to the institution with credits earned towards their bachelor's degree (Lipka, 2008; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Secondly, in terms of practice, faculty, staff, and administration can have a better understanding of CCT students' identity experiences aiding in designing programs, activities, and training that can facilitate stronger commitments to the institution as a result of this study. Many CCT students cite the lack of institutional ownership (Lipka, 2008), wherein CCT students are disengaged and do not consider the four-year institution as their campus. To address CCT students' lack of institutional ownership, institutions are

implementing new strategies tailored to address CCT students' needs including

registration, support services, and seminar courses (Adams & Curtis, 2014; Mamrick,

2005). For example, many transfer orientation programs are repackaged freshman

orientation programs with minimal adjustments tailored to CCT experiences (Kirk-

Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). This study can also offer possible andragogical

considerations for faculty regarding how they can facilitate cultural environments within,

and outside of the classroom, enhancing relationships for CCT students. For instance,

Schwartzman and Sanchez (2016) suggest that identity-based conflicts and tensions can

be relieved through enacting communal rituals and enriching relationships created among

students, faculty, and staff.

Finally, this study also contributes to the developing body of knowledge and

theory surrounding CCT students and identity development. Expanding the literature on

the area of identity development could fill the gap in other facets of the transfer literature

by examining different types of transfer populations, including horizontal transfer

students. Additionally, other studies could perhaps utilize the CTI framework for identity

development in CCT students majoring in specific fields of study. For example, CCT

students experience challenges in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)

fields (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014), and the CTI framework could be used to recognize some of

these challenges.

Delimitations and Assumptions

To explore the lived experiences of CCT students and their transfer student

identity, the researcher utilized a hermeneutical phenomenological research design (van

Manen, 2001). Hermeneutic phenomenology was employed in the present study due to its

interpretative nature, drawing rich narratives from participants and their lived experiences to understand how CCT students develop their student identities. As such, identity development is an ongoing and complex process that cannot be encompassed in a single theory (Patton et al., 2016) While there are other conceptual frameworks in examining identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Weidman, 1989), for the context of this study, the researcher utilized the communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993) as the theoretical framework to analyze the participants' communicative experiences in development of their transfer student identity. The researcher also elected to emphasize CCT student identity experiences, removing the focus on university administration, policies, and institutional practices. If these topics were mentioned, the researcher tied this back to the student's own experiences and how it related to their identity development and addressed this as part of the implications in policy, practice, and research.

The study was delimited to include participants from one four-year institution who transferred from a community college and had been enrolled at the university for at least one year. A single site was utilized for not only the institution's large transfer student population, but also to allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of CCT students' experiences, taking into account the researcher's background knowledge of the institution's policies and practices regarding transfer. Secondly, a complete understanding of CCT identity development is difficult to grasp fully, which is inherent in exploring complex phenomena. In an attempt to explore the meaning making process of CCT students' transfer student identity, other salient aspects of identity may not be fully explored. This study examined how CCT students develop their transfer student

identity; however, there may be other aspects of identity, such as gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, or socioeconomic status, that may influence the participants' identity exploration. Additionally, the scope of the study focused specifically on CCT students, limiting the expansion of identity development for other emerging transfer populations, such as lateral students (Shapiro et al., 2018).

The present study relies on a few key assumptions. First, the researcher acknowledges that the participants' experiences are individual constructions contributing to the collective meaning making of this study. However, these constructions should be carefully considered. In seeking this collective meaning making experience, the researcher assumed that participants would respond to the interview questions in a truthful manner. To encourage honest responses, the researcher informed and reminded the participants of the voluntary nature of the study and the de-identification of their responses. Other assumptions made include participants' effectively grasping the interview protocol questions, and the researcher eliciting the desired perspectives from the participants. Additionally, the researcher conducted this study with the assumption that participants have an understanding of the development of their transfer student identity and could share those thoughts through the interview sessions. Despite the delimitations and assumptions mentioned above, the present study creates new and necessary knowledge regarding theoretical and practical significance.

Definition of Terms

In order to ensure a common understanding of key concepts and terminology, a list of terms with definitions is included. It is important to note that the participants' terms will be utilized in data analysis and discussion, which may differ from the list provided.

- Community college transfer student (CCT student) - This study defined community college transfer students as individuals who began their postsecondary education at a two-year community college and transferred to a four-year institution to complete a bachelor's degree. This type of transfer pathway from a two-year institution to a four-year institution is also known as vertical/upward transfer (Handel & Williams, 2012).

- Beginning first-year student – This study defines a beginning first-year student as a student who entered a four-year institution as a first-time freshman (Laanan, 2001).

- Transfer – Transfer as defined in this study as the postsecondary pathway where a student transitions to a four-year institution from a two-year community college.

- Identity development – The psychosocial process through which an individual makes sense of his/her experiences during specific points in his/her life (Patton et al., 2016).

- Student identity – This study defines student identity as the articulation of an individual's identity as being a student based on their behaviors, relationships, and community membership (Hecht, 1993; Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

Conclusion

This chapter began by introducing the rationale for exploring CCT students' post-transfer experiences in regards to identity development. Chapter One outlined the problem, the study's purpose, and driving research questions. Additionally, this chapter reflected on the significance of the project, along with a discussion of assumptions and delimitations, and definitions relevant to the study. The remaining chapters will examine

literature pertinent to this study, research methodology, analysis, and overall recommendations. The proceeding chapter, Chapter Two, reviews the literature surrounding community college transfer students, from the community college context and the composition of its' students, to their post-transfer experiences at four-year institutions. Chapter Two will also explore the limited research available on CCT students' identity development as part of their post-transfer experiences. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in the study, participant and study site identification, data collection, and analysis processes. Chapter Four details the findings from the data as it pertains to the research questions, identifying key themes, which emerged from the analysis of the data. Lastly, Chapter Five provides a summary of the study linking the findings to aspects of the literature, while providing implications for practice and future research related to CCT student identity development.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the identity experiences of CCT students one year after attending their receiving institution and understand how these experiences play a role in shaping their transfer identity. One overarching research question guided this inquiry: (1) How do CCT students' lived experiences inform their identities as college students? Additionally, two sub questions were formed: Sub Question (1): How do CCT students' community college experiences shape their student identities? Sub question (2): How do CCT students (re)negotiate their student identities post-transfer?

Intended to provide context and ground the study in existing literature, this chapter begins with an overview of the community college setting and the composition of its students. The essential functions and missions of community colleges are discussed as well as an examination of the facilitators and obstacles community college students face in vertical transfer. Next, a review of the literature on CCT students' post-transfer experiences is provided. Though the focus of this study is on the experiences of CCT students one-year post-transfer, literature on CCT students' initial transfer experiences, both facilitators and obstacles, are included to provide context for the acclimation process at the four-year institution. Given the lack of literature on CCT students' identities, the final theme identified in this chapter relates to the broader sense of identity development for transfer students and notable theoretical approaches to psychosocial identity development recognized in the literature. Finally, the CCT student literature is summarized and concludes with a discussion of the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993), which served as the theoretical framework for this study.

Table 1

Identified Themes in the Literature

Theme	Sources
The Community College Context and Students	
Community Colleges	(Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Cohen et al., 2014; Ginder et al., 2014; Laanan et al., 2010; Ma & Baum, 2013; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Provasnik, 2008; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wang, 2009; Zumeta et al., 2012)
Community College Students & Transfer	Facilitators of Vertical Transfer: (Bahr et al., 2013; Doyle, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Falconetti, 2009; Ginder et al., 2014; Hagedorn et al., 2008; Handel, 2007; Jain et al., 2011; Laanan et al., 2010; Lasota & Zumeta, 2016; Luo et al., 2007; Wang, 2009; Wyner et al., 2016)
	Obstacles in Vertical Transfer: (Alfonso, 2006; Bailey et al., 2017; Bound et al., 2010; Dowd et al., 2008; Doyle, 2009; Hagedorn et al., 2006; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Melguizo et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Wang, 2009)
Post-Transfer Experiences	
The Transfer Process	Facilitators of the Transfer Process: (Bailey et al., 2017; Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Davies & Kratky, 2000; Dowd et al., 2008; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Shaw & London, 2001; Shaw & Chin-Newman, 2017; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wyner et al., 2016)
	Obstacles of the Transfer Process: (Flaga, 2006; Hills, 1965; Laanan et al., 2010; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Patton et al., 2016)
Acclimation at the Receiving Institution	Academic Adjustment & Engagement Experiences: (Adams & Curtis, 2014; Astin, 1985; Barnett, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014; Flaga, 2006; Hills, 1965; Kodama, 2002; Kuh, 2003; Mamrick, 2005; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Roberts & Styron Jr., 2010; Schreiner et al., 2011; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Townsend, 2008)
	Social Adjustment & Engagement Experiences: (Antonio, 2004; Astin, 1984, 1985; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Ellis, 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Lester et al., 2013; Martinez & Munsch, 2019; Wang & Wharton, 2010; Wang, 2009; Zhang, 2008)
	Academic and Social Integration: (Deil-Amen, 2011; Lasota & Zumeta, 2016; Stuart et al., 2014)

Identity Development	
Theories of Psychosocial Identity Development	Chickering Theory of Student Development: (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Drexler & Campbell, 2011; Fassinger, 1998; Gardner, 2007; Hadley, 2006; Jones & Abes, 2013; Liversage et al., 2018; Taub, 1997; Torres et al., 2003; Zhang, 2008; Zubernis et al., 2011)
	Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Development: (Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Weidman, 1989; Weidman et al., 2014)
	Student Identity Centrality and Identity Salience: (Abes et al., 2007; Bowman, 2014; Bowman & Felix, 2017; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Sellers et al., 1998; Stryker & Serpe, 1994)
Theoretical Framework	
Communication Theory of Identity	(Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Golden et al., 2002; Hecht, 1993, 2014; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht et al., 2004; Jung & Hecht, 2004, 2008; Jung, 2011; Kam & Hecht, 2009; Maeda & Hecht, 2012; Nuru, 2014; Orbe, 2004; Schwartzman & Sanchez, 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Urban & Orbe, 2010; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2016)

Community College Context and Students

Community Colleges

In the United States, a variety of options exist for students who wish to pursue post-secondary education, including two-year community colleges, four-year private and public institutions, technical schools, and for-profit institutions. Higher education institutions are increasing their student tuition and fees (Zumeta et al., 2012), which proves problematic for students and families concerned with the cost of post-secondary education. Due to rising tuition costs at four-year institutions, students often begin their post-secondary education career at two-year institutions (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Community colleges offer lower tuition rates as compared to four-year institutions, with the "average annual community college tuition and fees are less than half those at public

4-year colleges and universities and one-tenth those at private 4-year colleges and universities" (Provasnik, 2008, p. 23).

Regarding the transfer experience, students often begin their educational journeys at a community college (Laanan et al., 2010; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Wang, 2009). Community colleges are considered diverse institutions due to the various types of students they serve, as well as the curriculum options and resources they provide to their local communities (Taylor & Jain, 2017). While the original intent of community colleges was to support transfer pathways by housing general education courses (Cohen et al., 2014), their current composition and missions have changed. In addition to the transfer function, community colleges provide workforce development and skill training through professional education and certificate programs, enrichment programs, high school equivalency exams, and remediation courses.

Community colleges provide an essential pathway to post-secondary education for a diverse group of students in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity (Ma & Baum, 2013) due to their institutional missions of open access (Cohen et al., 2014). Specifically, community colleges are an attractive option for non-traditional (average age of 28) (Ginder et al., 2014), minority, and low-income students due to the variety of class offerings and emphasis on the needs of the learner (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). This examination of the roles and functions of community colleges provides an essential backdrop in examining community college students and the unique nature of their transfer experiences.

Community College Students and Transfer

Community college students differ socially and academically from beginning first-year students at traditional four-year institutions (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Over one-third of all community college students represent first-generation college students (36%), nearly a quarter of students are Hispanic (24%), and an overwhelming majority (63%) attend on a part-time basis (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). The majority of the community college student population are white (46%), females (56%), working part-time (62% for full-time students) while receiving some form of financial aid (59%) (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2018). Academically, more than half (60%) of community college students begin their college career in basic skill remedial courses (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012), a stark contrast to the less than one third (20%) of beginning first-year students who take remedial courses (Complete College America, 2012). Nevertheless, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that approximately half (45%) of all four-year degree students had enrolled in a two-year institution at some point in their postsecondary career (Ginder et al., 2014).

The transfer function, also referred to as a transfer pathway, has become embedded into community college's institutional missions (AACC, 2018). As indicated by the AACC (2018), 80% of first-time students entering community college express a desire to earn a four-year degree. Previous research has established aspects of pre-transfer success indicators (D'Amico et al., 2014) and transfer process barriers (Packard et al., 2013) for community college students transferring to four-year institutions. Although community college students rarely follow a "lockstep" transfer pathway (Patton et al.,

2016), where these students transfer as juniors to four-year institutions, the community college transfer pathway can both facilitate and present challenges to vertical transfer.

Facilitators of Vertical Transfer

The literature reflects two frames of inquiry regarding factors that influence community college students' vertical transfer: student factors relevant to transfer and state and institutional characteristics pertinent to transfer. As noted by Lasota and Zumeta (2016), community college student factors are a better predictor of student outcomes rather than institutional factors. For example, a community college student's choice of degree program, program intensity, and intent to transfer are considered the most critical factors of transfer opportunities (Ginder et al., 2014). According to Lasota and Zumeta (2016), "students who were on academic curriculums are more likely to attain a bachelor's degree than those on vocational or other curriculums" (p. 582). Greater enrollment intensity, as identified by Wang (2009), such as enrolling in more credit hours per term, increased the probability of vertical transfer, which was consistent with Doyle's (2009) findings regarding academic preparation in the community college context.

Researchers have examined the relationship between community college students' academic performance and course completion toward the likelihood of vertical transfer. Studies have pointed to academic preparation (i.e., higher grade point averages and academic skills developed) as a predictor of success (Hagedorn et al., 2008). Completion of key transfer-related courses, such as passing college-level math as well as completing an associate degree (Laanan et al., 2010; Luo et al., 2007), are factors related to vertical transfer. In Engle and Tinto's (2008) phenomenological study, certain types of students were more likely to transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions.

Specifically, traditional college-age students (18-24 years of age) and white females from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to transfer to four-year institutions than any other group (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Along with individual student preferences, institutional preference and state factors also play a role in the opportunities for community college students' vertical transfer.

A considerable feature in vertical transfer is the transfer articulation agreement. Here, articulation agreements intend to provide smooth transitions from the community college, a two-year institution, to the receiving four-year institution (Jain et al., 2011). For example, California and Florida are considered successful blueprints for developing articulation agreements and transfer process by creating seamless transfer systems from K-12 to community college and finally, four-year institutions (Bahr et al., 2013; Falconetti, 2009). The institutional commitments and partnerships between administrators, faculty, and staff at both community colleges and four-year colleges aid in transfer pathways. Handel (2007) suggested that higher levels of trust, coupled with open and honest lines of communication within and between institutions, resulted in strong systems of support for transfer student success. Other institutional measures have been examined by the Community College Research Center to improve the transfer process. In Texas, some factors that aided in vertical transfer included communicating with students willing to transfer, supporting community colleges, admitting community college students first, setting transfer targets for students, and establishing a transfer going culture (Wyner et al., 2016). Although community colleges offer opportunities for vertical transfer to four-year institutions, CCT students often face significant transfer process barriers.

Obstacles in Vertical Transfer

Some researchers have suggested that attending a community college is a barrier in bachelor's degree completion (Bailey et al., 2017), while other researchers have noted the requirement to complete developmental or remedial courses (Alfonso, 2006; Bound et al., 2010) as one of the critical obstacles in the probability of vertical transfer. Scholars have also examined the role student factors play in limiting vertical transfer. Demographics such as students who are ethnic minorities, older adult students, lower-income, and first-generation community college students have been identified as individuals with a lower likelihood of vertical transfer (Hagedorn et al., 2006). Additional risk factors to college persistence inhibiting vertical transfer include full-time employment, lack of a high school diploma, and single parenthood (Wang, 2009). Traditionally, CCT students come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and face contextual factors such as employment while attending college, making this population more sensitive to cost. Therefore, CCT students base their four-year institution selection primarily on tuition as compared to beginning first-year students (Doyle, 2009; Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013; Melguizo et al., 2011). Lichtenberger and Dietrich (2013) tracked postsecondary outcomes of 2,154 CCT students and 21,522 rising four-year college juniors from Illinois high schools. They found that CCT students enrolled in less selective institutions as compared to students who enrolled in four-year institutions upon high school graduation (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013).

For community college students transferring to four-year institutions, academic preparation, knowledge of resources, and equity-related barriers are among the challenges they face before transfer. CCT students encounter equity-related barriers in regards to

access to student information as low "elite status" members. For example, "the role of social capital and how teachers, counselors, and other authority figures facilitate educational opportunities for racial minority students" can affect their ability to cope during their transition to a four-year institution (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2013, p. 651). Specifically, transfer agents, such as instructors, staff, and counselors alike, provide a wealth of knowledge and resources beneficial to students.

Social capital is an additional situational barrier CCT students face. The way community college faculty, advisors, and staff facilitate educational opportunities for racial minority students can aid in the perception of lower "elite status" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Regarding social status, elite four-year institutions rarely admit community college students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Even when elite institutions admit transfer students, these students are more likely to transfer from other four-year institutions rather than community colleges (Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008). In addition to the pre-transfer opportunities and challenges examined above, community college students encounter further adjustment experiences after transitioning into their four-year institution, otherwise known as post-transfer adjustment.

Post-Transfer Experiences

The literature has identified many potential contributors to the successful transition to four-year institutions for community college students as well as challenges these students face before transfer. This section will focus on the literature concerning the experiences of community college students upon and after transfer, otherwise known as post-transfer adjustment. In this context, post-transfer adjustment refers to the academic and social experiences associated with transfer students' success once they have

transitioned into their new institution. The following part of this chapter describes the intricacies of the acclimation process at the receiving institution for CCT students.

The Transfer Process

The process of transferring from two-year to four-year institutions remains a critical element to baccalaureate degrees (Blaylock & Bresciani, 2011; Laanan, 2007) and contributes to the unique nature of CCT students' experiences (Silverman et al., 2009). One student development theory helpful in understanding this unique process is Schlossberg's transition theory (1981, 1984). This theory hypothesized that student characteristics or perceptions about the transition process play a role in how students adjust to their settings after transfer. Four factors, known as the 4S's, were identified as influential in an individual's ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) performed semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students who transferred from the California Community College system to a California four-year institution. Using Schlossberg's model, Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) illustrated how the use of students' intrinsic motivations; situational stressors, including financial burdens and transfer guidance; support systems; and strategic lessons learned aided in the goal of transfer. For community college students, significant transitional and adjustment experiences, both positive and negative, play a role in their transition and overall adjustment to their new institutional settings (Lewis, 2013; Nora et al., 2006).

Facilitators of the Transfer Process

There are specific facilitators of success in the transfer process. Research in successful transfer processes are the byproducts of partnerships, articulation agreements between two-year and four-year institutions, and the creation of a transfer receptive

culture at two-year institutions (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Eggleston and Laanan (2001) suggested "transfer students report a need for more course articulation, counseling and advising, faculty sensitivity, academic support services, transfer student-centered orientation programs, student activities, and knowledge of campus resources, and universities and colleges are not meeting their needs" (p. 95). For transfer students, factors that were considered positive during the transfer process include accurate, accessible, and timely information (Davies & Kratky, 2000), support networks for students (K. M. Shaw & London, 2001), and counseling plus advising services (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Transfer orientation programs that introduce transfer students to support services while creating opportunities for social and academic engagement can also facilitate ease of the transfer process (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Institutional measures have also been suggested to improve the transfer process by supporting community colleges and establishing a transfer-going culture (Dowd et al., 2008), as well as providing well-functioning technical tools (Bailey et al., 2017) relating to the situation factor in Schlossberg's model. Nuñez & Yoshimi (2017) found that academic skills developed in two-year settings and student self-characteristics were positive facilitators in the transfer process. These academic skills included note-taking skills, problem-solving skills, and time management skills. Moreover, Shaw and Chin-Newman (2017) proposed transfer-going cultures at institutions to create environments for CCT students to flourish. While research has found some facilitators of the transfer process, overwhelmingly, the literature focuses on the barriers community college students face during the transfer process (Wyner et al., 2016).

Obstacles of the Transfer Process

Laanan and colleagues (2010) discovered three themes affecting students' successful transfer for 172 Massachusetts CCT students: informational setbacks, imperfect program alignment, and the lack of community college resources. For example, the lack of advising with misinformation about the transfer process served as a significant informational delay. Other situational factors on obstacles in the transfer process include academic issues, including credit hour setbacks, loss of academic credit, and academic difficulties (Flaga, 2006; Hills, 1965; Monaghan & Attewell, 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Patton et al., 2016). While steps have been taken to improve the transfer process, it is essential to examine the post-transfer student experience, both academically and socially, to understand its influence on adjustment to university life.

Acclimation at the Receiving Institution

The most notable theory of student persistence utilized in understanding outcomes in the community college setting has been Tinto's intergration model (1975, 1993). The model suggests students are more likely to commit to an institution and persist if they are academically (attached to the intellectual life of the institution) and socially (creating relationships outside of the classroom) integrated within the institution. Here, students enter into higher education with a variety of background characteristics (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, etc.), which can impact their commitment to the institution and persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993). In this model, a student may be well-integrated academically but are more likely to leave the institution for another if they are socially un-integrated.

Additionally, students who are both academically and socially un-integrated are more likely to drop out of the institution altogether. Generally, research into the applicability of Tinto's model has provided support for the constructs of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Dennis et al. (2008) proposed that motivation, adjustment, and perception could be more important than an individual's cognitive skills. However, transfer students have reported lower levels of satisfaction with their institution's climate including interactions with their professors and classmates (Lester, 2006). Also, students with low self-concepts (Laanan, 2007) and negative perceptions of the transfer institution (Flaga, 2006) tend to have greater difficulty in adjusting.

Academic Adjustment and Engagement Experiences

CCT students encounter complicated transfer procedures, academic difficulties, and adjustment complications (Flaga, 2006; Hills, 1965; Townsend, 2008). In regards to academic difficulties, Monaghan and Attewell (2015) found a slight dip in overall GPA performance of CCT students as compared to beginning first-year students. Declines in GPA during initial transfer is known as transfer shock (Hills, 1965) and transfer tremor (Kuh, 2003). Classroom environmental factors are issues relating to academic adjustment for community college students. Negative attitudes of faculty, regarding approachability, are often associated with larger class sizes (Roberts & Styron Jr., 2010). This perception regarding approachability is also associated with previous experiences with faculty. For example, beginning first-year students may have encountered faculty members through prior class experiences, developing closer relationships than transfer students engaging with faculty for the first time (Cohen et al., 2014). As such, developing relationships and engaging in positive interactions with faculty have been known to positively impact

students' collegial success (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Schreiner et al., 2011). For community college students, validation from CC faculty, in terms of feeling acknowledged and valued, was found as a significant predictor of students' intent to persist (Barnett, 2010).

An additional challenge of academic adjustment, as indicated by Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2012), is that CCT students often take higher-level coursework within their major for the first time and are academically ill-prepared. Furthermore, these relationships, including familiarity with class structures, discussions, and expectations with faculty, are crucial for student academic persistence regarding involvement and adjustment (Astin, 1985). Some research has explored the ways in which seminar courses can help mitigate the challenges in acclimating to college (Grites & Farina, 2012; Mamrick, 2005). For example, Adams and Curtis's (2014) study on transfer seminars, found that 84% of their participants reported increased levels of communication confidence, ease in building relationships with faculty, and obtaining relevant academic information. While research has given attention to the academic deficiencies of CCT students, even when CCT students well-equipped academically, their social experiences post-transfer can leave them feeling marginalized (Kodama, 2002).

Social Adjustment and Engagement Experiences

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement points to the importance of social interactions of students in the college setting, focusing on the amount of energy and effort a student devotes within an environment. Astin (1984) argues that involvement requires an investment in qualitative psychosocial and quantitative physical energy. As previously mentioned, relationships with faculty and college peer groups are essential to student

persistence (Astin, 1985). For example, Antonio (2004) found college peer groups as a source of informal socialization. More specifically, students in racially and academically diverse friendship groups are likely to have higher levels of degree aspirations than homogenous friendship groups. These various interpersonal relationships relate to similar findings regarding academic success and adjustment in community college students in regards to higher degree aspirations (Wang, 2009). A community college student's sense of belonging was also found to be an important form of engagement among CCT women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) regarding their perceptions of institutional climate (Johnson, 2012).

In Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, quantitative features relate to the physical amount of energy devoted to an activity. Community college students often cite a lack of belonging while in community college due to their additional responsibilities regarding work and family (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Martinez & Munsch, 2019). In the same token, CCT students' work and family responsibilities often carry over from the two-year setting, translating into less time to be involved in school activities within the four-year setting as compared to beginning first year students (Wang & Wharton, 2010). Even when transfer students partook in on-campus activities, many saw those activities as unnecessary diversions (Lester et al., 2013). Consequently, transfer students' sense of belonging was found to take place through academic channels, with social engagement taking place outside of the university (Lester et al., 2013). In a comparison of levels of engagement between beginning first-year students and CCT students, Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) found that "community college transfer students matriculated as sophomores and juniors are less engaged in respect to active involvement in the academic

environment than their native student counterparts" (p. 588). Chapman and Pascarella (1983) echoed this, noting that community college students have less social contact with their institution, given that the majority of their social integration took place off-campus. As such, CCT students' social engagement happens through interactions with personal relatives at their home or interacting with their peers by discussing academic progress (Ellis, 2013). These studies reveal that CCT students may eventually gain a sense of belonging but through academic activities.

Academic and Social Integration. Given the unique experiences of CCT students, Deil-Amen (2011) has questioned the dichotomous relationship between academic and social integration for community college students. Instead, Deil-Amen (2011) conceptualizes these academic and social experiences as "socio-academic integrative moments" (p. 72), given that CCT students utilize academic channels as their social experiences. Stuart et al., (2014) proposed an alternative model of student persistence specially tailored for community colleges. In their new framework, the authors acknowledge the role of job opportunities and work-family-schooling dilemmas CC students face incorporating elements of cost-benefit considerations. Here, the conceptualization of social integration focuses less on social activities outside of the classroom and more on the peer groups and interactions with faculty and students centered around academically-related activities. Researchers such as Lasota and Zumeta (2016) sought to determine if this new construct of socio-academic integrative moments was related to Tinto's social integration construct, revealing that both constructs were highly related. While these results look promising, additional research into the utility of socio-academic integrative moments in the context of CCT students should occur.

Various studies on CCT student integration and involvement have proposed factors that contribute to the student departure puzzle (Braxton, 2000). According to DeBard (2004), the current generation of college students is considered the most diverse group regarding race, ethnicity, and other social identity dimensions. Nevertheless, the concept of student identity development is often absent from the literature on CCT students.

Identity Development

Student identity development in college students has captured the interest of researchers and practitioners alike. The concept of identity development began with Erikson's (1963) examination of the series of psychosocial crises occurring during adolescence, with the field of higher education extending this research due to the exploration of one's identity during late adolescence (Tatumm, 2000). Theories of student development have used the concept of development interchangeably with the concept of identity as a reference to overall personal growth (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1994). The broad concept of identity is considered a socially constructed combination of beliefs and perceptions about one's social group and the interactions that take place in broader social contexts (McEwen, 2003). Identity can also be defined as a process created as a result of experiences and perceptions (Kegan, 1994), serving as an anchor in an individual's core beliefs, values, and attitudes (Scott et al., 1998). Development is a process that involves connecting to, being loyal to, and belonging to an entity, or multiple entities. It encompasses the "perception of oneness with or belongingness to (a collective), where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the (collective) in which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104).

Conversely, identity development research has also examined how individuals may manage their identities depending upon the context of a situation. For example, Goffman (1963) examined the notion of how individuals partially disclose or cover their identities when they feel stigmatized. According to Goffman (1963), all stigmatized individuals will engage in adaptive techniques referred to as "covering" in order to reduce the visibility of their stigmatized condition. Moreover, Yoshino (2006) extends this notion of covering in his experiences as an openly gay Japanese-American lawyer. Covering as defined by Yoshino (2002) occurs when "the underlying identity is neither altered nor hidden, but downplayed" (p. 772). Both Goffman and Yoshino explore how covering is utilized as an identity management technique in order to assimilate into particular situations.

Higher education researchers have identified specific subsets of identity development work, namely social identity and psychosocial models. Social identity development focuses on how an individual comes to understand their social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Helms, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Rypisi et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2017). On the other hand, psychosocial identity development refers to the critical issues of development individuals face during specific points in their lives, such as student identity (Patton et al., 2016). Seifert and colleagues (2010) highlight the importance of mean making in regards to college student development suggesting that as a college student develops, they begin to rely on their own education and experiences as a source of guidance. Chickering's theory of student identity development, Weidman's model of undergraduate development, and frameworks

in student identity centrality and identity salience are noteworthy theories present in identity development literature.

Theories of Psychosocial Identity Development

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development

Chickering established the most notable theory of student identity development theorizing overall identity development in college students through seven vectors (Chickering, 1969) based on his work with undergraduate students who attended Goddard College, a small institution located in rural Vermont from 1959-1969. The vectors illustrate how the formation of a student's identity is shaped through emotional, social, physical, and intellectual developments in a college environment. Based on middle-to-upper-class, rural, white undergraduate men (Jones & Abes, 2013), Chickering and Reisser (1993) revisited the original developmental theory revamping the vectors "to use language that is gender-free and appropriate for persons of diverse backgrounds" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 44). Chickering and Reisser's (1993) fifth stage in their student development theory examines establishing identity formation by exploring self-concept and differences in social identities. The development of identity includes: "(1) comfort with body and appearance, (2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, (3) sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, (4) clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyle, (5) sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (7) personal stability and integration" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49).

Chickering's seven vectors of development have been discussed in a variety of student populations such as in South African first-generation students (Liversage et al.,

2018), community college students participating in study abroad (Drexler & Campbell, 2011), lesbian and gay college students (Zubernis et al., 2011), international students (Zhang, 2008), and students with learning disabilities (Hadley, 2006). Developmental researchers have also begun to acknowledge that psychosocial growth occurs beyond undergraduate degrees (Gardner, 2007), specifically understanding how development evolves in graduate students.

In reviewing Chickering's theory and the applications associated with the vectors, it is important to acknowledge some of the most significant criticisms of the framework. As Torres et al., (2003) noted, "the belief that students' sense of identity is developed during the college years is widely accepted; what has not received as much attention as the influence of race, ethnicity, other social categories, or the interrelationship of multiple identities on that development during the college years" (p. 14). This shift toward an inclusive environment was profoundly influential in the revision of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors. However, criticisms remain that the theory still ignores the importance of social identities such as race, sex, gender, and socioeconomic status due to the preservation of the original foundations of the framework deriving from Caucasian students. For example, researchers have argued that the theory's vectors may not sufficiently nor accurately explain the identity development of women (Taub, 1997), African Americans (Cross, 1991), and LGBTQ students (Fassinger, 1998). While Chickering's seminal theory created a basis for understanding undergraduate identity development, Weidman's model of undergraduate socialization is another prominent theory in identity development worth noting.

Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Development

Weidman's (1989) model of undergraduate socialization has also been used to study student identity development. This model expands upon Tinto's model (1975, 1993) and Pascarella's (1985) model for assessing change, focusing on college experiences and the development of student identity through the domains of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. The most vital element in identity development pertains to an awareness of being exposed to common settings (e.g., academic environments like lectures, seminars, and labs), creating long-lasting memories in students' minds, which affects their development, behaviors, and expectations (Pascarella, 1985). Studies done between 2003 and 2013 have demonstrated that Weidman's model can contribute to improving student identity development in community colleges (Weidman et al., 2014). This model takes into account important student background characteristics, unlike Chickering, and how these "characteristics and shaping forces constitute predisposing and, to a certain extent, constraining forces on students' choices in the college's structural and organizational settings" (Weidman et al., 2014, p. 58).

Student Identity Centrality and Identity Salience

Bowman and Felix (2017) proposed the concept of student identity centrality for college students as an identity development construct that may help shape student success, retention, and persistence. Identity centrality, as described by Sellers et al., (1998), examines the extent to which an aspect of one's identity is important to their overall self-image. Identities about one's life roles, such as a parent or occupation, can be a contributing aspect of whom they perceive themselves to be. Building upon this framework, Bowman (2014) proposed that student centrality is where a student views

their identity as a post-secondary student as essential to their self-image, suggesting that this form of identity development may aid in the student being more committed to their institution and eventually completing their degree. In their study of 400 undergraduate students, Bowman and Felix (2017) found student identity centrality to be positively related to a student's goal commitment, institutional commitment, and intent to persist.

Stryker and Serpe (1994) describe identity salience "as a readiness to act out an identity as a consequence of the identity's properties as a cognitive structure or schema" (p.17). Essentially, identity salience is the likelihood of an individual to enact certain behaviors of a particular identity and how much time is devoted to those enacted behaviors. Identity salience is situational, in that different identities can be more or less salient depending on the context of the experience by the individual (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The model's development by Jones and McEwen (2000) and Abes and colleagues (2007) further the concepts of identity salience, explaining how students can experience multiple identities, how they intersect, and the extent to which those identities are contextual salient. As cited in Jones and Abes (2013), Dill and Zambrana (2009) stated that an individual's identity draws from an array of socially defined statuses, which vary concerning importance depending on specific situations or at particular historical moments.

Similarly, Abes et al., (2007) went on to discuss the significance of contextual influence in regards to the salience of our social identities to our core selves, illustrating great fluidity in multiple identities. A significant impacting element to an individual is dependent on the identity dimension that is most important to them at the time. Despite the extensive research in identity development, a significant gap in our knowledge about

CCT students' experiences of identity and the salience of their identities as students is unknown.

Gaps in CCT Student Literature

Having discussed the context of community college and the students they serve, community college students' post-transfer experiences, as well as aspects of identity development, opportunities for additional research emerged. First and foremost, there is a need for an additional focus on CCT students' experiences after their initial transfer. Literature on community college students transferring to four-year institutions sufficiently addresses aspects of pre-transfer success indicators (D'Amico et al., 2014), transfer process barriers (Packard et al., 2013), and post-transfer outcomes like retention (Dennis et al., 2008), persistence (Townsend & Wilson, 2009), and adjustment (Goodman et al., 2006). Yet, research frameworks in post-transfer adjustment and engagement (Jain et al., 2011) have not taken into account how identity is shaped and renegotiated by community college students.

As stated above, researchers have identified specific subsets of identity development work, mainly to understand students' social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Helms, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Rypisi et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2017). Moreover, theories of identity development have focused on overall developmental growth for different student populations, neglecting the ever-growing presence of CCT students at four-year institutions. While Bowman and Felix (2017) have begun to look at student identity, more research is needed in examining the unique nature of CCT students. Community college students' identity development in community college and the interpretation of their identity or status as a "transfer student"

at their receiving four-year institution is virtually unknown (Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2016).

Fundamentally, language is the glue bonding our identities because "the process of identification is conducted primarily with language and the product of identification is expressed primarily with language" (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, p.11). Thus, the communication theory of identity is a conceptual framework that can be utilized to examine CCT students' identity development post-transfer since this framework constructs identity via behaviors, relationships, and community membership (Hecht, 1993).

Theoretical Framework

Communication theory of identity (CTI) is a framework used to explain the broader sense of identity as "the processing of social identity through interaction" (Hecht et al., 2004, p. 261). Identity is a multi-layered construct formed, challenged, and altered through communication with communication being considered an element of identity instead of just a product. Identities are manifested in the interactions with other social actors and are expressed using language.

CTI's focus on communication depicts a key difference from the broader framework of social identity theory's focus on structures, roles, or group classifications (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) as well as Chickering's psychosocial identity development. Specifically, CTI asserts that the construct of identity infuses not only an individual awareness, but also the articulation of identity via behaviors, relationships, and community membership (Hecht, 1993). Specifically, identity is fluid, continuously being shaped, confirmed, questioned, and altered through the act of communication and "must

be understood as a transaction in which messages and values are exchanged" (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 230).

CTI "conceptualizes identity as communication rather than seeing identity as merely a product of communication or vice versa" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 266) by situating identity in four different "frames": (1) personal, (2) enacted, (3) relational, and (4) communal (Golden et al., 2002). These layers are positioned to reflect the holistic approach in where identity resides: within a person, within the interaction, within a relationship, and within a group (Hecht et al., 2004). The personal layer empathizes the traditional conception of identity as a person's self-concept, self-image, understanding of one's thoughts and feelings about the self. The enacted layer situates identity as communication with others expressed via verbal and nonverbal messages, including the performance of social roles and behavior (Hecht, 1993). The relational layer describes how identity is co-created and negotiated through a variety of roles and social interactions. For example, Jung and Hecht (2004) describe four different levels of relational identity. The first level of relational identity is where individuals internalize others' perceptions to shape their own identity. The social roles an individual takes on in relationships with others (e.g., graduate student, parent, spouse) form the second level of relational identity. The third aspect of relational identity pertains to how identity is formed based on the multiple roles an individual may hold concerning other roles (i.e., I am a doctoral candidate, which impacts the time I spend with my children and partner). Finally, relational identity constitutes how a relationship can be a unit of identity (i.e., a family as a unit). The fourth and final layer of identity is the communal frame. This frame focuses on how larger social groups, such as cultures and communities, "bind us together

through collective memories, histories, rituals, and practices" (Drummond & Orbe, 2009, p. 81). The communal layer speaks to the collective characteristics and norms held by members of a group to form the composition of the group's identity. The four layers of identity influence one another and should not be understood as separate entities (Hecht et al., 2004). When the four layers of identity are aligned, an individual experiences cognitive consistency, for the time being. The layers of identity are not always in harmony, and when these communication frames are contradictory, cognitive inconsistency occurs, otherwise known as an identity gap (Hecht, 2014).

Identity gaps arise essentially when "a gap occurs between one's self-images and ascriptions of others" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 279). Identity gaps are an inevitable part of communication and vary in the degree of the gap, type of gap, and implications for social interactions (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Schwartzman and Sanchez (2016) suggested that identity-based conflicts and tensions can be relieved through enacting communal rituals and enriching relationships created among students. With 11 identity gaps theoretically possible when combining the four layers of identity, most of the research investigating identity gaps have taken place on the personal-enacted and personal-relational gaps (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Hecht & Choi, 2012; Nuru, 2014; Wadsworth et al., 2008). A variety of studies explain the communicative outcomes as a result of identity gaps within intracultural and intercultural interactions (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2008; Jung, 2011). Kam and Hecht (2009) demonstrated how personal-enacted identity gaps between grandchildren and grandparents lead to communicative outcomes such as topic avoidance, hindering overall relationship satisfaction. In their study of international students, Wadsworth and colleagues (2008) discovered that the personal-enacted gaps

experienced by international students hampered their acculturation and classroom satisfaction. Moreover, Urban and Orbe (2010) examined how identity gaps experienced by immigrants living in the United States played a role in their assimilation into American culture. Specifically, Urban and Orbe found that participants continuously utilized resources from their home country while assimilating into American culture while experiencing a variety of identity gaps: personal-enacted, personal-relational, enacted-relational, communal-relational, personal-communal, and enacted-communal identity gaps (Urban & Orbe, 2010). Other studies have examined identity gaps in transgender individuals (Nuru, 2014), first-generation college students (Orbe, 2004), and single Japanese women (Maeda & Hecht, 2012). Most of the current work utilizing CTI has focused primarily on identity-negotiation processes with groups including Jewish Americans (Golden et al., 2002), African Americans (Hecht et al., 2003), and international students (Wadsworth et al., 2008). Additionally, studies utilizing CTI have extended their focus to African American first-generation college students (Orbe, 2004) and transgender individuals (Wagner et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter explores the critical aspects of CCT students and their transition experiences through the following three themes: (1) the community college context and students, (2) post-transfer experiences, and (3) identity development. Community colleges have made higher education more accessible both geographically and economically, serving as an alternative to four-year institutions for many individuals (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015). Despite the increasing presence of CCT students, only 42% of CCT students complete their bachelor's degree within six years and often face

significant transitional and adjustment challenges at four-year institutions (Lewis, 2013; Nora et al., 2006).

Students' identity development in community college and the renegotiation of their student identity post-transfer is also a critical component of their post-transfer experiences. While there are specific theories in the college student development literature on transitions and post-transfer experiences, higher education identity development frameworks have yet to focus on community college students as a specific population. For example, Schlossberg (1981, 1984), Tinto (1993), and Astin (1984) have made connections between college student adjustment and engagement regarding transfer student populations. Meanwhile, Chickering and Riesser (1993) and Weidman (1989) focus on some aspects of identity development, yet there is a lack of research in the discussion of identity development for community college students. Additionally, most of the current work drawing on the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) has focused predominantly on identity negotiation processes in specific social identities like racial and ethnic groups. Research on CCT students can extend this body of research and create new opportunities to explore the complexities regarding identity creation, management, and negotiation in different collegial environments.

The following chapter will outline the methodology which will be employed to investigate how identity is shaped and renegotiated by CCT students after transferring to their receiving four-year institution.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Despite the growing presence of CCT students in four-year institutions, researchers have noted the lack of attention in transfer students' acclimation processes at their receiving institutions (Jain et al., 2011). As noted in Chapter Two, CCT students face multiple hurdles before, during, and after their transition to their receiving four-year institution, playing a significant role in their success (Laanan, 2007). While previous research has indicated that transfer students often feel stigmatized by university personnel (Laanan et al., 2010), the literature on post-transfer experiences does not yield an understanding of CCT student's interpretation of their identity as a transfer student (Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2016).

The aim of the present study was to understand how CCT students' transfer identity is shaped and renegotiated after attending their receiving institution for at least one year. In addition to adding to the developing body of literature on CCT students' post-transfer experiences, the knowledge gained from this study can be utilized by postsecondary administrators and educators to better support CCT post-transfer experiences. This chapter will outline the methodology for investigating CCT students' identity negotiations through an overview of research questions critical to the study, research design, the researcher's subjectivity statement, and ethical considerations. Sampling procedures for the project, data collection, instrumentation, and analysis procedures are then highlighted. Additional considerations are also discussed, including strategies for quality and limitations.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand how CCT students negotiated their student identities after one year at a large, public four-year institution. One overarching research question, along with two sub-questions, guided the design and implementation of this phenomenological study on how the lived experiences of CCT students inform and negotiate their identity as a transfer student.

RQ: How do CCT students' lived experiences inform their identities as college students?

Sub Question 1: How do CCT students' community college experiences shape their student identities?

Sub question 2: How do CCT students (re)negotiate their student identities post-transfer?

Research Design

Philosophical assumptions, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018), influence the researcher's approach in investigating phenomena. A researcher's beliefs, values, and worldview (ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological) (Gephart, 1999) influence their methodological perspectives (Crotty, 1998) and how they go about engaging in research. As a social constructionist, the researcher believes reality to be co-constructed through societal and interpersonal meaning making between individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, the researcher tends to examine research questions through an interpretative framework (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism provides the opportunity for in-depth exploration, which is a distinct characteristic of qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative research, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds,

and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). This qualitative study aims to understand the lived experiences of CCT students one year after they have successfully transferred to a four-year institution and how their experiences inform their identity as a transfer student (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As such, the use of qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration and detailed understanding of the complexity of CCT students' identity negotiation experiences. The examination of CCT students' identity negotiation is virtually nonexistent in the literature requiring an exploratory approach. Exploratory research examines a problem that has not been clearly defined and helps researchers gain a better understanding of the problem while exploring the research topic in varying levels of depth. As such, Lindolf (1995) suggests that qualitative inquiry supports the fundamentals of grounded research because: "if we want to know how something is done and what it means, we have to know how it is talked about" (p. 234).

Qualitative research is considered an umbrella term for a variety of research strategies used to conduct qualitative inquiry. For example, Patton (2015) noted 16 different theoretical traditions of qualitative inquiry, including ethnography, case study, and grounded theory, whereas Creswell and Poth (2018) present five qualitative inquiry approaches. This qualitative research will utilize a phenomenological design (Husserl, 1989) since the focus of the study is to explore the lived experiences of CCT students one year after they have successfully transferred. Phenomenology seeks to understand the nature, essence, and meanings of an experience as it is (Husserl, 1989; van Manen, 2014). Historically, phenomenology has been utilized as a descriptive approach in order to discover the essence of participants' lives through thick, rich descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Yet, there are several different methodological approaches to phenomenology

available to researchers. Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenology most closely aligns with Husserl's philosophical method, emphasizing the use of description to communicate the experiences of the phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology is another methodological approach in which the researcher is oriented towards the lived experience (the phenomenon in question) and interpreting the narrative texts of life as the meaning of the participants' lived experience (van Manen, 2014). Van Manen's (2001) hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses specifically on constructing a full interpretive description of the phenomenon instead of utilizing just description.

The aim of this qualitative study is to interpret the lived experiences of CCT students; hence, the branch of phenomenology that most closely aligns with the present study is hermeneutical phenomenology (van Manen, 2001). The researcher is interested in drawing rich narratives from the participants and their lived experiences, which will require an interpretive approach. Since this line of inquiry explores complex issues of identity negotiation, it is essential to allow the participants to express their own experiences with their transition to identify future investigations into how CCT students construct, reconstruct, and enact their student identities.

Subjectivity and Researcher Role

My inspiration to research CCT students and their student identity negotiations comes from my professional experiences in higher education. I have been employed in higher education for 10 years as an academic advisor in a four-year institution and as a lecturer at two-year and four-year institutions. As a 35-year-old Caucasian female, I consider myself to be in the early stages of my professional career. Currently, I am a full-time lecturer in the Department of Communication Studies for a large southeastern

university. As a lecturer, I teach a variety of undergraduate courses in public speaking, business communication, interpersonal communication, and research methods. In addition to my teaching duties, I also advise Communication Studies majors, helping students to navigate university policies and explore their academic, career, and personal goals. To understand my positionality within the context of this study, two layers of my identity have been identified, creating connections between my own experiences and my interactions with CCT students: an academic advisor and a full-time lecturer.

First, my interests in CCT students are influenced by my experiences as an academic advisor at a four-year institution. As an academic advisor, I came into contact with students, both beginning first-year and transfer, daily and often heard many stories from CCT students about their experiences at the four-year institution. Secondly, as a full-time lecturer in both a two-year institution and a four-year institution, some of my classroom discussions with students revealed commonalities in the challenges CCT students face when preparing to transfer but also their acclimation to the university after transfer.

While stories were varied by individual students who told them, patterns in their stories began to emerge, and I started to notice commonalities of experiences. The commonalities noticed in their stories led me to begin formulating the beliefs that guide this research. First, I noticed a trend in CCT students' stories revolving around the feeling of being neglected as citizens at the university. Their experiences at the four-year institution and beliefs about their membership with the institution became part of their identity, leading into specific negative self-talk and degrading their status at the institution. Many of the students recounted institutional procedures, experiences with

teachers, lack of engagement, and lack of institutional support as factors relating to their second-class citizen status.

As a researcher, it is essential to examine not only one's subjectivity, but also my approach and role in the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My previous knowledge, experiences, and personal perspectives all contribute to my worldview, which resides within an interpretative paradigm. As a social constructionist, I believe that reality is constructed through societal and interpersonal meaning making (Davis & Lachlan, 2017), with knowledge being understood from an individual's point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My beliefs, values, and worldview (ontological, epistemological, axiological) shaped my methodological choices of qualitative research in the present study (Crotty, 1998). In the interpretative paradigm, multiple realities are constructed by different individuals' points of view (Crotty, 1998) and are collected through subjective evidence in which the researcher has privileged access to the meanings co-constructed by those individuals. For example, throughout the research process, I assumed an active participant role where the level of my involvement was characterized by the phrase the researcher as the instrument (Cassell, 2005). As the primary instrument for qualitative data collection, every interview was facilitated as a conversational space where participants felt comfortable in sharing their unique experiences. For instance, I provided background information about myself as a researcher. I sought to build rapport with participants by asking introductory questions about their experiences as a transfer student at Southern University (SU). Since I assumed an active participant role in the research design, my attributes have the potential to influence the meanings of the participants'

responses, making it important to examine my reflexivity during every step of the research process.

There are advantages and disadvantages to my previous experiences as an academic advisor, and as my current role as a faculty member. My previous experiences as an institutional insider at SU serves as an advantage in this current study by creating rapport through shared experiences with my participants. To be fully transparent, I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees from SU before I began my professional career as an advisor/lecturer. My familiarity with SU's campus life, policies, and procedures provides a common foundation I share with my participants, aiding in my ability to build rapport. However, a possible disadvantage of my institutional insider status and experiences produces possible predispositions, biases, and attitudes that I made a conscious effort to avoid or share during data collection and analysis. As described by Moustakas (1994), during the participant interviews, I took a nonjudgmental stance to achieve epoche.

Additionally, member checks were conducted by sharing emerging findings with participants to certify proper researcher interpretation. I am also aware of my position as an employee/faculty member at SU and how that may influence my participants' responses. As a result, I made every effort to highlight my role as a researcher and not that of a faculty member at SU.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that it is the responsibility of the researcher to anticipate ethical issues that may arise as a result of the research process. The researcher made every effort to protect the participants so that the study will pose minimal risks. To do this, the researcher had the study protocol vetted and approved by SU's IRB prior to

data collection. Through participants' experiences and shared personal thoughts, the interview questions were centered around their experiences at SU one year after their transfer from a community college and did not address sensitive topics. However, in qualitative research, sensitive responses from the participants can happen during data collection. To safeguard the participants' statements and opinions, the researcher removed references to names and any context that might identify the participant.

Additionally, as a precaution, the researcher was prepared to refer participants to appropriate resources (SU's counseling center) during the interviewing process should a sensitive topic arise. Once the study was approved, the following safeguards were employed to protect the participants' rights:

1. The intent of the study – Objectives of the research study were provided in writing during the recruitment process as well as discussed before interviews began with all participants.

2. Voluntary participation – Each participant was informed in writing during the recruitment process and verbal confirmation was given before interviews were conducted. Additionally, participants were reminded of their ability to decline specific interview questions or withdraw from the study without penalty at any time.

3. Informed consent – A copy of the informed consent document was given to each participant prior to participants as well as verbal consent was obtained from each participant before their engagement in the research study.

4. Transparency – Participants were informed of data collection processes and activities, given written transcriptions of their interviews, and provided with final interpretations of the study.

5. Privacy - Participants used pseudonyms, and other identifiable data—such as the names of all people and places in the transcripts—were replaced with additional pseudonyms, thus allowing the researcher to share findings. Only the researcher had access to the interview transcripts, with all transcripts securely stored on password-protected, cloud-based networks.

Sampling

Setting

The setting for this study took place at a large, public research-intensive four-year institution located in the Southeastern part of the United States that is referred to as Southeast University (SU). This was selected as the research context of the present study for several reasons. First, SU is located in North Carolina, a state with the third-largest community college system (58 colleges across the state that enroll over 144,000 declared transfer students) in the United States (North Carolina Community Colleges, 2019), potentially increasing the overall number of eligible participants.

Second, SU had a large transfer population. SU's transfer center tracks entering students who transfer from community colleges, aiding in the participant selection and recruitment process. According to a publication from SU's undergraduate admissions office, for the academic year of 2017-2018, SU was considered the top transfer-serving institution in North Carolina, with 44% of new student enrollments entering with transfer status. SU also has a large (over 29,000 student enrollment) and diverse (40% minority)

student body, offering over 139 undergraduate majors. Due to SU's large student

population and less homogenous student body, this will allow for the selection of

participants from a variety of backgrounds, resulting in a more comprehensive

understanding of CCT students' one-year post-transfer experiences.

Finally, organizational policies and practices vary across four-year institutions.

SU was selected due to the researcher's familiarity and existing knowledge of SU's

institutional structures and systems, providing the ability to gain deeper insight into the

participants' lived experiences (Cooper & Rogers, 2015). By focusing on a single

institution, the researcher was able to limit the possible complexity of varying

institutional policies and practices. Convenience sampling for the site selection was used

based on the accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018); thus,

the researcher acknowledges the potential dangers of conducting qualitative research with

an insider role. The actions taken to mitigate those dangers are discussed later in this

chapter.

Participants

The researcher employed purposive sampling of 15 CCT students who transferred

from two-year community colleges to a large public four-year state institution located in

the Southeastern United States. Additionally, participants were required to be enrolled at

their receiving institution for at least one year. Purposive sampling was used to ensure

that participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Polkinghorne

(1989) suggested that phenomenological research designs have between five to 25

individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Participant selection occurred in

two phases. After IRB approval, the director of the SU Transfer Center created an

institutional report identifying potential participants based on their community college transfer status, age, and length of attendance at SU.

Next, a recruitment e-mail was sent to 3879 potential participants, summarizing the study and participation requirements and offering a small monetary incentive in the form of an Amazon gift card for participation in the study. The next phase of participant selection occurred as participants completed the web-based questionnaire. The recruitment e-mail asked participants to complete a web-based questionnaire (Appendix A) confirming their transfer from a community college, program of study, and demographic data, such as gender identity and race/ethnicity, in order to ensure a variety of diverse perspectives in the sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After completion of the pre-interview questionnaire, participants were given a copy of the informed consent document (Appendix B).

A total of 48 individuals responded to the call for participation. In order to gain a robust understanding of student experiences, the researcher engaged in purposeful maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2013) techniques selecting participants based on their ability to contribute to the diversity of perspectives in the overall study. Here, participants were selected based on their responses from the web0based questionnaire (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, program of study at SU, current student status) to ensure that diverse perspectives were represented in the sample. The researcher emailed 20 potential participants from the list of 48, with 15 participants agreeing to participate in the interviewing phase of the study. Potential participants who were not selected to join the study were sent an email thanking them for their interest and notification that they will

not be included in the study. A participant summary and individual participant profiles are provided in Table 2 located in Chapter Four.

Data Collection

In order to explore the essence of how CCT students negotiate their student identities after one year at a large, public four-year institution, data for the present study was collected using a pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix A) followed by multiple in-depth interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Participants completed an online pre-interview questionnaire to gather general information from the participant, such as demographic data, may diminish the flow created throughout the course of the in-depth interviews. The pre-interview questionnaire also provided the participants with a copy of the interview informed consent form (Appendix B) in order to give participants time to review and prepare any questions in advance. Items on the pre-interview questionnaire included the participant's community college background, when they transferred to SU, and their current major at SU.

Two in-depth, semi-structured, virtual interviews were conducted with each participant in order to allow participants the opportunity to voice their unique perspectives (Duggleby, 2005; Zorn et al., 2006). It is important to note the rationale for virtual interviews utilized in the present study. In March 2020, Southern State was placed under a stay-at-home order due to Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19). As a result of the current COVID-19 outbreak, the researcher utilized her personal Webex video conferencing room with both video and audio components to interview participants. A semi-structured interview approach was utilized to allow for additional questions based on participants' responses. This approach for interviewing was crucial in allowing adaptability between

the researcher and participant in order to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. Both in-depth interviews continued for the duration of approximately 55 minutes. A two-interview structure was utilized to allow the researcher the opportunity to collaborate with participants over the course of three weeks. This time frame allowed participants to reflect on their preceding interview with the purpose of a reduction in the impact of an idiosyncratic interview (Seidman, 2013). Participants used pseudonyms, allowing for interviews to be recorded and destroyed after the transcriptions were created (van Manen, 2014).

The interview questions concentrated on the realities of community college students combined with the status of a CCT student at SU. See Appendix C for the interview protocol used during the initial interview and Appendix D for the second interview protocol. Interview questions during the initial interview focused on the participants' identity experiences at their community college based on CTI's four frames of identity. The second interview focused on the participants' identity experiences at SU through CTI's four frames of identity, the personal frame: "What is it like being a CCT student at this institution?"; the enacted frame: "Is being a CCT student something you talk about with other people? How would you describe those conversations?"; the relational frame: "How would you describe your relationship with faculty, staff, and peers at SU?"; and the communal frame: "How would you describe your level of involvement at SU?".

Both interviews for each participant were electronically recorded and transcribed. Copies of the interview transcripts were shared with each participant. The purpose of this exercise was to give participants the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on any facets of

their interview. Moreover, the researcher conducted member checks with all 15 participants following the first interview and with seven participants after the second interview to ensure that the researcher's interpretations corresponded to participant's experiences.

Finally, the researcher concentrated on Moustakas's (1994) approach to phenomenological research in order to maintain the essence of this qualitative approach because of the systematic approach to data collection and analysis. As part of discovering the essence of an experience, Moustakas (1994) identified epoche, or a refrain from judgment, as an essential component of the research process. This process takes place by the researcher, exploring his or her own experiences with the phenomenon in order to become aware of assumptions and possible prejudices. These prejudices and assumptions are then bracketed or set aside in order to allow the researcher to understand the participants' experiences fully.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis is to organize and classify the data in order to gain insight into the driving research questions. The participants consented to be audio-recorded during the interviews and chose a pseudonym to protect their identities. To ensure the security of the participants, a master list of participant pseudonyms were kept securely stored on the researcher's password-protected, cloud-based network and was destroyed when this document was no longer needed. The interview recordings were housed in a secure location on the researcher's institutional Dropbox. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, with the researcher engaging in spot checks of all transcriptions. Data analysis in the present study occurred in three phases.

First, non-interview data (demographic information from the participants) were reviewed by the researcher before interviews were conducted, as well as the compilation of descriptive statistics. During the second phase, interview transcripts were analyzed with the aid of NVivo (v. 12) software. Using the constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the researcher began engaging in data analysis immediately after interview data transcription. Analysis in phenomenological research follows a procedure of categorizing the participants' statements into meaning units that represents the layers of identity being examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, the researcher engaged in "phenomenological reflection" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77) in order to understand the essential meaning of the experience. This took place through multiple examinations of the transcribed interviews as a way for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of each participant's background and experiences. During the first transcription review, the researcher used horizontalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) to identify significant statements relevant to the student's textual description of "what" the experience is like and of "how" the experience happened, otherwise known as the structural description. After several subsequent reviews of the transcripts, the researcher began identifying quotes relevant to participants' experiences. Following the identification of relevant words and phrases, the creation of codes/categories began, and the researcher developed a coding sheet to sort and group the codes/categories to examine potential emerging themes and insights. To that end, initial coding resulted in 249 unique codes. However, as more data were collected and analyzed, this allowed the researcher to identify essential themes representing the unified experiences of CCT students, resulting in grouping 249 codes into eight categories. The process as data categorization,

reduction, and theme identification was repeated during the second round of interviews to construct further analytical notations resulting in 279 codes grouped into eight categories. In order to ensure the accuracy of content, transcripts, and the researcher's interpretations were shared with participants. Feedback from the transcript evaluation was incorporated into new data.

Finally, the researcher identified significant statements into clusters of meaning (van Manen, 2001). This information was furthermore separated into themes related to the research questions, which reflect the experiences of CCT students. Ultimately, 528 codes were grouped into 16 clusters of meaning. Once clusters of meaning were created, the researcher reported the essence of the phenomenon by utilizing the essential invariant structure (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Here, the researcher found two overarching themes and four subthemes representing the essence of CCT students' identity experiences. The study's findings are presented in Chapter Four.

Strategies for Quality

Several strategies were employed in order to maintain the quality of this phenomenological study. First, a subjectivity statement was included in the study to acknowledge and create transparency regarding the researcher's possible bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of this subjectivity statement was to bracket the researcher's personal experiences with the phenomenon in order to partly set aside potential bias. The researcher openly examined her assumptions about the phenomenon of interest before beginning the study. Similarly, during participant interviews and data analysis, the researcher made a conscious effort to achieve epoche (Moustakas, 1994) by taking a nonjudgmental stance.

Secondly, the researcher engaged in additional bracketing exercises and reduction through phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenological reflection is a process utilized throughout the study in order to continually return to the essence of the participants' experience. During the data collection and analysis process, the researcher followed a systematic process engaging in horizontalization by treating all of the data as having equal weight in the initial data analysis stages.

Thirdly, two forms of member checks were used to aid in accuracy, credibility, and transferability (Yin, 2014). First, the researcher engaged in member checking by clarifying participant responses throughout the interviews with additional questions if a response was unclear. Next, the researcher sent copies of the completed transcripts to each participant to allow for the correction of inaccuracies. Before the beginning of the second interview, the researcher conducted thematic member checks with all fifteen participants to allow participants to add or clarify information discussed during the first interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks allow for the veracity of coding by ensuring that it resonates with the experience of the participants and also further informs themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the first thematic review, the researcher discussed her findings pertaining to participants' perceptions of their community college experiences. Minimal differences emerged and were resolved through discussion.

Moreover, all fifteen participants engaged in transcription reviews of their second interview in order to add or clarify information discussed. After constructing the study's overall themes and subthemes, seven thematic member checks were conducted with participants to ensure the trustworthiness of findings (Creswell et al., 2007). Based on the feedback received by the researcher, the findings captured a representative picture of the

participants' lived experiences. For example, when asked "what changes do you suggest that I make in order to better represent your experience?", shared responses included "nothing," "no changes, thank you for doing this," and "you have done a great job representing my experiences."

Finally, additional guidance was obtained throughout the research design process, implementation and data collection phase, and data analysis phase from a team of supervising faculty with expertise in phenomenological research.

Limitations

This section addresses the limitations of the present study. The qualitative nature of the present investigation, as is often the case with qualitative inquiry, focuses on the depth of a phenomenon. Due to this in-depth focus, the findings may not be applicable across various contexts due to the utilization of participants from a single institution (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While the researcher made every effort to generate practical knowledge that is transferable to other four-year institutions, the unique experiences from CCT students at this urban research institution might not translate to the policy and practical implications for private four-year institutions.

Furthermore, identity is a socially constructed combination of beliefs and perceptions about one's social group and the interactions that take place in broader social contexts (McEwen, 2003). To this end, an individual's conceptualization of their identity is fluid as multiple identities can occur and overlap at the same time. Identities are drawn from an array of socially defined statuses, which are contextually salient. This study focused on participants' conceptualizations of their student identity development, which serves as a possible limitation. By focusing on just transfer student identity development,

this overlooks the multiplicity of other socially defined identities and the interplay of those identities in the development of participants' student identities.

An additional limitation of the study involves the focus solely on retrospective, self-report data. The researcher chose to use retrospective participant accounts in order to observe the ways in which CCT students understood the way their experiences informed their student identities. The researcher's intent behind this decision was to allow for the exploration of how participants' identities were negotiated after they had transitioned to their four-year institution. While useful in the current study, this type of data collection limits the scope to which student identity is developed. Furthermore, the study's results may be limited by self-selection bias. It is possible that CCT students who were successful, motivated, and had stronger academic backgrounds were more likely to respond this study about their college experiences than others.

Finally, another limitation of the study focuses on the researcher's utilization of virtual interviews. All 15 interviews were conducted virtually. As such, the use of virtual interviews may have affected the climate of the interview as well as what the researcher was able to observe. For instance, while Webex did contribute both visual and audio elements similar to a face-to-face interview, connectivity problems did arise making it difficult to easily communicate and actively listen to participant's responses. Additionally, occasional delays and skips in the Webex feed created interruptions in the interview process to where the researcher sometimes interrupted participants.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the methodology utilized by the researcher in conducting a phenomenological study on CCT students' experiences at SU. Details surrounding the

qualitative nature of the research questions and design, description of the researcher's

positionality, and ethical considerations for the investigation were explained. The present

study's setting, participant selection, data collection, and analysis were discussed, along

with strategies for ensuring quality and the study's limitations. The following chapter will

present the researcher's findings on how CCT students describe their lived experiences at

SU and how those experiences inform their student identity.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand how the lived

experiences of community college transfer students inform their student identity

development after they transitioned to a large, public four-year institution. The researcher

sought to understand how CCT students experience identity negotiations at their

receiving four-year institution guided by the following research questions:

RQ: How do CCT students' lived experiences inform their identities as college students?

Sub Question 1: How do CCT students' community college experiences shape

their student identities?

Sub question 2: How do CCT students (re)negotiate their student identities post-

transfer?

To that end, 15 participant interviews served as the primary means of data collection.

CCT students were interviewed using a two-interview structure where the researcher

worked with the participants over a three-week period. Interview questions during the

course of the initial interview focused on the participants' collegiate decision-making

process as well as the method in which their community college experiences informed the

development of their student identity. The second interview focused on the participants'

four-year institution decision-making processes and how the experiences at their four-

year receiving institution informed their student identity. Their interviews were coded

and interpreted by the utilization of Hecht's (1993) four frames of CTI—personal,

relational, enacted, and communal—as guides.

The findings presented in this chapter reveal that CCT student identity appears to

be an overlapping dialectical process involving several interrelated components (Hecht,

2014; Hecht et al., 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008). For the 15 participants, the communicative development, management, and negotiation of their student identities were constantly in flux, forming and reforming through self-cognitions, expressions, relationships, and group interactions.

In an effort to focus on the participants' lived experiences, the researcher organized the present study's findings by first interpreting participants' community college experiences through each of the four frames of identity (e.g. personal, enacted, relational, and communal) and attending to the manifestations of identity within each frame. The researcher then focused on participants' lived experience, attending to the manifestations of identity within each frame, at their four-year institution.

Two overarching themes represent the essence of the participants lived experiences: facilitating positive student identities in community college and renegotiating student identities at SU. Each theme seems to have influenced the participants' experiences as college students on multiple levels. First, the development of participants' student identities while in community college (sub question one) resulted in two subthemes and eight specific manifestations of identity consistent with Hecht's (1993) four frames of identity. Secondly, the interplay among the participants' lived experiences at their community college and the transition to their four-year receiving institution (sub question two) resulted in an additional two subthemes and eight specific manifestations of identity. Figure 1 provides a summary of the study's emergent themes, subthemes, and manifestations of identity. To begin, the researcher will first provide brief profiles for each participant.

Figure 1

Evolution of CCT Student Identity

Manifestations of Identity		Manifestations of Identity
•**Personal** – feelings of being student savvy •**Enacted** - enactments of confidence •**Relational** – constructing identities through purposeful connections, constructing identities through general support	**Facilitating Positive Student Identities in Community College**	•**Personal** – battling feelings of self-doubt •**Enacted** – enactments of sustained effort, messages of strategic communication •**Communal** – community college as a means to an end

Engaging in identity validating behaviors — Resisting community college identities

CCT Student Identity

Growing as a person — Honoring their educational journey

Realigning Student Identities at SU

Manifestations of Identity		Manifestations of Identity
•**Personal** – grades to growth •**Enacted** – enactments of making school work for me •**Relational** – constructing identities through professional connections •**Communal** – knowledge of physical space as a source of connection, participation in cultural practices as a source for connection		•**Enacted** – enactments of CC emphasis, messages of CC de-emphasis •**Relational** – constructing identities as a bragging right

Participant Profiles

The following section introduces each of the fifteen participants in the present study. As stated in Chapter Three, an invitation for participation went out via email to 3879 potential participants who met the previously mentioned participant criteria. A total of 48 individuals responded to the call for participation. Guided by the goal of obtaining

diverse perspectives, the students' race/ethnicity, gender identity, major, as well as previous two-year institution were considered when selecting the 15 participants. Seven participants in the study identified as women with seven participants identifying as men, and one participant identifying as gender non-binary. The participants reported a broad spectrum of ages ranging from 19-67 years ($M = 27.33$, $SD = 11.65$). Eight participants identified as White or Caucasian, four participants identified as Black or African-American, one participant identified as Hispanic or Latino, one participant identified as Middle Eastern, and one participant identified as Asian or Pacific Islander.

The majority of participants earned an associate's degree and had uninterrupted enrollment between their community college and SU. All participants expressed a "transfer mindset" while attending community college, describing their ultimate goal to transfer into a four-year institution. Additionally, most participants cited their motivations for attending community college as financially-based and chose to transfer to SU because of cost and proximity. All participants had attended SU for at least one year and brought with them previously earned college credit, with 12 seniors (90+ hours), two juniors (60+ hours), and one sophomore (30+ hours). A total of 11 majors from four academic colleges on SU's campus were represented in the sample. Table 2 provides a summary of this data, all of whom are identified with pseudonyms.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Summary

Participant	Age Range	Gender Identity	Racial Identity	CC degree earned	Declared Major at SU	Other Identities
Amanda	19-24	Woman	White/Caucasian	AS	Mathematics	
Amy	19-24	Woman	White/Caucasian	AS	Psychology	International student
Appleseed	30-39	Man	White/Caucasian	AAS	Systems Engineering	Identified disability
Blaine	19-24	Man	Hispanic/Latino	N/A	Spanish	First generation college student
Dragon	60-69	Man	White/Caucasian	AA, AS	Mathematics	
Eli	30-39	Man	White/Caucasian	AS	Japanese/Religious Studies	Military veteran
Iris	25-29	Gender Non-binary/Genderqueer	Black/African American	AA	Computer Science	
John	19-24	Man	Asian/Pacific Islander	N/A	Computer Science	
Lilly	19-24	Woman	Black/African American	AS	Biology	
Nicole	19-24	Woman	Black/African American	AS	Mechanical Engineering	
Rose	19-24	Woman	White/Caucasian	N/A	Illustration	
Sabrina	19-24	Woman	Black/African American	N/A	History	
Tiberius	19-24	Man	White/Caucasian	AA	Communication Studies	
Tyler	25-29	Woman	Middle Eastern	N/A	Biology	
Tyron	19-24	Man	White/Caucasian	AA	Communication Studies	

Note: All names are pseudonyms. Gender and racial identity are as reported by participants.

Amanda

Amanda was a white woman majoring in mathematics. She was home schooled

and upon her graduation, she decided to enroll in community college along with her twin

sister as a way to transition into face-to-face learning. Amanda shares, "we thought that it would be a better transition. Instead of going from a class of me and my sister to a class of 30,000, to start at smaller school and adjust and get used to everything, like in-person school for the first time." Amanda attended a community college, located 42 miles from Southern University. From the moment Amanda enrolled at CM community college, she, along with her sister, planned on transferring to a four-year institution. Amanda describes her time at community college a very good experience in that "it was relaxing, comfortable, really helpful, and kind of necessary" for her social/emotional well-being. Amanda immediately transferred to SU because it was close to her home. While Amanda did not live on campus she describes her time at SU as "challenging, but in a good way," and was very happy with her experience. Amanda will attend SU again in the Fall as a doctoral student.

Amy

Amy was a white woman majoring in psychology. Originally from another country, Amy moved to the United States and lived with her aunt and uncle to attend college. She enrolled in a community college, located 15 miles from SU, with the intent of transferring to a four-year institution. Amy's motivation for attending community college was solely based on cost. As Amy shares, "you can get the same quality of education for a low price." Amy really enjoyed the community college environment, describing it as "a comfortable place to be." She was involved in participating in campus activities, while simultaneously spending time on campus cultivating relationships with her professors and classmates. Ultimately, Amy chose to attend SU for "convenience" since it was close to not only her home, but also to her community college. Amy also

enjoyed her time at SU and characterized the last two years of her education as "growth." Amy shares, "I grew a lot as a person and I got more of an idea of what I wanted to do as well." Amy considered her time at SU as a way to hone in on her academic skills and to prepare for her career.

Appleseed

Appleseed was a white man majoring in systems engineering. Originally from Northern State, Appleseed moved to Southern State in 2012 after losing his job. Appleseed decided to enroll at his local community college based on a recommendation from an individual in the unemployment office. He enrolled in a certificate program at a community college, located 45 miles from Southern University. However, after speaking with an advisor, Appleseed decided to change from the certificate program to an Applied Science degree, so that he may be able to transfer to a four-year institution. While attending community college, Appleseed truly enjoyed the small personalized environment and the way in which professors and administration provided academic support for him. Appleseed characterized his time at community college as "absolutely excellent, because they recognize students' potential and push them." When Appleseed transferred to SU, he was majoring in electrical engineering technology. However, after taking a few courses in this major, he decided to switch majors, since his current major was not a "good fit" for him. He remained an undeclared major for a semester, while working with engineering advisors, until he declared systems engineering major. While at SU, Appleseed was not happy with the innerworkings of the system engineering department, including issues with professors, advisors, and deans. Feeling as though he made the wrong choice coming to SU, Appleseed characterized his time at SU as

frustrating, expressing a desire to transfer to another four-year institution.

Blaine

Blaine was a Hispanic man who attended a community college, located 15 miles from SU. Although Blaine applied and was accepted to other four-year institutions, he ultimately decided to attend a community college based upon cost. Blaine characterized his time at community college as "focused so that he could transfer." When describing what it was like at his community college, Blaine described his day as "going to class and then leaving to go to work," as he really did not like to talk about his status as a community college student. Blaine did not complete an Associate's degree nor obtain a certification because he wanted to get enough credits to transfer to SU as soon as possible. Blaine transferred to SU as an engineering major, however, he had difficulty in the engineering courses. Because of this, Blaine switched his major to Spanish. Blaine felt pride as a SU student, participating in clubs/organizations as well as attending SU events. After Blaine became a student at SU, he began to take pride in his educational journey and often shared the financial benefits by attending community college with others.

Dragon

Dragon was a white man who had a long history of education. After graduating high school, Dragon was enrolled at the University of Border State. However, after being enrolled for a year he dropped out to begin his career as a software developer. He moved back to Southern State in the 70s and after retiring, Dragon decided to enroll in community college. Dragon's motivation for enrolling at CS community college was based on location as well as cost. Dragon knew that he wanted to transfer to SU, focusing

his coursework towards completing an Associate's degree. Dragon described his time at community college as "a stepping stone, pleasant, and useful." From Dragon's perspective, community college was a means to an end to where he could get his "fluff" courses out of the way for a lower cost. Whereas, a four-year institution costs more and he could focus his last remaining semester on his passion, mathematics. Dragon's approach to education was very transactional, in that his opinion of his educational journey did not change. He also viewed his time at SU as a stepping stone in his next educational goal, earning a doctorate in mathematics.

Eli

Eli was a white man majoring in Japanese and Religious Studies. After graduating from high school, Eli enlisted in the Army and served for ten years. Once Eli was discharged, he decided to enroll in a community college, located 31 miles from SU. Eli's motivation to attend community college was based on cost as well as location. Eli characterized his time at his community college as "interesting and laid back." While he enjoyed his time at community college, he viewed it as a stepping stone in his educational journey. For the first year and a half, Eli did not enjoy his time at SU mainly because of the issues he had within the physics department, such as advising and class structures. Eli decided to switch his major to Japanese as well as religious studies. Upon switching his major, Eli became more at ease with his educational journey and began participating in activities such as the Japanese club. Eli also took a transactional approach in his educational journey, similar to Dragon. He viewed his time at SU as a time to earn a degree, not as a time to goof off. Eli attributes this perspective to his time in the Army. He shares, "they tend to grow up a little bit quicker because they're around the more

mature people."

Iris

      Iris was an African-American computer science major who identified as genderqueer. Immediately after graduating high school, Iris enrolled at a community college, located 250 miles away from SU. While Iris wanted to earn a bachelor's degree, they, Iris, watched their older sister go into debt at a private four-year institution. Iris considered this a waste of time and money and decided to enroll in community college as a way to figure out their career path while saving money. Iris was involved at SC community college by taking on leadership positions such as becoming the president of the LGBTQ club. Iris expressed a lack of diversity at SC community college and felt there was a need for more awareness on their campus. To Iris, their time at community college was "successful" meant that they were able to earn college credits at a cheaper price as well as become emotionally prepared to attend a four-year institution. Iris chose to attend SU because it was the only program in Southern state that had a Bachelor of arts degree in computer science. Once Iris transferred to SU, they became involved in a number of activities from running student clubs to working in campus housing. While Iris expressed some hiccups with advising in the computer science department, they characterized SU as "life-changing."

John

      John is an Asian man majoring in computer science. When John graduated high school, he applied to SU and was deferred admission. He was advised to enroll at a local community college in a transfer program for students who were deferred admission at SU. John decided to take this advice and enrolled at a community college located 15

miles from SU. While attending community college, John's focus was purely based on earning a high enough GPA in order to transfer to SU as soon as possible. John often expressed how he negated his identity as a community college student because he was ashamed of his community college status. John attended his community college for one year and then transferred immediately to SU without earning an Associates degree. Transferring as a computer science major, John became a mentor in the transfer program that he was a part of at his community college. John enjoys his time at SU because it feels more like a college environment where as his community college felt like an extension of "high school."

Lilly

Lilly was an African-American woman majoring in biology. Upon earning her high school diploma, Lilly applied and was accepted to a few four-year institutions located in Southern State. However, Lilly decided to enroll at a community college, located 15 miles from SU, because of cost as well as proximity to family. Lilly described her time at community college as being "motivational," giving her the confidence that she can do "this college thing" successfully. After transferring to SU, Lilly described how she was able to build her confidence even more as a student due to the vastly different environment at SU with larger class sizes as well as more challenging work. However, Lilly enjoyed this challenge and viewed her time at SU as "pushing her out of her comfort zone" and "growing as a person."

Nicole

Nicole was an African-American woman majoring in mechanical engineering. Nicole moved to the United States to live with her mom before attending community

college. She decided to enroll in community college at the suggestion of her mother. Nicole's mother received advice from a number of individuals suggesting that attending community college was a better option than a four-year institution because of price as well as providing an easier transition to college. Nicole became very involved in community college by participating in clubs as well as engaging in community service events on behalf of the community college. She characterized her community college experience as a "very fun and interesting experience," even though she expressed feeling stigmatized as a community college student. Like most participants, Nicole transferred as a mechanical engineer major to SU immediately at the suggestion of her mother, even though she wanted to attend a four-year institution about 100 miles from home. Nicole characterized her time as "not as interesting as community college." While Nicole joined a student engineering group, she felt that the coursework was more challenging than community college, making it difficult for her to make friends because she was so focused on her grades.

Rose

Rose was a white woman who was an illustration major. After not being accepted to Mountain University, she decided to enroll at a community college, located 15 minutes from SU, as a way to earn college credits before transferring to a four-year institution. Rose did not enjoy her time at community college and was focused on getting college credits and transferring to a four-year institution as soon as possible. Rose shares that she felt unsafe and that people "did not take her seriously," while in community college. After attending her community college for two semesters, she transferred to SU as an undeclared major without completing an associate's degree. While she did look into

attending other four-year institutions, ultimately, Rose transferred to SU because of its proximity to home. After spending one semester at SU, Rose decided to major in illustration. Rose truly enjoyed SU because of the "real" college environment. She discussed how she was able to be a part of the student body by participating in activities on campus as well as being taken seriously as a student.

Sabrina

Sabrina was an African-American woman majoring in history. Originally, Sabrina wanted to attend Southern University, however, she submitted her application as an out-of-state student after the deadline and was not accepted. Because of this, she chose to attend a community college, located about 265 miles from SU, and transfer to SU as soon as possible. Sabrina chose to enroll in community college for three reasons: (a) she did not want to attend any other four-year institution, (b) her community college was located close to home, and (c) she wanted to save money. Sabrina was "laser-focused" in community college and considered it "money well spent and a great use of my time." She expressed how her community college prepared her for SU because she was able to develop her study habits. After completing two semesters at her community college, Sabrina transferred to SU as a history major, without learning an associate's degree. Sabrina discussed how she enjoyed her time more at SU because she felt she was "expanding her horizons" and growing as a person. She talked about how she was so focused in community college to earn good grades so she could transfer that she was not able to focus on her personal development. Whereas at SU, she had the ability to focus on her personal growth.

Tiberius

Tiberius was a white man majoring in communication studies. Once he graduated from high school, Tiberius decided to enroll in community college because that is where he had taken his college classes in high school and it financially made sense. Tiberius characterized his time at community college as "unique and eye-opening." He discussed how he was able to "relearn how to learn." In this instance, he expressed how he was able to hone in on his study skills and learn from his mistakes in a less competitive environment when he compared it to his time at SU. While Tiberius did not mind attending community college, because he often talked about it with his coworkers, he still expressed feeling a sense of stigma about attending a community college instead of going straight to a four-year institution. For Tiberius, SU provides a "real college" atmosphere because SU students have a sense of school pride and he feels as though he can focus more on his professional development as a student rather than the skill development he gained in community college.

Tyler

Tyler was a middle eastern woman majoring in Biology. Tyler moved to the United States when she was in ninth grade and was having difficulty with the English language in high school. Tyler, along with her parents, felt as though attending community college could help her learn the English language so that she could be better prepared for a four-year institution. She enrolled in community college, located 15 miles from SU. Tyler viewed her time at her community college as "bleak, uninteresting, and a little depressing." She talked about how it was difficult for her to understand all the different aspects of the community college such as what a GPA was, understanding credit

hours, as well as how to study and to earn "good grades." Tyler also mentioned how she felt alone at her community college because she did not see anyone that looked like her. Tyler truly enjoyed her time at SU because she was able to make friends as well as grow academically and personally. As Tyler shares "It's been awesome. I've made best friends. I made great connections to people that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I learned a lot of new things and I learned a lot of new techniques that I can apply to how I live my life."

Tyron

Tyron was a white man majoring in Communication Studies. Similar to Amanda, Tyron was home schooled, however, he began taking college-level courses at a community college while still attending high school. While Tyron expressed feeling stigmatized as a community college student, he did perceive his time at his community college as helpful in preparing him for college-level work at SU. Tyron did not become involved in any activities in community college, as he viewed it as a "stepping stone" to the next part of his journey. While, Tyron still did not become involved on campus, his perception of SU was positive, characterizing it as a time of personal growth instead of a stepping stone. For Tyron, his coursework and interactions with professors and classmates at SU have given him the skills needed in his career.

The Evolution of CCT Students' Identities

The overall research question posed in this study sought to understand how the experiences of CCT students inform their student identities. The participants' evolution in their student identities were depicted through their tensions in navigating the personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames between the different educational settings.

Hence, two overarching themes emerged to illustrate how participants commutatively developed, managed, and negotiated their student identities in community college and at their receiving four-year institution: (a) facilitating positive student identities in community college, and (b) renegotiating student identities at SU. The findings also indicated that participants' student identities were formed and reformed through strategic social interactions across the personal, enacted, relational, and communal contexts. The first overarching theme revealed how participants' community college experiences shaped their student identities.

Facilitating Positive Student Identities in Community College

The first sub research question sought to investigate the ways in which CCT students formed their student identities in community college. In the first overall theme, participants explained that they were purposeful in facilitating actions and behaviors that cultivated a positive student identity by: (a) engaging in identity validating behaviors, and (b) resisting community college identities. Consistent with the principles of CTI, participants described how meanings of their student identities materialized through eight distinct manifestations across the four frames of identity. Specifically, participants described how the meaning of being a community college student materialized in discourse through self-reflection, relational partners, and community members. Manifestations of identity in the personal frame included: (a) feelings of being student savvy, (b) battling feelings of self-doubt. Manifestations of identity within the enacted frame included: (a) enactments of confidence, (b) enactments of sustained effort, and (c) messages of strategic communication. In the relational frame, two manifestations of identity emerged: (a) constructing identities through purposeful connections, and (b)

constructing identities through general support. Lastly, in the communal frame, CCT

students' identities were embodied through one overarching theme: (a) community

college as a means to an end. An overview of manifestations of identities within each

subtheme regarding CCT students' identities in community college are represented in

Table 3.

Table 3

Facilitating Positive Student Identities in Community College

Subtheme	Identity Frame	Manifestations of Identities	Focus of Manifestations
Engaging in identity validating behaviors	Personal frame Identities are understood based on inward reflections and feelings of the self	Feelings of being student savvy	Inward reflections about being smart and strategic as a student
	Enacted Identities are expressed through performances and social behaviors that inform impressions of student identity	Enactments of confidence	Performances that involve developing confidence in their skills as a student through a "student-ready" atmosphere
	Relational frame Identities are understood in references to an individual's relationship with others	Constructing identities through purposeful connections	Identifying with particular individuals as a way of managing a positive student identity
		Constructing identities through general support	Identifying with individuals based on their understanding of how they are viewed by others
Resisting community college identities	Personal frame	Battling feelings of self-doubt	Inward reflections about being negatively perceived as a student
	Enacted frame	Enactments of sustained effort	Performances that highlight their success as a student by being studious, earning above-average grades, and developing an all work no play mentality
		Messages of strategic communication	Facilitating interactions about their student identity through scripted responses
	Communal frame Shared identities formed through societal agreements define by the group	Community college as a means to an end	The lack of belonging as a source of disconnection of their student identity

This analysis will begin by focusing on the development of CCT students' identity by engaging in identity validating behhaviors.

Engaging in Identity Validating Behaviors

To review, the personal layer of identity describes an individual's views of him or herself, their self-concept. In the personal layer, Hecht (1993) describes identities as hierarchically ordered within particular context, creating expectations and motivations, which are then endorsed by the self and others. This frame is particularly unique in that it involves inward reflection of interactions with others and how those interactions shape the ways in which an individual comes to understand who they are. Participants in this study revealed specific inward reflections about being smart and strategic as a student.

Feelings of Being Student Savvy. In describing themselves as a student, participants often reflected on their ability to make smart and strategic choices by understanding what was best for them personally, academically, and economically. First, participants often expressed their personal satisfaction with their choice to attend community college instead of a four-year university. In this sense, participants felt a high sense of agency, characterizing their community college path as a personal choice because it was "what was best for them." This was the case for Sabrina. While Sabrina was accepted to a number of four year universities, she did not want to be alone and unhappy living far away from her family. Sabrina notes:

> I'm a middle child so I'm always used to being around someone and I feel like I would have been really lonely and it probably wouldn't have been the best thing for me personally. I didn't feel like a four-year was right for me at that time. So I just didn't go. I felt like that was what best for me.

Like Sabrina, Amanda also articulated her choice in attending community college as a personal strategic decision. Amanda, along with her sister, were homeschooled and expressed a level of social anxiety in attending a four-year university upon graduation. Amanda notes, "I don't know how to interact with people socially." She goes on to explain her thought process behind attending a community college:

> It was small and it was nice and I knew everyone. I liked it a lot for that reason because I knew all the professors. I think it was kind of what I needed to get me from homeschool to Southern University, where you're just like one of 30,000 other students who was off doing their own thing. I thought it was really helpful for that reason.

Here, Amanda felt that enrolling in community college would serve as a middle ground helping to bridge the gap between her academic and social needs. Iris on the other hand, pointed out their disposition towards life as part of their strategic personal choice in attending community college. Iris explains their "try it before you buy" perspective on getting practice as a college student:

> I'm not the one to straight up jump into something new. I want to know everything about something before I do it because I want to make an informed decision and stuff like that. So I'm glad I went to community college to basically get that experience of like what it could or should be like when I go to a four year university because I didn't want the culture shock of universities.

Like Amanda and Sabrina, Iris understood their personal needs as a student and made a cognizant choice to attend community college instead of a four-year institution.

In addition to strategic personal decisions to attend community college,

participants also expressed their ability to engage in academic savviness. Eli decided to attend community college after he returned from his deployment in Afghanistan. In talking about his transition back to civilian life, Eli revealed that it had been nine years since he graduated from high school and he was unsure if he would be academically ready to attend a four-year university. Eli explains:

It was a lot. When I think about what it would have been like to start at a university. I think I might have quit because I haven't been in school in a long time, and they [referring to community college] were a lot more understanding and a lot less stressful.

Similarly, Amy also explains how she was a savvy student because she understood her academic needs. Amy discusses her decision to attend community college, "I think you should work smart as well as hard. So being a community college student for me was being in an environment with like smaller classes that I felt like I had access to more resources." Here, Amy knew that she wanted to be in an environment with smaller class sizes so that she would be able to receive personalized attention. Being an international student, easy access to resources, such as her professors and the international student office, was extremely important.

Finally, many participants referenced their student savviness in how they considered themselves economically smart since they were able to reduce their overall college expenses while gaining a quality education. When comparing themselves to their friends who went directly to a four-year setting, Tyron emphasized attending community college as "a smart plan, that'll save you some money." In Amy's experience, "I decided to start out at the community college. First of all, because obviously it's a cheaper option,

you can get the same quality of education for a lower price." For both Amy and Tyron, saving money while getting the "same education" played a major role in how they understood themselves as a student. Similarly, John echoes this sentiment articulating how the economic decision to attend community college is a smart choice for anyone,

> If you think about it, everyone takes pretty much the same classes in their first year of college. And it would probably be a better option just to knock those out at a community college and save thousands of dollars rather than going straight to a big university and paying a lot more for the same classes.

In this excerpt, John felt strongly about being able to save money as a student. For John, he was deferred admission to SU, and at the suggestion of an advisor, he enrolled in a program at his local community college in order to establish a strong GPA so that he could transfer to SU. While John wanted to transfer to SU as soon as possible, he reflected on his economically smart decision to attend community college.

Like John, Blaine also highlighted his strategic choice to attend community college instead of a four-year institution. He shares,

> I actually did apply to other colleges. I actually applied to two colleges and I got in one of the colleges, and they offered me a scholarship and everything. Well, I liked the idea of being debt free. I was thinking for the long-term future, which is something I look at myself now and just like that was actually the better decision for me to do that.

Overall, participants reflected a sense of agency regarding attending community college as their first choice. This sense of agency was communicated by participants as a smart and strategic choice for them personally, academically, and economically. The next

section will examine how the participants' student identities manifested through specific discourses and behaviors encompassed in the enacted frame.

   Enactments of Confidence. The enacted frame of identity examines how individuals express their student identities through social behaviors, performances, and expressions. One manifestation of student identity emerged within the enacted frame was the performances participants referenced regarding their skills as a student.

   Throughout this theme, participants detailed how their experiences at community college aided them in developing confidence and the skills needed to being a successful student. First, participants explained how the structure of community college provided a comfortable environment to develop their "student" skills. Eli found the community college environment to be "less stressful" because of the diversity in age among students. Eli shares:

> It was a little bit less stressful. I felt less of an oddball in community college because there were a lot more people either older than me or around my age or maybe only a couple of years younger than me. There were people a lot closer to my age group then at Southern University.

Eli was concerned with being in lower level course with classmates who were fresh out of high school considering he was returning to school nine years after his high school graduation. While Eli mentioned that he did not make connections with his community college classmates, he felt a sense of comfort in that it was the "norm" to have adult classmates going there "to achieve a goal." On the hand other, Amy was appreciative of the diverse age range of students because of the wealth of experience each student could bring to the classroom aiding her in confidence building. She explains,

I was working with people from the ages of like 18 up to I'm going to guess like

mid-forties. So there were a range of experiences and people that could bring

different knowledge and ideas, and I really liked that. It definitely gave me more

confidence because I think because I was pushed.

In Amy's case, she expressed this sense of "we're all moving towards the same goal"

giving her the ability to enjoy school, similar to Eli.

In addition to the structure of community college, many of the participants also

expressed how community college was a "student-ready" atmosphere. For example,

Appleseed characterized himself as a disabled student and indicated how his community

college went "beyond and help students like myself to achieve all of their potential." He

explains,

So, when I stepped into freshman English or the basic math classes. I was not

prepared for them. I think my community college did that for me because they

helped me improve my skills. I hold that dear to my heart because that means a lot

to me.

In essence, for Appleseed, community college provided an atmosphere that was

understating of his educational needs, creating a personalized learning environment.

For some participants, this "student-ready" atmosphere was described as

preparing them or helping them to develop skills as a college student. In Lilly's

experience, attending community college, "increased" her confidence. She shares, "It let

me know that I can do this college thing in that it's not as hard as I thought it was. And

all you do is ask for help and use time management." Amanda echoed a very similar

sentiment, expressing how the professor at community college, "sort of helped me figure

out how much is a good amount of work to put into something." Amanda explains

further, "their attitude of we don't want you to fail. We want you to succeed. We want

you to do well. And I think that was a really, really good thing." Like other participants,

Tiberius touched on some of the "student-ready" skills he gained while at his community

college.

> I definitely think that's probably the thing I gained at my community college that
>
> I've carried with me though, is how to actually be a student as to somebody who
>
> can just coast because I can't do that anymore. I had to relearn how to learn, you
>
> know to set aside proper study times to make sure that I'm consistently interacting
>
> with the information so it doesn't go stale. Learning what kind of things works for
>
> me when I study, like for example, I learned that I learn things better it I write
>
> them down by hand than if I type it.

Overall, the sense of comfort in the classroom and this "student ready" environment gave

participants the ability to express their identity as a student with confidence in their

abilities. The next section will examine how participants' student identities emerged from

conversations comprised in the relational frame.

Constructing Identities Through Purposeful Connections. In the relational

frame, identities are understood through an individual's association with others. In

essence, the relational layer speaks to how participants understood their student identities

through their interactions with others. Two themes emerged in where participants'

meanings of their student identities were constructed: (a) constructing identities through

purposeful connections, and (b) constructing identities through general social support.

Participants were purposeful in their relationships with others while constructing

their student identities in community college. First, participants noted that meanings of their student identities were largely constructed in association with their familial relationships. This was due in part to most of the participants continuing to live at home while attending community college. Although a few participants reported having negative relationships with their family members, the majority of participants highlighted acceptance and support by their family members. When asked to discuss their relationships with their family as a result of attending community college, Blaine shares the supportive role of his family,

> Both of my parents, they didn't go to college, so they always told me go ahead and just do whatever you think is best. The only people I really could talk to were my teachers, my friends and my siblings.

Blaine indicated that he felt like his status at community college was not "something to be proud of" and did not feel comfortable telling other people. Due to his feeling of embarrassment, Blaine made it a point to discuss his student identity with his family as a form of acceptance and support in succeeding academically. Appleseed also shares how his sense of pride about his student identity was constructed through his constant communication with his mother, "I talked to my mom so much about school and she is proud of me. My family is so proud of me because I went from an I do not care attitude, to achieving beyond my potential in my education."

On the other hand, Lilly explains how her family supported her efforts aiding in her confidence as a student, "my relationship with them, I would say it's gotten better. I mean because I would communicate with them about how school is going and my confidence has gotten better." Like Blaine, Appleseed, and Lilly, Tyler also shares how

she would often ask family members, specifically her parents, for guidance. Tyler shares,

> I would try to, well, even though they can't help me, I would still try to ask them,
> like, this is my schedule. This was how it was going to be, what do you think? Am
> I doing the right thing? Because I still needed the guidance. I still needed
> someone to tell me you're on the right path. I wasn't getting that from my advisor,
> so I was trying to get it from somewhere else.

In this excerpt, Tyler expresses a desire to reach out to her support system as a form of guidance, even though her parents could not really help her since they did not go to college.

Along with familial relationships, participants also noted the method in which their identities were constructed through their association with specific classmates. As mentioned previously, Blaine utilized his familial relationships as a form of support in his student identity. Additionally, Blaine indicated how he would associate himself with other students in class who share the same ambitions and drive. He shares, " the only friends I really would associate would be with those that had the intentions or were pretty much at my same level of we're going to be transferring at the same time to the same place." In Blaine's case, associating with students who were "hard working" like himself, was his way of validating his student identity. Likewise, Tiberius also used purposeful associations with military students in the classroom as a way to match their student identities.

> So I liked working with them and those were the people I think I like associating
> with the most. I think if I had to summarize it in one sentence, I'd say I worked
> with former military more often than not because of the attitudes that they

brought.

Alternatively, Sabrina's participation in an academic student group aided in forming her student identity. As stated previously, Sabrina was a "laser-focused" student and she wanted to be a part of something that would help her succeed as a student. She decided to join OD student group because they offered academic and career support, but also encouragement. Sabrina shares,

> So that experience was really helpful. It was to help people with tutoring services. Financial literacy. I feel like the advisors at OD helped me along the way too. They helped you with your homework and figuring out what classes you want to take in order to transfer.

For Sabrina, she wanted to align herself with students who had long-term goals of transferring to a four-year institution. In the OD student group, Sabrina explains how she was able to spend time with like-minded students through different workshops and campus tours, giving her support as a community college student. Along with purposeful connections, participants also shared how professors and other members in their social network supported and even encouraged their student identity through focusing on their astute college choices and welcoming conversations.

Constructing Identities Through General Social Support. Participants described instances of how these individuals perceived them and in turn constructed their student identity in terms of those perceptions. For example, John explains, "my math professor and my economics professor, they told us we were smart for taking the classes at the community college rather than spending thousands more at a big university for the same entry level courses." John, along with several other participants, explains that their

community college professors perceived them as "smart students." In Sabrina's case, her professors were validated her student identity by making it clear she was earning a quality education for half of the cost, "They would be like, congratulations, you're paying half the price. Someone at a four-year is paying more for the same work. You're just paying half the price." Tiberius further illustrated this by describing the continued assurance from his professors that he made a smart decision:

> I think it was my sophomore year, my professor said, I teach here in the mornings and I teach at Southern University in the afternoon. So he asked us what we think the differences between what he taught there versus what he taught us. We came up with things like, different textbooks, tests, and such. But he said the difference is about a few grand. But they always reassured us that they thought we were making a smart decision by going to a community college. In almost every class I went to, but maybe one or two of my professors, at some point they mentioned I think you're making the right decision by coming here.

Similarly, Amy's extended family offered support and appreciation for her smart college savings since Amy was an international student living with her aunt and uncle. Amy shares, "I guess an appreciation from my aunt because one of her husband's eldest sons, he just went to Southern University a year before. And obviously he, he got the same level of education but for a higher price."

Participants also shared how conversations with some members of their social network helped shape their student identity as accepted and supported. Co-workers were often a large source of support for participants, other than their parents. Participants found their conversations with their co-workers as welcoming because these

conversations validated their student identity. As Tiberius explains,

> Almost everybody has a story. When you mentioned that you go to a community college, which I found really interesting because either it's going to be, they're going to give you a story like I did that. I don't regret it one bit. I saved so much money. I would get stories where people would say, I wish I had done that because even though I got some cool experiences, all I really got was more debt, which is interesting.

Tiberius indicated at another point in the interview that he truly enjoyed these conversations because he felt like his co-workers were truly "interested in his experiences." Several participants described their co-workers as showing interest in their studies and frequently asked about their courses. Which in turn, gave participants the opportunity to talk about their academic progress. In Lilly's experiences, she embraced her conversations with her coworkers because it gave her a chance to learn and ask questions about their experiences. Lilly explains,

> I had a lot of conversations with coworkers because a lot of my coworkers knew about my community college. Either they went there, attended there, or a lot of people wanted to go and they would just have questions, like, asking me about what it was like. I'll also ask questions to my coworkers. And oftentimes because they would have a different pathway or doing, they would pick a class online and I'll be curious to how it is for them, like how's their experience.

Lilly pointed out how these conversations helped to validate her student identity, explaining that over time she felt like she "was doing what's right" for herself as a student since not everyone has the same pathway to a four-year school. Although

participants utilized strategic actions to support the creation of a positive student identity; participants also found themselves resisting the association of being a community college student.

Resisting Community College Identities

Participants frequently noted feeling stigmatized for attending a community college, leading them to resist the association of a community college student identity. Despite participants viewing themselves as being student savvy, many encountered feelings of self-doubt, often questioning their adequacy as a college student. In the personal frame, participants often highlighted how their social interactions with others instilled feelings of self-doubt about their capabilities and who they were as a student.

Battling Feelings of Self-Doubt. Several participants noted feelings of being perceived negatively as a student who couldn't "hack it" at a "real" college or lacked drive as a student. Amanda referenced this perception as "you couldn't hack it at a four year school basically, or oh, look at you, you don't want an advanced degree. I don't want to say it means slacker, but it seems like that's the perception." It appeared in the interviews that participants felt conflicted between others' negative perception of community college students and the manner in which they viewed themselves as a savvy student. For instance, Tyler struggled with aspects of self-doubt as a community college student. "It really lowered my self-esteem as a student. You know, you're stuck feeling like, maybe this is not worth your time when maybe that's not worth the work" In Tyler's experience, she often felt like she was viewed as "less than" for attending community college instead of going to a four-year institution, because "anyone can get into community college." Similarly, Lilly also felt insecure as a community college student

based on the perceptions from others. She explains,

> I feel like to other people, a community college student means like, you are not
> that smart or you have bad grades so you're just going to community college
> because you couldn't get into a four year university. And this is what I felt like
> people would think. And that's where, so part of my insecurities came from at
> first.

Like Lilly, Rose illustrates how discouraged she was with battling these perceptions,

> I considered just dropping out because this was not, it was a very discouraging
> way to go, but it was just something to remind me not to be like, this is not who I
> am. This is just a step in the path of going into the right direction.

In Rose's experience, the negative perception of being a community college student
played a role in how she internalized her student identity. She, along with other
participants, were conflicted with being viewed as a "slacker student" when they
reflected on their smart strategic choices to attend community college.

Many participants also noted shame and embarrassment as a community college
student. Blaine described how he really did not tell anyone that he was in community
college, "I don't know. I feel like it's just not something that I wanted to talk to people
about. Everyone really thought I was at Southern University, except for my family and
some of my close friends." When asked to explain further, Blaine mentions,

> I just felt like it wasn't something to be proud of, it's more to be something
> ashamed of. I had pretty much all my closest friends, they all got into four-year
> colleges on their first try. So it was more of a just they're over here trying, they're
> doing their best. I'm at a community college, which anyone can pretty much get

into.

Like Blaine, Rose also explains that she felt inferior when discussing her status as a community college student with she family. Rose shares,

> I was kind of embarrassed of it. Because my family, they had all gone straight from high school to a big university. And then I come and go to a community college, and the extended family would be asking me where I was and what I was doing at a community college. It just kind of put me down a lot.

Here, many participants expressed a sense of shame due to the open access policy of community colleges. Because of this, many participants avoided conversations around their status as a community college student. Nicole mentions, "I wasn't really comfortable with being a community college student, especially with telling people back home like my friends in another country because it wasn't something that they're familiar with. They probably saw it as retaking high school."

Likewise, participants also felt inadequate as a student when speaking with individuals other than family and friends. John, tried to avoid discussing his community college student status by misleading others by letting them believe he was at a four-year university. John explains,

> I didn't like it very much because I didn't really tell anyone that I was at a community college. They, everyone, really thought I was at Southern University, except for my family and some of my close friends. I kept it hidden for a while. I feel like it's just not something that I wanted to talk to people about because to tell them that you didn't get accepted to a university and you're stuck at a community college makes you feel dumb, I guess.

On the other hand, some participants felted the need to fight against the negative stigma of being a community college student. Sabrina shares:

> I was laser focused. I feel like people think when you go to community college that you're dumb. And I think I was trying to fight against that perception that people were placing on me just because I had decided to go to community college and not a four-year.

Eli also discussed fighting this stigma in his conversation with advisor,

> I felt that negative stigma. For me it felt like he was saying, oh so you couldn't handle just starting at a university. I'm like, there are some people that can just jump in a river and swim. I'm not one of them. I need to walk into the river. I'm not just wanting to jump from a bridge into a river. I don't know how deep it is. I don't know how cold it is, or if something is out there ready to eat me. I like to walk in slowly.

To combat these feelings of self-doubt and being perceived as a "slacker" student, participants engaged in enactments of sustained effort and messages of strategic communication.

Enactments of Sustained Effort. One way participants enacted their student identities was through success in their community college performance. This performance included being studious, earning above-average grades, and developing an all work no play philosophy. For Appleseed, his studious behaviors related to his work ethic. He explains, "if you have a good work ethic, you will achieve your goals. Just show up and do the work. You will achieve so much." Participants characterized studious behavior through committed participation both in and out of the classroom. Tyron

mentioned "I was a pretty good student. I paid attention; I did the homework. I noticed

there were other students who wouldn't really pay as much attention and I kind of prided

myself on being kind of ahead of them." Sabrina talks about the result of her studious

behavior, "I realized the importance of going to class, being in class, being present,

getting everything you can possibly get from the professor." Sabrina also shares,

> I had an English professor who would let you rewrite your paper up until the end
>
> of Thanksgiving. People didn't take advantage of that. I took advantage of that
>
> and I ended up getting an A, and it's not easy. It was never easier because it was
>
> community college. I've actually had three classes that were harder at my
>
> community college than they were at Southern University.

In Sabrina's case, she was adamant about using the available resources as a way of

expressing herself as a good student and ultimately earning an above-average grade. For

some participants, committed participation also meant utilizing all of their resources.

Nicole would frequently attend her professors' office hours, so much so that "most of

them knew me by name." This enactment served as a way Nicole expressed her student

identity as she explains how her professors responded to her attentiveness in class: "So in

class if they had a question, I would raise my hand, they would say my name and I would

answer, it was mostly like a personal relationship and I wasn't scared to ask questions." In

this same spirit of utilization of resources, Iris expressed how they were "eager to

understand the material" and would use outside classroom resources for help,

> Like we had a learning center lab called math lab. There would be all of the math
>
> professors and they would just sit there and they would have tutors at each desk. I
>
> remember I spent a lot of time in there because math was one of my worse

subjects, especially trig.

In addition, most participants associated their success as a student with earning above-average grades or as Blaine stated "perfect grades." Eli articulated the differences between a good student versus a better student as, "a good student is someone who does the work that they're required to. And a better student is someone who does more than their supposed to and get a better grade." Participants often focused the enacted of their student identity through their higher grade point averages (GPA). For instance, Nicole mentioned, "I think I had a 4.0 for about all of my time there. So I think I did a pretty good job as a student at my community college." Dragon echoed this by stating, "I have a straight 4.0, across every course I've taken. I mean, so that, I guess that kind of implies I'm a good student." For example, John compared his efforts in high school to his performance in community college,

> When I was in high school I didn't really get good grades very much. But when I went to my community college I got like an A in everything. I was really motived when I was there. I was putting a lot of effort into my work and I just wanted to do good. I wanted to keep my GPA as high as possible while I was at my community college.

Although participants aligned their student identity with higher GPAs, participants also noted instances where they would invoke specific social behaviors to highlight aspects of their student identity. During the course of the interviews, participants highlighted how they enacted an all work and no play mentality as a community college student. This mentality comprised of engaging in behaviors consistent with thoughts and feelings regarding the meaning of a "good student." For Tyron, this

mentality meant "I basically just went to the classes, did my homework and then left."
This was also true for Amy as she explains "I definitely put myself more into my classes
than extracurriculars." In Tyron and Amy's case, they engaged within the classroom and
performed the behaviors of putting in the work, however, being a student did not entail
engaging in activities outside of the classroom with classmates. In the same manner,
Sabrina talked about her intentional focus on school. Sabrina shares:

> I didn't do a lot of extra curriculars because I had like a lot of responsibilities at
> home. So I was only focused on going to school, doing my schoolwork, and then
> going home right afterwards. And I knew I had a purpose. I knew where I wanted
> to be so I didn't have time to, I didn't feel like I had the time to spend mingling
> and meeting people.

Likewise, other participants made sure to align themselves with other students who also
focused on their schoolwork. For instance, John revealed that he did not have many
friends in community college,

> There were like three other students that I liked. Those were the only people I
> talked to, because we actually did our work. That's really the only people I
> associated myself with when I was there. Those of us who were in there who
> actually did our work, I guess we kind of thought we were better than the other
> students.

Like John, Tiberius also made a conscious effort to work with classmates who were also
focused in the classroom. He explains:

> I really liked working with the former military students because they wanted to be
> there, their drive was a little different than say somebody like me who is fresh out.

I liked working with them and associating with the most.

Another significant aspect in participants enacting their student identities was through facilitating interactions that prevented them from being perceived negatively as a community college student.

Messages of Strategic Communication. Throughout their discussions, participants explained that they were purposeful in discussing their identity as a student with others through a scripted transfer response. Participants explained that they developed a script in order to downplay their status as a community college student to avoid unwanted questions or negative perceptions from others. As revealed by the participants, they often described the experience of navigating expressions about their student identities made by others by highlighting community college as, noted by Tyler, a "stepping stone," while focusing on the next steps of their educational journey. As Tyron explains:

> I felt like when I was going to community college I kind of a had a script thought
>
> out for when people would ask me that kind of stuff. I always pretty much said
>
> the same thing about getting the associates and go into a four year school.

For Tyron and others, downplaying their community college status while focusing on their plans to transfer to a four-year university was a way to show others that they were not "settling," aiding in their identity management. Participants preferred to illustrate the continuation of their educational journey as a means of declaring the fact that they were 'hardworking and motivated,' with goals lasting beyond their current status as matriculated into community college. As Blaine shares:

> I am a hard worker. I am motivated, but this was just my past. And it worked for

me. I would go ahead and just start off with the basic, I'm in college. I wouldn't

really specify where I'm at or what I'm doing or that kind of stuff. And then once

they went ahead and asked me where I was, or where I was attending, I would go

ahead and follow up really quickly with the phrase, "Oh, I'm at this community

college but I'm transferring really soon. I'm almost done."

Like Blaine, Rose notes that she would quickly clarify her educational steps to avoid a

negative student image from others. She explains,

I would make sure to clarify that I'm definitely like this isn't for me. I'm going

up, I'm going to a university, I'm going to get as much as I can get done for my

education and then I'm going to get a great job. This is not it. I'm going to be up

there. I'm not this.

In Rose's experience, like many of the participants, they felt the need to express their

next steps in their educational journey as a way to deflect negative perceptions.

Amy, along with several other participants, explained how their conversations

with others were characterized by expressions of a transfer attitude and their motivations

for attending community college as a way to manage their student identities with others.

For instance, Eli felt the need to justify his educational choices to attend community

college. He shares, "I always had to explain to people why I went there." Like Eli, Amy

illuminated how her transfer mindset played a role in her conversations with others. She

explains, "So for me it was like the plan. When I started it was always, two years and

then transfer to a four year. The goal was just to get out, get a bachelor's degree." In

Amy's experience, she explains that her discussions with others, whether with

classmates, friends, professors, or advisors, were characterized by her transfer attitude,

letting them know her overall educational plans. In essence, Amy would follow her educational plans with her motivations for attending community college by stating something to the effect of "getting the degree, is just going I'm going somewhere that it's a little bit cheaper to start off." Likewise, Sabrina also felt the need to explain her motivations for attending community college. She explains:

> I always feel like I had to explain to people why. I knew I was up to par and I knew where I had gotten in. But I always felt like I was explaining myself to people. Cause they were like, well, you're so smart. Why are you, you know, going there?

Overall participants highlighted how they enacted their student identities through using strategic and even scripted transfer responses with others. The next section will examine how participants formulated their student identities through their associations with others in the communal frame.

Community College as a Means to an End. The final way in which participants understood their student identity can be examined through the communal frame. The communal frame of CTI reflects a shared sense of identity among a group of individuals, or in other words, the context of a larger community group bonds them together. In this sense, individuals situate their understandings of self through the creation of a sense of belonging to a particular community. When analyzing how participants' student identities were shaped by the two-year community, one overarching theme emerged: (a) community college as a means to an end.

Participants cited a discrepancy between societal stereotypes of the community college student and their perceptions of themselves. Many participants discussed the

negative perceptions other individuals held of community college and the concept that it was not something participants wanted to be associated with. Rose discussed this negative perception of being "less-than,"

> My uncle was a Dean and so he was always asking me all these questions like, well, is this what you want? And I was like, wait, hold on now. Don't just assume, let me explain everything because, I will be going to a university.

Participants explained that people often think that community college students are "dumb" (Tyron), "weren't smart" (Lilly), "couldn't handle just starting at a university" (Eli), "don't know what you want to do" (John), and "don't want an advanced degree" (Amanda). Not surprisingly, these stereotypes deviated from their perceptions of themselves. When asked to describe the type of student they were, participants emphasized that they were quite the opposite, "hard working" (Tyler), "motivated" (Blaine), "a good student" (Nicole), "made a smart choice" (Appleseed) "you're good enough to get into university" (Dragon). This discrepancy challenged participants' communal identity resulting in characterizing their time at community college as a "stepping stone" to achieve their long-term educational goals. As Tyron notes "community college is seen more as like a stop on the destination. It's not the stop itself, it's just a way to get there."

> For participants, even if they enjoyed their community college experiences, they felt a disconnect from identifying as a community college student citing a lack of belonging to the college. For example, Iris explains,

> I didn't really have any feeling towards it. I was like, this is just a pit stop. I would definitely say that like when you're not connected with your community college

or whatever, you just tend to like, just think of it as like a job where you just go

there, clocking your hours and leave.

Like Iris, Tiberius explains this notion further by discussing the lack of physical features

to connect to at the college,

I shouldn't say there's nothing you can take pride in, but like the things that we

traditionally associate with like school pride, they didn't offer. We didn't have a

big bookstore where I could get all kinds of shirts with their logo on it. They

didn't have sports teams you could go and cheer. They didn't have anything like

that.

As stated earlier, participants enacted their student identities by focusing on their

academics to achieve their goal to transfer. Since the majority of their time was spent in

the classroom, the student body could be a source of belonging for participants. However,

participants noted the lack of motivation and/or time to connect with the student body.

For example, Sabrina explains her level of academic focus due to the fact that she was

well aware of her short duration of time in attendance at the community college level.

Sabrina shares,

I didn't do a lot of extra curriculars. I was only focused on going to school and

doing my schoolwork and then going home right afterwards. I knew I had a

purpose. I knew where I wanted to be so I didn't feel like I had time to take out to

spend mingling and meeting people. I definitely feel like if I met anybody that I

wouldn't have wanted to be friends with long-term.

Sabrina explains later in her interview that she was academically focused and did not

engage in activities to create a sense of belonging at community college since she was not

going to "be there that long." Her purpose was to earn "good" grades and transfer without "distractions." This sentiment is echoed by Blaine who shares,

> I'm not sure why, but it was more of just thinking to myself , why do I even bother making friends with these people? You know, I'm only going to talk to them for like two semesters at most, and that's, even if we're in the same class, when I'm about to go to Southern University.

Like Blaine, Rose cited her lack of participation in organizations and with the student body due to the negative environment and her physical distance from the college. Rose shares, "there wasn't anything. But, I didn't really put much effort into trying things because it seemed pointless being in any clubs or anything because it wasn't a friendly student body. And the distance really impacted my choices." Appleseed also mentioned his lack of connecting to the college due to the student body because "so many students come in and out so much that it made it difficult for me to associate with all the students."

As illustrated above, the participants did not create a sense of belonging to the group identity of being a community college student; instead, community college was treated as a means to an end disconnecting the participants from the negative student identity of community college. Overall, each frame contained unique discourses in where participants intentionally crafted positive student identities by engaging in positive validating behaviors and resisting the community college stigma. The next section examines the study's second overarching theme involving the participants' experiences at their receiving four-year institution, Southern University.

Realigning Student Identities at SU

Once participants transferred to SU, the findings demonstrated that manifestations of participants' prior student identities were irrelevant, leading them to engage in identity negotiations. The second sub research question examined the ways in which CCT students negotiated their student identities after trasnferring to their four-year recevieing insitution, SU. In the second theme, manifestations of participants' prior student identities were irrelevant at their four-year receiving institution. Instead, participants discussed the need to renegotiate their student identities as a way to cope at their four-year receiving institution. Two additional subthemes emerged to document these discursive communicative strategies (a) honoring their education journey, and reframing their student identity to reflect (b) growing as a person.

Consistent with the principles of CTI, CCT students' development of their student identities were negotiated through the four conceptual frames. Manifestations of identity in the personal frame included one overarching theme: (a) grades to growth. The enacted frame resulted in three themes of performances and social behaviors that informed participants' identity: (a) enactments of CC emphasis, (b) messages of CC De-emphasis, and (c) enactments of making school work for me. In the relational frame, participants' identities were constructed through their association with others: (a) constructing identities as a bragging right, and (b) constructing identities through professional connections. Lastly, in the communal frame, participants' student identities were embodied through two themes: (a) knowledge of physical space as a source for connection, and (b) participation in cultural practices as a source for connection. Table 4 provides an overview of the manifestations of identities within each subtheme regarding CCT students' identities at SU. Analysis of CCT students' identity efforts are discussed

in the following sections.

Table 4

Realigning Student Identities at SU

Sub theme	Identity Frame	Manifestations of Identities	Focus of Manifestations
Honoring their educational journey	Enacted frame	Enactments of CC emphasis	Performances that highlighted their community college background
		Messages of CC de-emphasis	Learned performance expectations through their interactions with others
	Relational frame	Constructing identities as a bragging right	Identifying with their CC background as a way of gaining approval from others
Growing as a person	Personal frame	Grades to growth	Inward reflections about being more than just the sum of their academic performance
	Enacted frame	Enactments of making school work for me	Performances that involve understanding how their student identity has evolved
	Relational frame	Constructing identities through professional connections	Identifying with particular university professionals as a way to build rapport
	Communal frame	Knowledge of physical space as a source for connection	Sense of belonging that is rooted in complete knowledge of campus buildings and systems
		Participation in cultural practices as a source for connection	Sense of belonging rooted in the ability to take part in cultural practices

Honoring Their Educational Journey

The interviews revealed a sense of inner conflict of participants. Participants

clung to former versions of themselves while simultaneously defining a refined student

image as current SU students. As a result, participants experienced a need to discuss their previous student background as a way to validate their educational journey. Three manifestations of identity emerged to illustrate this validation, (a) enactments of CC emphasis, (b) messages of CC de-emphasis, and (c) constructing identities as a bragging right.

       Enactments of CC emphasis. First, participants described how they were not shy in sharing that they transitioned from community college with others**.** This was vastly different as compared to their experiences while in community college. As presented earlier, many participants felt shame or embarrassment with their community college status and avoid those conversations or engaged in strategic transfer messages. Conversely, participants enjoyed engaging in these conversations. John explains,

       I tell people now that I'm at Southern University, that I've taken classes at the community college. Whereas before, when I was actually there, I never told anyone I was at the community college. I think that maybe now that I'm actually at the university, I like there's not really any shame in it at all, because I got where I want it to be.

Like John, Eli felt that community college "was a part of college. It's still a part of my current experience compared with my life." Several participants made it a point to bring up their community college experiences because it was part of their educational journey and they wanted to share this with others as a form of motivation. In the same token, Lilly shared her enthusiasm in speaking about her community college experiences,

      I include that every time I talk about college. I started at community college and I transferred because I say it as a part of my story. I started off lost and all over the

place, then I adjusted at a small college and I transferred, and did what I had to do

to adjust to a bigger university. I just included as a part of my story.

When asked how people react when she tells her story Lilly responds,

They react pretty pleasantly. They just say ask questions, ask questions about how

it was, and most of the time I'm inspiring someone, either that person the fact of

how it is the process of transferring from a community college to a university, or

they know someone that could benefit from it.

In this excerpt, Lilly explains how sharing her educational journey is exciting because

people want to hear about her process.

For other participants, they also enjoyed discussing their educational journeys as a

form of guidance for others. Blaine describes how he uses his community college

experience as a form of guidance to his co-workers, "I'm friends with my coworkers, and

I always try to guide and push them and tell them, they should consider going to

community college." Similarly, John is a leader of a transfer student program where he

mentors other community college students who are planning to transfer to Southern

University,

I'm one of the of leaders for that program now. I'm one of the mentors for the next

cohort. So that really helps me like share with them what I know about

transferring and being at the community college and the university.

Sabrina also enjoyed helping others when it came to looking at options for college

through her participation in a mentoring program. In this excerpt, Sabrina shares how she

was able to pay for a four-year degree by attending a community college,

I do this mentoring program in the summer. I'm always telling the girls that

community college is not a bad thing. It's a great stepping stone to college. I'm always trying to help people kind of do what I did because it saved me a lot of money. And people need help cause people don't know.

Meanwhile, other participants were more comfortable in sharing their community college background because of the welcoming environment at Southern University. Rose experienced a completely different atmosphere in which her classmates and professors are interesting in learning about one another. She shares,

Everyone wants to get to know everyone and everyone's so open to having a discussion and everyone sees each other just as an equal being treated and everything and everyone's just open to talk about whatever. And you feel safer for the environment.

Rose indicates that she did not engage in discussions with classmates in community college because everyone kept to themselves. However, at Southern University, she is comfortable in having conversations regarding her community college background. While participants enacted their student identities by freely sharing their educational journey, participants also received messages that de-emphasized the negative stigma of once being a community college student.

Messages of CC De-emphasis. Second, participants described experiences of navigating expressions about their student identities based on the messages they received by others. In these cases, participants note that their community college identity was considered trivial based on what they learned through their interactions with others at Southern University. In Dragon's and Iris's experiences, when asked to recall the details regarding previous conversations on the topic of community college transfers, they

simply stated "nobody cared." Rose discussed the reactions others have about her time in community college, "we've shared a few conversations of what it was like, but everyone is just, you know, they see each other as an equal. Nothing upsetting about being a transfer from a community college. No one says anything about it." Amanda recounts,

> It was usually just, oh, you transferred, cool. I transferred too or I didn't transfer or I went to this school, or I thought about doing that, but I'm still here. There's never been like a judgment behind it. There's never been like a, oh, you didn't start here. It was always just like, oh, you did that thing. cool. I did this thing and we move on with the conversation.

Amanda, along with several other participants felt accepted and even welcomed by professors, classmates, advisors, and administration at Southern University, due to the de-emphasis of their community college background.

In Tyron's experiences, he describes this sense of future goal orientation focusing on "it's not about where you started but how you finish." Tyron explains, "I feel like we're all just students there and it doesn't matter as much where you came from, like as long as you're doing your studying there." A handful of other participants noted these messages of de-emphasis. Tiberius explains,

> I definitely felt very comfortable around my professors, especially when I was mentioning that I transferred in. None of them thought that it was a crutch. If I ever mentioned, hey, I, I'm kind of struggling with this, maybe it's because I did not take it here. Which didn't come up that often, but when it did, I never felt like they were looking at me like, oh no, it's another one of these transfer kids. I felt very welcomed by everybody that I've interacted with.

In Amy's case, she describes how her classmates often implied that it did not matter where she started from:

> I think because when you're talking to people in class, you both have that capability of being in that class. You can both see that you've met those requirements and you're at the same point, it really doesn't matter how you got there in the first place, when you're both still completed that course, you're both still graduating with the same degree.

Here, Amy describes this sense of being on the same page with other students. Specifically, Amy mentions how everyone in the course regardless if they are a first-time beginning SU student, or if they are a community college transfer student, they have all met the requirements to enroll in that course and there is not a feeling of academic difference regarding where they came from.

Overall, participants who described enactments of CC de-emphasis illustrated how they negotiated their student identities within the enacted from by received messages of "we are all working towards the same goal" from others. Along with enactments of CC emphasis and receiving messages of CC de-emphasis, participants also applied their community college experiences as a bragging right with others at SU.

Constructing Identities as a Bragging Right. In the relational frame, participants noted the negotiation of their student identities by constructing their community college experiences as a bragging right. To begin, participants reported many instances where they constructed their student identities through their relationships with their friends and classmates. This is a departure from their identity formation in community college. While in community college, participants focused their student

identity based on their connections with their family. At Southern University, participants described interactions with their friends as part of a comparative process through which their identities were formed. Several participants describe how their financially smart decision to attend community college has become a "bragging right" among their peers. For example, Tyler explains that she likes to boast about her time at community college because she did not have to pay as much as her friends for the same courses. She shares,

> It's become a little bit of a bragging right. Yeah. I went to community college. Y'all are paying extra for whatever education you got here. And so it's kind of like a running joke between me and my friends that, I had the first two years cheap and they did not."

Like Tyler, Iris uses her financial gains as a way to construct her student identity comparing her experiences among her family and friends,

> And she was paying like a pretty penny for that school. She had her own room by the time she was a sophomore and the halls were really old. As for my friends, I would just be like looking at them like that's a lot of money. I would say, oh my books were just as expensive as your books. But my classes were like a thousand dollars a semester.

In this excerpt, Iris explains how her sister paid a lot of money for something that her sister felt was not valuable. Whereas her friends at Southern University were also paying extra money for tuition and services that she did not have to worry about. For Iris, she discusses her student identity by comparing her financial position to that of her family and friends. Blaine shares similar experiences when talking to his friends regarding his student identity,

I look at my friends and they tell me how much they're in financial debt with how they went to different colleges out of state and in state, even though they did get some scholarships. I look at myself, and I'm like, even though I'm a transfer student, I'm still on track to graduate somewhat on time and I'm not as much in debt as compared to them.

In Blaine's case, constructing a student identity that acknowledged his financial position and ability to graduate in a timeframe relative to his friends, is important. In this instance, Blaine highlights his desire to be recognized as a financially smart student.

Similarly, Eli makes it clear that he is not ashamed to speak in regards to the amount of money he has saved as a part of his identity. As Eli explains,

I am not ashamed about saving money. If someone ever asks me, why did you go to a community college first? Like, it's way cheaper and if you know what you want to do, it's a lot cheaper and a lot quicker. For example, one of my friends who is an engineer major, she's having to take another math. We have had conversations about statistics because I said, yeah, back at community college this is how we did this. And we'll talk about how we have the same grade with the same class.

Through these examples we can see that participants renegotiated their student identities through their relationships with their friends. Participants framed their student identity through a sense of financial gain as compared to their peers. While participants felt a need to acknowledge their previously formed student identities, they also utilized this inner conflict as a technique to evolve.

Growing as a Person

The second subtheme that emerged from the data resulted in participants describing shifts in their student identities in relation to their maturity as a student. Five specific manifestations of identity across the four frames of identity were present to represent these efforts of growth: (a) grades to growth, (b) enactments of making school work for me, (c) constructing identities through professional connections, (d) knowledge of physical space as a source of connection, and (e) participation in cultural practices as a source for connection.

Grades to Growth. While in community college, the participants characterized themselves as smart and strategic students who made good grades. However, once at their receiving institution, participants portrayed their student identity from a focus on grades to growth.

Many participants negotiated their understanding of their student identity from the perspective of being more than the sum of their grades. This change in their student identity was due in part to the loss of their GPA once they transferred to their receiving four-year institution. Amy characterized this as a source of frustration, "I think the only thing that really frustrated me was the fact that I lost my GPA. I had a really good GPA when I transferred from community college." Likewise, Amanda mentioned the same source of frustration with her GPA, "When you transfer your GPA becomes zero. And I had a 4.0 at my old school, which went away. I would have been Summa Cum Laude if I had not lost my GPA."

Being unable to keep their GPA once they transferred, participants had to redefine themselves as a college student. For example, Tiberius described how his "GPA reset"

once he transferred, giving him a "fresh start after having gained some of that experience." In this case, participants knew what it took to be a student based upon the skills that they had developed at the community college level. For instance, Eli expressed how community college aided him in "being more grounded into this is how college is" giving him the ability to focus more on "learning the subject" at Southern University rather than having to navigate basic study skill techniques. John also indicated his success as a community college student, "I always did work and studying and everything and I had a 4.0 when I was there." However, he notes that there was a need for "a lot more effort into my schoolwork at Southern University" suggesting progress as a change in his student perspective rather than just good grades. Like John, Sabrina talked about her progress as a student. She notes,

> I felt like it was easier for me to get A's at my community college. That is what I was used to. In my major classes, it just was harder to get A's because I was doing all that writing and I just felt like I was not that good at it. And it kind of translated in a way where I focused on improving, expanding your horizons, growing as a person.

Furthermore, Tyler explains the change in her student perspective based on her experiences at SU. She states "a lot of people say it's about good grades, but it's really about taking in information, processing them correctly, and then applying them to other things in life."

While participants still highlighted aspects of making good grades, many participants characterized their understanding of their student identities based upon their personal development and growth during their time at their four-year institution instead

of by their grade performance. Amanda explains how she developed a different understanding as a student once she transferred to Southern University. Amanda explains,

> You work hard. You try to do well, keep up with the classes. You try to get good grades and get help when you need to get help. You don't have to, you can get bad grades, and still be a good student if you're struggling.

Similarly, Amy discusses the ability to push herself to excel through engagement and utilizing all of the resources available,

> I grew a lot as a person. And so I really felt like those who wanted to push themselves to excel and learn more were the ones that engaged and took advantage of these people who have so much knowledge and experience.

Like Amy, many participants discussed how they understood the importance of becoming a well-rounded student. In Blaine's case, he discussed the importance of making connections and becoming involved in the campus community. Blaine shares, "I would say I'm more of a well-rounded person, given that Southern University has allowed me to develop and open up myself more as a person." When asked to explain further, Blaine states,

> I would say it would go beyond academics. There are other key roles that would play into it, you know, being a member in different clubs or activities, working with the community, doing community service projects, being something that's very beneficial, making connections, establishing, a relationship with my professors.

In the same token, Iris indicated that she started becoming more involved at Southern University and created "lasting memories and friendships" as a result. Iris shares, "I was

always involved in something and I knew a heck ton of people because I was always doing something on campus. So that was great."

Other participants shared similar experiences and noted that their involvement at Southern University provided them the opportunity to become open-minded as an individual. Lilly explains that her involvements created inclusion and engagement, which aided her in becoming more creative and open-minded as a student,

> I have joined clubs and organizations and I'm starting to be more creative as a student. I'm more open minded, focused with my classes and learning how to engage in different circumstances, like when it's time to do a project in a classroom.

Likewise, Tyler also mentioned the additional skills she has gained as a result of transferring to Southern University. She shares,

> I learned a lot of new things and I learned a lot of new techniques that I can apply to how I live my life. So there's a lot of things that teach us that doesn't just apply to us as a student, but they really teach you life skills and you don't learn that a lot in community college or even in high school.

In Sabrina's case, she feels like "I've grown, like not just learning new things, but understanding people. Learning when to pick and choose and when to fight your battles and speaking up for yourself. That's really important." In the personal frame, the participants were forced to renegotiate how they understood themselves as a student. Participants characterized themselves by the growth they encountered as a student. The enacted frame is another significant aspect in examining how the participants renegotiated their student identities.

Enactments of Making School Work for Me. Participants described navigating expressions about their student identities by putting themselves "out there." In these cases, participants characterized their first two semesters at Southern University as being "lonely" and "overwhelming," forcing them to engage in actions that would "make school work for them."

One of these actions characterized by participants was engaging professors. While in community college, participants talked about how their professors knew them and felt comfortable engaging in conversations to ask for help. However, once participants transferred to their four-year institution, they needed to figure out how to engage with professors since they were in larger classrooms where the professors did not know them by name. For example, Nicole describes her feelings during her first year at Southern University,

> I did feel very alone as a transfer student. For about a year. I didn't probably talk to anyone about a year. I felt very overwhelmed being in such a large environment. So for the first two semesters or probably even three or four, wasn't really going to my professors to ask questions just like I did in community college mostly because I felt like they were not reachable.

However, Nicole wanted to avoid feeling alone as a student, and did not want to fail her courses at Southern University. To do so, Nicole began to engage with her professors as well as with her classmates. Nicole shares, "I probably started talking to people, started talking more to people and then I joined, I started joining different organizations. I had to force myself to talk to professors because I didn't want to retake the class again."

Like Nicole, Rose spoke regarding the choice to make a conscious effort to

introduce herself to her professors as a way to enact her student identity. During the interview, Rose discusses her need to show excitement as a student in order to feel connected.

> I make it a huge point to introduce myself and get to know them so that I'm not just another student and that they're not just another professor. Of course I give the most respect towards them, but at the same time I want to get to know them and I want them to know me as much as they want to.

Here, Rose wanted to show her professors her motivation and interest in the material as a way to communicate her connection to her new student identity. In Blaine's experience, he also enacted his new student identity by showing his professors that he is a serious student. Blaine explains, "you have to go ahead and put in the work, do office hours, introduce yourself on the first day, that kind of stuff. Let them know that, you're here to learn."

On the other hand, some participants mentioned resourcefulness as a way of enacting the negotiation of their student identity. Lilly recalls times when she used the resourcefulness she learned at community college to help push her past feelings of being overwhelmed as a university student. Lilly shares,

> I was overwhelmed by the university's large size, but the university also has so many resources to help. So once I understood these things, I was able to understand that I have to just ask questions, get myself out there, say focused, manage my time, and I'll be okay. And then that's just what I've been doing.

Here, Lilly explains that she was having a hard time focusing as a university student due to its size and culture. However, she used her experiences at community college as a

source for understanding her student identity giving her the ability to focus in her new environment. Similarly, Tyler adds to this sense of resourcefulness as she explains the use of searching for the information on her own as an expression of her student identity. She recalls,

> But when I transferred to Southern University, there's a little bit more to where the teacher lectures and they give you ideas, but you have to search for the information which gives you a little more understanding of how to do things. For example, if I have a question, I will go ask the teacher, but they're still, they're not going to give me the answer straight away because they still want me to look for the answer. So I've, learned how to look for answers for myself and not just as a student but in life.

For Appleseed, his use of resourcefulness boiled down to being able to communicate effectively with professors and administrators as a strategy in making school work for him. In Appleseed's experience, he faced numerous barriers at Southern University, such as accessibility. Appleseed shares, "I have to work at communicating effectively to have my issues resolved. I actually called the police department and they came out and helped me out. I've had to call the transportation department. They helped me out. I talked to Southern University's advising center. They helped me out."

In the end, participants felt lost when they transitioned into their new college environment, with larger classrooms and less individualized attention. As a way to combat feelings of being overwhelmed and loneliness, participants tapped into their experiences from community college as a way to make their new school environment work for them. The next section will examine how participants' student identities

emerged from discourses comprised in the relational frame.

        Constructing Identities Through Professional Connections. Participants noted they often formed their student identities based on their understanding of how they were viewed by the professionals they came into contact with. In this sense, participants focused the construction of their student identities based on the professional connections with their professors and advisors. Blaine discusses how his connections with his advisors and professors added to his financially smart student identity,

> With my advisors, they would look to see what class I've taken and they would even tell me, you know, that's so smart of you to go ahead and take that class over there. Because it's the exact same class. It's a different course number. You know, with my professors, I would tell them about how I transferred from a community college and they would tell me how smart it is.

For Blaine, the perceptions from professionals at Southern University aided in his construction of his student identity.

        For other participants, the perceptions from their professors were a source of identity formation due to the possible networking connections their professors could offer. Rose explains that she wants her professors to perceive her as "hardworking and honest." She shares her experiences with two professors,

> I want to succeed; I really just want to be the best that I can be and I want to show the professors what I'm capable of. For example, this past semester I was able to get really close with two professors. I had some health issues and a family member passed away. They were so considerate and they would be emailing me all the time asking how I was and how everything was going and they wanted to

video chat because they missed me. They showed that they cared so much and I

found them as a mentor.

In this excerpt, Rose stressed the importance of her personal connection with her

professors leading to a professional mentoring relationship. In a similar vein, Tiberius

explains the importance of building rapport with his professors because of the higher

likelihood of taking another class with them. He explains,

I think the relationship you have to have with your professors is a little different. I

recommend kind of building a rapport with them if you can. And that is a little

different than at community college because community college was just with

multiple campuses and in many professors. So here I think it's much more

important to build lasting relationships.

When asked to explain this further, Tiberius notes that building rapport was largely

connected the "possibility of networking connections" that his professors had to offer.

Tiberius, along with several other participants, were concerned with their

professors' perceptions of them as a student because of these potential connections. For

example, Tyron shares the importance of the networking connections his professors have,

"I know a lot of them know a lot more people. So if I can get their contact information or

just start networking from there, especially since it's near the end of my college journey,

they are better suited for that." Iris further illustrated the importance of her professors'

perceptions because of their professional connections in the industry, "I remember even if

I saw my professors outside of class I would just say hi to them because they work in the

industry I'm trying to work in. And networking is a very important in computer science."

On the other hand, Dragon focused on his connections with his professors as

possible sources for recommendation letters and research experiences. One of Dragon's long term goals is to obtain a doctoral degree in math. In order to achieve this, Dragon makes is a point to have conversations with professors and work with them on research projects as part of his graduate school applications. Dragon explains,

> I actually talk more with professors than I do with students. I mean, a couple of times I have sat down and had long conversations about things outside of class. Like I talked to [Dr. Abbout] a few times and we always talked about computer science, what I did in the industry, and my future doctoral goals, that kind of thing. I'm actually still working with a professor, on a paper that we are publishing with another graduate student.

Throughout this frame, participants voiced how their student identities were shaped in comparison with their friends and the perceptions held by university professionals whom they came into close contact with. Having discussed how participants negotiated their student identities in the relational frame, the last frame to examine is the communal frame.

Knowledge of Physical Space as a Source for Connection. The communal frame provides a source of shared identity among a group of individuals (Hecht, 1993). In this frame participants formed an understanding of their student identity through the creation of a sense of belonging at Southern University. Specifically, two manifestations emerged: (a) knowledge of physical space as a source for connection, and (b) participation in cultural practices as a source for connection.

First, participants frequently reported that the knowledge of the physical campus contributed to whether or not they felt like a member of the student body at Southern

University. Prior to registering for classes at SU, participants explained that they were required to attend a transfer orientation program. During this program, participants were given a tour of the campus as well as information and access to resources. While the participants noted participating in a transfer orientation session prior to the start of the semester, many felt as though this session was insufficient in helping them with understanding the physical layout of the campus. Nicole summarizes the participants feelings regarding the transfer orientation at SU, "what they did was they just took us around at different buildings, but it was kind of a lot for me to remember all the different buildings at one day."

During their first two semesters at Southern University, participants reported feeling "stressed" with their surroundings and often felt like a "fake" SU student. In Tyron's experience, he felt strange coming to SU without a comprehensive knowledge of things around campus. Tyron notes, "it was just a little strange to me coming in as a junior, I didn't really have any knowledge about the campus or where anything was." In a community college setting, participants described how there were only a few buildings that made up the community college campus, making it easy to navigate. However, once they transferred to SU, participants were overwhelmed with the size of the campus, trying to navigate between classes. For example, Nicole explains the stress she felt trying to get to class,

> I was trying to figure out where different places were. I remember on the first day
> of classes, I was about 30 minutes late to my class and I was walking and I didn't
> know about the bus system. I think first semester and a half, I didn't know about
> the bus system. So, I would walk all the way from the engineering building to the

library. It was very stressful for those first periods.

In this excerpt, Nicole explains the stress she felt when trying to navigate across campus to her next class. At SU, the engineering building is located on the north end of campus, while the library is located in the center of campus. If a student were to walk from the engineering building to the library, it would take roughly 30 minutes, whereas the SU bus system could cut this time in half to 15 minutes. Sabrina further illuminates the stress she felt when trying to navigate around campus, "the bus drove past me six times on the first day and I was like, how does this work? It was so confusing and I was late to my first class. It stressed me out."

> Many participants noted that it took at least a year, or two semesters, for them to create a connection to their new student identity at SU. For example, in Amanda's experience,

> For a while that meant that I didn't really feel like I belonged there. It's like I'm a fake Southern University student is what I felt like for a long time. I'm just like, I just showed up here one day, I don't belong here.

However, Amanda began to feel a connection as a SU student once she became familiar with the physical surroundings of the campus. Amanda further explains,

> I think the end of my first year after my first two semesters, I started to know where more buildings were and I started to know people and know professors at least a little bit. So, by the end of my second semester I was just like, okay, I know what's happening, I know where we are. I'm a Southern University student at this point.

For Amanda, the simple understanding of SU systems and knowledge of buildings

enabled her to feel comfortable at SU and began to identify as a SU student. John expressed similar experiences regarding his connection to being a SU student. John shares,

> When I first transferred, I didn't really know the campus at all because I commuted first semester when I transferred. So I would just come to class and then go home. But then second semester I lived on campus and I would to go to the dining hall and do stuff in the gym and it helped me to learn where everything was.

On the other hand, Sabrina began to feel a sense of belonging once she was able to focus on her surroundings on campus. For Sabrina, she was coming from a comfortable environment where she was focused on her academic performance. However, once she transferred to SU, creating a sense of connection to SU was not a priority, as she was trying to focus on her academic performance and familial obligations. Sabrina explains,

> I struggled the first semester with like balancing schoolwork, my responsibilities at home. I really didn't do anything outside of going to class just because it's just not my thing. But, I definitely felt like more of a student cause I kind of finally knew where things were.

As such, Sabrina felt this connection once she gave herself time to figure out the physical location of things on campus.

Overall, participants discussed their sense of belonging as a SU student in terms of knowing the physical innerworkings of SU's campus. As such, most participants also illustrated how identity negotiations in the communal frame involved an awareness of SU's cultural practices.

Engagement in Cultural Practices as a Source for Connection. Second, participants explained that having shared understandings of SU's cultural practices contributed to whether or not they felt a sense of belonging as a student. In this, participants highlighted their connection to their student identity through their ability to take part in SU's cultural traditions and artifacts. One of the ways in which participants felt a sense of belonging was through academic connections. For example, Lilly shares how her participation in an academically focused group within her major aided in her sense of belonging.

> The [minority] association group. That definitely brings me a sense of belonging because I do have feelings, there have been times when I feel left out and especially with some instance where I'm sitting in the classroom and I don't see many people that don't look like me. So it gives me a good feeling to be in a club and connect and gather with students who go to the same school and we can discuss things.

Like Lilly, Nicole discusses being a part of an engineering group that serves as a source of connection. Nicole notes,

> My NSBE [National Society of Black Engineers] group has study halls every week. I met people who had taken classes I had taken, cause I didn't know how to reach them to reach out to other upperclassmen. That was an environment that gave me an opportunity to reach out to upperclassmen and ask them for help. So they were very helpful with telling me about teachers, teachers not to take, teachers to take, teachers that will be helpful.

Here, Nicole explains that her participation in her engineering group has given her the

ability to meet other students and find out more about the innerworkings of the
engineering department.

Meanwhile, some participants shared their sense of connection through social
events outside of academics. For example, Tyler shares that her sense of connection to
SU is rooted in her ability to enjoy specific locations on campus. Tyler mentions,

My favorite thing about campus is the nature. Everywhere you walk there's a little

park everywhere you walk. There's a little bench and a swing in and something

like that. I really enjoy using all of these resources. I really liked the library,

especially the 10th floor. I like to go there from time to time to look at old books

or just enjoy the view from the top. It's a, it's a place to explore, that's for sure.

Like Tyler, other participants expressed a sense of connection through the SU activities
they were able to engage in at SU. As Iris explains, "I was always doing something on
campus. I was always involved in something and I knew a heck ton of people because I
was always doing something on campus." For Rose, she expresses a sense of connection
as a SU student because of the different activities she is able to participate in. Rose
explains,

To see the different student organizations create something, like a fair or

whatever, they'd go round and giving out free stuff, that was always a major plus.

I'd have to say, submitting artwork into different shows and seeing my work there

with all my other students. My fellow classmates and then attending different

events at the school. That definitely makes it feel like I'm a part of the student

body.

In this excerpt, Rose describes her sense of connection as a student because she is able to

participate in different cultural practices at SU. From sharing her artwork with other students, to engaging with others in different student organizations, Rose feels that she is a "real college student" because she is able to be a part of the campus community.

Alternatively, many participants noted that they felt a sense of connection because they can brand themselves with SU artifacts, such as clothing or objects they could display on their person. For example, Sabrina explains, "I feel like I see Southern University stuff everywhere. I feel like, oh yeah, that's my school and wearing the paraphernalia, that really makes you feel a part of it." Here, Sabrina notes her sense of connection because she sees other students wearing the SU brand while she can participate in the branding as well. Like Sabrina, Blaine uses SU artifacts to talk about his connection to SU. He shares,

I always represent my school no matter what. I either have it on my car around me with my lanyard or I wear just a regular shirt. So people always ask me, do you go to Southern University? And that's when I go in and start telling them, I'm a college student, graduating next year, and I tell them just about the different activities that I do.

Similarly, Tiberius further describes his connection experience by explaining the difference between school pride at the community college versus SU. He shares,

There's, there's a lot more school pride here too. You see people wearing SU t-shirts here. When I was at community college and maybe it's just because the bookstore didn't have a very good selection, but I did not see a lot of people wearing their community college stuff. Everybody was kind of focused on, what college they wanted to go to versus the one that they were at.

Here, Tiberius notes that he feels a sense of belonging to SU because he can share a sense of pride at SU through branding himself with SU artifacts. Overall, participants described how negotiations in their student identity were rooted in the knowledge of the SU campus environment and engagement in SU's cultural practices.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the current study's finding addressing how CCT students' lived experiences inform their student identities within the personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames of identity. Through careful examination of each frame, specific meaning making processes were generated to inform the ways in which participants crafted and negotiated their student identities. First, the researcher described the ways in which CCT students' community college experiences shape their student identities through two subthemes, resulting in eight distinct manifestations of identity. The researcher then examined how CCT students negotiated their student identities once they transferred into their four-year receiving institution, revealing two additional subthemes and an additional eight separate manifestations. Overall, this chapter addressed how CCT students' identities are uniquely formulated and renegotiated within each educational context. In the next chapter, the researcher will address these findings, outline key conclusions and implications, while making recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this phenomenological study was to explore how CCT students' lived experiences at their two-year institutions inform their student identity as well as how CCT students discuss and negotiate their student identity after they transfer to their receiving four-year institution. To this date, no study has exclusively examined the communicative identity experiences materialized in discourse through self-reflection, performances, relational partners, and community members of CCT students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to add to the growing body of identity research by exploring how CCT students' lived experiences inform their student identities. The researcher sought to capture CCT students' lived experiences through two in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 participants at a large, public four-year institution. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

RQ: How do CCT students' lived experiences inform their identities as college students?

Sub Question 1: How do CCT students' community college experiences shape their student identities?

Sub question 2: How do CCT students (re)negotiate their student identities post-transfer?

This chapter provides a summary of the present study's findings, a discussion surrounding the findings, theoretical implications and significance, and recommendations for future research and practice.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the study was to understand how CCT students' lived experiences inform their student identities. To do this, the researcher examined CCT students

collegiate meaning making experiences. First, the researcher sought to understand how CCT students' experiences at their two-year institution shaped their student identity. Then, the researcher focused on how CCT students renegotiated their understanding of their student identities at their four-year receiving institution. The hermeneutic phenomenological study design was selected as a way to understand and interpret the essence and meanings of CCT students' experiences (Husserl, 1989; van Manen, 2014). Hecht' (1993) CTI, served as the study's theoretical framework. CTI focuses on the manifestation of identities through communicative interactions and expressions with others, providing a lens through which to explore how CCT students understand their student identities.

The researcher selected Southern University (SU) as a site for exploration due to the institution's large and diverse student body as well as its status as the top transferring institution in North Carolina. After IRB approval, the Director of the SU Transfer Center created an institutional report identifying potential participants based on their community college transfer status, age, and length of attendance at SU. A recruitment email was sent to the 3879 potential participants generated from that report. A total of 48 individuals responded to the call for participation. In order to gain a robust understanding of student experiences, the researcher engaged in purposeful maximum sampling (Creswell, 2013) techniques selecting participants based on their ability to contribute to the diversity of perspectives in the overall study. Characteristics considered for selection included age, participants field of study at SU, gender and racial identification, and the location of their community college.

The researcher emailed 20 potential participants from the list of 48, with 15 participants agreeing to participate in the interviewing phase of the study. Fortunately, those 15 participants yielded a sample – summarized in Table 2- diverse in age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, field of study, and community college. Data collection took place through the completion of a pre-interview demographic questionnaire and through two rounds of interviews, with the second interview occurring two weeks after the first interview. Using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the researcher began engaging in data analysis immediately after interview data transcription. Analysis in phenomenological research followed a procedure of categorizing the participants' statements into meaning units that represents the layers of identity being examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The process as data categorization, reduction, and theme identification occurred in both rounds of interviews, with the researcher identifying two overarching themes, four subthemes, and 16 distinct identity manifestations reflecting the identity experiences of CCT students (van Manen, 2001). Table 5 provides an overview of the study's findings.

Table 5

Evolution of CCT Student Identities

Theme	Subtheme	Manifestations of Identity Frames
Facilitating positive student identities in community college	Engaging in identity validating behaviors	Personal – feelings of being student savvy Enacted - enactments of confidence Relational – constructing identities through purposeful connections, constructing identities through general support
	Resisting community college identities	Personal – battling feelings of self-doubt Enacted – enactments of sustained effort, messages of strategic communication Communal – community college as a means to an end
Realigning student identity at SU	Honoring their educational journey	Enacted – enactments of CC emphasis, enactments of CC de-emphasis Relational – constructing identities as a bragging right
	Growing as a person	Personal – grades to growth Enacted – enactments of making school work for me Relational – constructing identities through professional connections Communal – knowledge of physical space as a source of connection, participation in cultural practices as a source for connection

To begin, the overall research question that this study posed examined the how the lived experiences of CCT students informs their student identities. The findings from the study illustrate how the participants' student identities were constantly in flux, forming and reforming through self-cognitions, expressions, relationships, and group

interactions. Two overall themes emerged to present the complex phenomenon in how CCT students communicatively develop, manage, and negotiate their student identities.

The first theme demonstrates that CCT students engage in careful and purposeful positive student identity development behaviors while in community college. The first sub research question explored how CCT students' experiences in community college formulated their desire to facilitate positive student identities. Two subthemes emerged to document the participants' efforts: (a) engaging in identity validating behaviors, and (b) resisting community college identities. Consistent with the principles of CTI, the data indicated eight distinct manifestations of identity emerging from discourses located within each frame. Manifestations of identity and the personal frame included: (a) feelings of being student savvy, (b) battling feelings of self-doubt. In the enacted frame, identities were articulated through performances and expressions during social interactions informing understandings of CCT students' identities. Manifestations of identity within the enacted frame included: (a) enactments of confidence, (b) enactments of sustained effort, and (c) messages of strategic communication. In the relational frame, CCT students' identities were materialized in reference to the participants' associations with others. Two manifestations of identity emerged within the relational frame: (a) constructing identities through purposeful connections, and (b) constructing identities through's general support. Lastly, the communal frame explores understandings of identity as they are formed through societal agreements, establishing memberships to a particular group. In the communal frame, CCT students' identities were embodied through one overarching theme: (a) community college as a means to an end. Overall, each frame contains unique communicative practices through which CCT students create

meanings of who they are as a college student. Here, the participants crafted a pragmatic, future-oriented student identity in where they are focused on being savvy by leveraging their smart and strategic choices. Analysis of these identity efforts are discussed later in the chapter.

Next, the second overall theme illustrates how CCT students renegotiated their previously formed student identities. Once the participants transferred to SU, conceptions of their student identity constructed at their community college were no longer beneficial. Here, participants' sense of who they were as a student changed as they began their coursework and in their interactions with others. The second sub research question, focused on the ways in which CCT students negotiated their student identities as a result of attending their receiving four-year institution for at least one-year. Two subthemes emerged to document participants' efforts: (a) honoring their educational background, and (b) growing as a person. Participants documented the renegotiations of their student identities through eight distinct manifestations. In the personal frame, participants' inward reflections about their student identity were characterized by feelings of being more than the sum of their academic performance. Manifestations of identity in the personal frame included one overarching theme: (a) grades to growth. The enacted frame resulted in three themes of performances and social behaviors that informed participants' identity: (a) enactments of CC emphasis, (b) messages of CC De-emphasis, and (c) enactments of making school work for me. Within this frame, participants highlighted their community college background and their interactions with others since they received messages of community college deemphasis from students and professors at their four-year institution. Additionally, participants utilized social behaviors by

intentionally putting themselves "out there" in order to make their new collegiate environment work for them. In the relational frame, participants' identities were constructed through their association with others. The data demonstrated that participants understood their student identities through two emergent themes: (a) constructing identities as a bragging right, and (b) constructing identities through professional connections. Lastly, in the communal frame, participants formed understandings of their student identities through establishing memberships to their four-year institution. Participants' student identities were embodied through two themes: (a) knowledge of physical space as a source for connection, and (b) participation in cultural practices as a source for connection. In community college, the participants focused their student identities on being savvy by leveraging their smart and strategic choices. However, on SU's campus, their student identity shifted from not only focusing on their pragmatic student identity, but also to their holistic development as a person. Analysis of CCT students' identity efforts are discussed in the following section.

Discussion

Existing research on CCT students focuses predominately on transfer experiences (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Ishitani, 2008; Packard et al., 2013), post-transfer adjustment and engagement (Astin, 1984; Bahr et al., 2012; Flaga, 2006; Jackson & Laanan, 2015; Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2009), and post-transfer outcomes, such as retention (Dennis et al., 2008) and persistence (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Yet, research frameworks in post-transfer adjustment and engagement (Jain et al., 2011) have not taken into account the role of student identity negotiation. Findings from this study add to the limited number of existing studies examining student identity

development of CCT students at their two-year and four-year institutions. Specifically, this study adds to the broader understanding of who CCT students are and how they are focusing and developing their experiences. The section below builds upon existing literature by describing how CCT students' lived experiences inform their student identities at both their perspective community colleges and then at SU.

Facilitating Positive Student Identities in Community College

The findings of the present study indicate that participants' student identities exist through strategic social interactions across the personal, enacted, relational, and communal contexts. Here, participants engage in a variety of forms of communication to thoughtfully and carefully craft a positive student identity in community college. For example, participants developed a pragmatic, future-oriented student identity by being savvy and leveraging their smart and strategic college choices. Two subthemes emerged to illustrate these efforts: (a) engaging in identity validating behaviors, and (b) resisting community college identities.

Engaging in Identity Validating Behaviors

One of the most striking results of this study is that participants were deeply committed to facilitating actions and behaviors that cultivated a positive student identity. In the personal frame, participants noted feelings of student savviness by being able to make smart and strategic choices as a college student. Frequently comparing themselves to students who start off as freshmen at four-year institutions, participants were quick to acknowledge how their choice to attend community college reflected gains academically, personally, and economically. Like many participants, Tyron emphasized attending community college as "a smart plan, that'll save you some money." In order to manifest

positive student identities, participants often engaged in performances that supported their inward feelings of student agency. In the enacted frame, participants shared examples surrounding enactments of confidence. In this theme, the structure of community college environment aided participants in developing confidence in skills necessary to being a successful college student. For example, participants noted the community college environment as being socially and academically less "stressful," giving them the ability to develop confidence in their skills as a student. These findings are encouraging, complementing other pre-transfer success studies (Hagedorn et al, 2008; Laanan et al, 2010), suggesting that academic preparation increases the likelihood of vertical transfer.

In the relational frame, participants utilized strategic and purposeful connections with others in order to support the manifestation of a positive student identity. For example, in constructing identities through purposeful connections, participants noted that meanings of their student identities were largely constructed in association with their family members. As such, CCT students' social engagement happened through interactions with personal relatives at their home or interacting with their peers by discussing academic progress (Ellis, 2013). Oftentimes, participants would consult with immediate family members for academic guidance even if their family members did not attend college, or use them as a source of emotional support. Lilly shared the supportive role of her family: "My relationship with them, I would say it's gotten better. I mean because I would communicate with them about how school is going and my confidence has gotten better." Additionally, participants were quick to align themselves with like-minded classmates who exhibited the same ambition and drive to achieve as a student.

For example, Tiberius who used purposeful associations with military students in the classroom as a way to match their student identities.

Participants also supported a positive student identity by constructing their identities through general support. One source of general support was provided by their community college professors. Barnett (2010) suggests that validation from faculty, in regarding feeling acknowledged and valued, is a significant predictor of students' intent to persist. This finding is especially significant given that community college students used professors as a source of identity validation. Typically, the professors would support their student acumen by validating the economic reasons for attending community college. In Sabrina's case, professors validated her student identity by making it clear she was earning a quality education for half of the cost: "They would be like, congratulations, you're paying half the price. Someone at a four year is paying more for the same work." Additionally, coworkers served as a form of general support by showing interest in CCT students' community college experiences. While the participants utilize strategic communicative actions and behaviors to validate their conception of a positive student identity, participants also found themselves resisting the association of a community college student identity.

Resisting Community College Identities

Participants often expressed feeling stigmatized as a community college student. In the personal frame, participants noted battling feelings of self-doubt regarding their adequacy as a college student. For example, several participants noted feelings of being perceived as a someone who could not make it at "a real college," or being perceived as a "slacker" student who does not take their education seriously. Amanda referenced this

perception as "you couldn't hack it at a four year school basically, or oh, look at you, you don't want an advanced degree." This was a significant departure from how participants defined themselves as students. Schwartzman and Sanchez (2016) suggested that identity-based conflicts and tensions can be relieved through enacting communal rituals and enriching relationships created among students. To that end, participants experienced a communal-personal identity gap where the stereotype of a community college student did not align with their positive student concepts. To combat these feelings of self-doubt and being perceived as a "slacker" student, participants engaged in enactments of sustained effort and messages of strategic communication. For example, participants highlighted their success as a student through their enactments of sustained effort by being studious, earning above average grades, and developing an all work no play mentality in community college. Tyron noted his commitment in the classroom giving him a sense of personal pride: "I noticed there were other students who wouldn't really pay as much attention and I kind of prided myself on being kind of ahead of them." As such, studies have pointed to academic preparation (i.e., higher grade point averages and academic skills developed) as a predictor of success (Hagedorn et al., 2008) in transferring to four-year institutions.

Furthermore, participants explained that in their conversations with others, they were quick to utilize messages of strategic communication. In their messages of strategic communication, they often crafted a scripted response reflecting their academic goals in transferring to a four-year institution and earning a higher level degree. For instance, Rose would quickly clarify her educational steps to avoid a negative student image from others, "I would make sure to clarify that I'm definitely like this isn't for me. I'm going

up, I'm going to a university." This likens to Goffman's (1963) and Yoshino's (2002, 2006) management of stigmatized identities. In this sense, participants felt stigmatized as community college students, often downplaying this stigmatized identity and reframing the conversation with messages of transferring to a four-year institution. Likewise, Sabrina discussed how she felt the need to explain her choice to attend community college, "I always felt like I was explaining myself to people. Cause they were like, well, you're so smart. Why are you, going there?" This articulation of transfer messaging is also consistent with established facilitators of vertical transfer. As noted by Lasota and Zumeta (2016), community college student factors are a better predictor of student outcomes rather than institutional factors. For example, a community college student's intent to transfer is considered one of the most critical factors in transferring to a four-year institution (Ginder et al., 2014).

Lastly, in the communal frame, participants noted community college as a means to an end, citing the community college as a source of disconnection to their student identity. Participants acknowledged a discrepancy between societal stigmas of community college students and the perceptions of themselves. For this reason, participants engaged in behaviors that created a lack of belonging to the community college. For instance, several participants noted the lack of student pride and college culture, as a source of disconnection. Iris explained "I didn't really have any feeling towards it. I was like, this is just a pit stop." Also, participants described the lack of creating relationships with others due to viewing them as distractions in their long-term goals. As such, participants' sense of belonging while in community college was nonexistent, supporting similar findings regarding the lack of community college

connection (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Martinez & Munsch, 2019). Overall, each frame contained unique discourses in where participants intentionally crafted positive student identities to prepare for their transition to their receiving four-year institution, Southern University.

Realigning Student identities at SU

For CCT students, significant transitional and adjustment experiences, both positive and negative, play a role in their transition and overall adjustment to their new institutional setting (Lewis, 2013; Nora et al., 2006). Once participants transferred to SU, conceptions of their student identity constructed at their community college were no longer beneficial. In community college, participants focused their student identities on being savvy by leveraging their smart and strategic college choices. However, participants' sense of self as a student became muddled as they began their SU coursework and in their interactions with others. Specifically, participants described a sense of "loneliness" during their first year at SU, and felt a need to engage in their new college environment. As such, participants' student identities shifted from not only leveraging their smart and strategic college choices, but also to their holistic development as a person. Participants used their time as SU as a way to grow not only as a student but also as a person. Participants engaged in identity negotiations through discursive communicative strategies across the personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers of identity. Two subthemes emerged to document these efforts: (a) honoring their educational journey, and (b) growing as a person.

Honoring their Educational Journey

Participants described an inner conflict between holding onto their past student identity and how they should define themselves at their four-year institution. Baxter Magolda (2009) explores the use of meaning making pertaining to how a college student changes based on their experiences. Here, participants felt a need to discuss their previous student background as a way to validate their educational journey. Eli felt that community college "was a part of college. It's still a part of my current experience compared with my life." This validation of their previous student identity took place through the enacted and relational frames. First, participants noted that their community college experience was considered trivial based on the messages they received from classmates, professors, and advisors at SU, otherwise known as messages of CC de-emphasis. Here, what participants learned through their interactions with others at SU is that coming from a community college has little relevance. In Dragon's and Iris's experiences, when asked what their conversations with individuals were like about transferring from a community college they simply stated "nobody cared." Consequently, these messages of CC de-emphasis created non-threating opportunities for the renegotiating participants' student identities. This likens to how transfer-receptive cultures creates environments for CCT students to flourish (Laanan et al., 2010; Shaw & Chin-Newman, 2017). One component in facilitating a transfer-receptive culture involves placing higher importance on admitting transfer students. SU was considered a transfer-friendly institution because of its relatively high percentage of transfer students (44% of new student enrollments entering with transfer status). Due to the sheer number of transfer students on SU's campus, this "nobody cared" narrative surrounding participants

community college background encouraged the participants to focus on aspects of their student development rather than their status as a transfer student.

For that reason, participants felt a need to engage in performances that showed off their community college background. For instance, participants explained how they no longer felt shame or embarrassment coming from a community college. These findings are encouraging, considering how Seifert and colleagues (2010) highlight the importance of mean making in regards to college student development. They suggest that as a college student develops, they begin to rely on their own education and experiences to guide the development of their worldview (Seifert et al., 2010). In fact, participants frequently shared their community college background as a form of motivation and guidance for others. In this sense, participants used these conversations as a way to emphasize and validate their previous formed student identity.

Interestingly, participants used their CC experiences as a bragging right when they were associating with their friends and classmates. For example, Tyler explained that she likes to boast about her time at community college with her friends, "It's become a little bit of a bragging right. Yeah. I went to community college. Y'all are paying extra for whatever education you got here." This was a departure from their CC experiences in where they used professors and family members as a source of support. In the relational frame, participants described interactions with their friends as part of a comparative process through which their identities were formed. Several participants describe how their financially smart decision to attend community college became a "bragging right" among their peers. Walton and Cohen (2011) illustrated the how the use of story-sharing can aid in persistence especially when students face belonging uncertainty. As such,

participants utilized story-sharing as a way to emphasize their success in their educational journeys. While participants felt a need to acknowledge their previously formed student identities, they also used this inner conflict as a way to evolve their identities.

Growing as a Person

Participants described shifts in their student identities in relation to their maturity as a student, highlighting a personal-personal identity gap. Here, participants indicated how they valued interactions related to their academic experiences and future career goals. In community college, participants were highly focused on their GPA in order to be considered a "successful student." As they attended SU, this focus shifted from their GPA to overall academic and personal growth. This was contained in the personal frame characterized as grades to growth. Tyler highlighted this in the following excerpt:

> I learned a lot of new things and I learned a lot of new techniques that I can apply to how I live my life. So there's a lot of things that teach us that doesn't just apply to us as a student, but they really teach you life skills and you don't learn that a lot in community college or even in high school.

In the personal frame, participants experienced issues with academic adjustment, such as lower GPAs (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015), difficulty with higher level coursework (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012), and larger class sizes (Roberts & Styron Jr., 2010). While the participants noted their study skills developed in community college as somewhat helpful, their mindset changed from earning perfect grades to academic growth in understanding applications of material. For instance, Eli expressed how community college aided him in "being more grounded into this is how college is" giving him the ability to focus more on "learning the subject" at Southern University rather than having

to navigate basic study skill techniques. This finding is particularly significant in that participants reframed their previous constructed student identity as a way to promote self-development (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Additionally, participants stressed the importance of becoming a "well-rounded" student by putting themselves out there through enactments of making school work for them. In the enacted frame, participants were overwhelmed with the size of SU, including the campus and classrooms, often citing lack of approachability with their professors and classmates. This was vastly different, compared to their community college experiences, where they faced "comfortable" learning environments. Here, participants understood that part of their success as a student was based on their ability to utilize academic resources and engage with their professors (Wang & Wharton, 2010). For instance, Nicole began to engage with her professors as well as with her classmates. Nicole shares, "I probably started talking to people, started talking more to people and then I joined, I started joining different organizations. I had to force myself to talk to professors because I didn't want to retake the class again." Once participants began to feel comfortable in their environment (through knowledge of physical space and class structures), they began attending office hours, introducing themselves to their professors, and joining academically-based clubs. This leads further into how participants constructed their student identity based on their associations with others in the relational frame.

In the relational frame, participants understood the importance of networking for their future academic and career goals. Here, participants actively pursued applicable engagement opportunities in order to construct their identities through professional connections. This was demonstrated by participants joining academic clubs relating to

their major and networking connections with their professors. Iris illustrated the importance of their professors' perceptions because of professional connections in the industry: "I remember even if I saw my professors outside of class I would just say hi to them because they work in the industry I'm trying to work in. And networking is very important in computer science." Developing relationships and positive interactions with faculty has been explored by many researchers as positivity impacting students' collegial success (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Schreiner et al., 2011). Many participants noted the academic and professional benefit of establishing relationships for future opportunities and avenues of social support.

In the communal frame, participants renegotiated their student identity to reflect a sense of belonging to their college student identity. Here the participants established connection to this identity through (a) knowledge of physical space, and (b) participation in cultural practices. These findings are promising in that they support aspects of adjustment in the transfer literature. As highlighted by Astin (1985) and Johnson (2012), familiarity with class structures and overall sense of belonging is crucial for student academic persistence regarding involvement and adjustment. As previously mentioned, participants did not feel a source of connection, nor engaged in enactments of their new student identity until they felt a sense of "comfort" on SU's campus. Kodama (2002) found that students who are new to an institution can experience marginality due to feelings of isolation on campus. In this study, participants noted feelings of isolation due to their lack of knowledge of physical spaces in campus. Amanda stated, "I think the end of my first year after my first two semesters, I started to know where more buildings were and I started to know people and know professors at least a little bit." While participants

did participate in a campus orientation where they were introduced to buildings on campus, participants noted this as useless and instead spent large amounts of time on campus determining various needed locations. Once participants felt a sense of comfort on campus, they begin engaging academically and socially at SU (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Additionally, participants explained feeling like a "fake" student until they were able to engage in academically related activities with other SU students as well as feeling a sense of school pride (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). This suggests, alongside with Lester and colleagues (2013), that CCT students' sense of belonging was found to take place through academic channels. These academic activities, as discussed by participants, included working in major study groups and displaying artwork on campus. Nicole discusses being a part of an engineering group that serves as a source of connection. She notes, "my NSBE group has study halls every week. That was an environment that gave me an opportunity to reach out to upperclassmen and ask them for help." This is also consistent with Deil-Amen's (2011) conceptualization of socio-academic integrative moments, where participants in the study utilized academic channels as their social experiences. Moreover, participants felt a sense of student pride on campus because they were bombarded with SU paraphernalia and had the ability to brand themselves with SU artifacts. Numerous studies have reported relationships between perceptions of belonging and degree persistence (Barnett, 2010; Townley et al., 2013; Wang, 2009). In this present study, participants not only crated a sense of belonging through meaningful academic connections, but also through physical artifacts. For example, Blaine uses SU artifacts to talk about his connection to SU. He shares, "I always represent my school no matter

what. I either have it on my car around me with my lanyard or I wear just a regular shirt."

Conclusions and Implications

As the number of CCT students continues to rise, it is vital to fill this gap in the literature regarding the communication of CCT students' identity post-transfer. As discussed in chapter one, CCT students' identity development in community college and the communicative renegotiation of their student identity post-transfer is a critical component of their experiences. While there are specific theories in college student development literature on transitions and post-transfer experiences, there are no known higher education identity development frameworks examining CCT students' identity in community college and the interpretation of their student identity at their receiving four-year institution (Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2016). This research contributes to the expanding body of knowledge of transfer literature and student identity development. Too often, the literature focuses on the four-year college student, negating transfer students' experiences after initial transfer. This study provides a broader understanding of who CCT students are and where they are placing their focus regarding their four-year experiences. The conclusions drawn from the study and their implications for practice are discussed in the following section.

Contributions to Transfer Literature

Specific Acclimation moments

The findings of the study illustrated specific turning points where participants began to feel connected and a sense of comfort at their four-year receiving institution. Participants identified these positive turning points taking place one year after their transition to SU, which aided in the renegotiation of their student identities. Many

participants described a sense of comfort and belonging as a "real" SU student when they began to understand SU's physical campus and systems, as well as when they engaged in academic clubs and with their professors. These findings are promising in that they complement many transition studies regarding integration and acclimation. However, this study contributes to the transfer literature through the participants' articulation of specific acclimation moments in time.

First, feelings of isolation and disconnectedness are not uncommon for transfer students (Zubernis et al., 2011). For CCT students, they are accustomed to different institutional cultures with smaller personalized learning environments. Yet, when they transfer to a four-year institution they are expected to assimilate to their new collegiate environment quickly as juniors, whereas freshmen are given more leeway to assimilate (Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010). Participants described feelings of loneliness and being overwhelmed on SU's campus. It was not until participants began to actively "figure out" their way around campus and engaging in relationships with others through academic channels before they were able to feel like SU students. Moreover, participants explained that their full acclimation at SU did not take place until one-year after their transfer. Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement points to the importance of social interactions as a form of persistence for college students. Moreover, Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure suggests that students are more likely to commit to an institution and persist if they are academically (attached to the intellectual life of the institution) and socially (creating relationships outside of the classroom) integrated within the institution. The findings in this study somewhat conflict with Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (1993) models regarding social attachment. In this study, participants' social integration did not

take place until they gained a deeper understanding of physical structures and campus systems. Yet, many participants cited a sense of belonging to SU through "socio-academic integrative moments" (Deli-Amen, 2011, p. 72), where this connection was crafted through participants' engagement with their professors and involvement through in academic clubs specific to their major.

Subsequently, support and guidance from academic departments, especially with professors, plays an important role for transfer students (Ellis, 2013), since transfer students often report lower levels of satisfaction with their four-year receiving institution's climate along with their peers and faculty relationships (Lester, 2006). As discussed in the findings, participants indicated that they were culturally shocked with larger class sizes and lack of approachability of professors in those classes, consistent with transfer literature (Roberts & Styron Jr., 2010). During participants' first year at SU, they often felt alone in their academic pursuits as they were trying to balance their previously constructed student identity of making good grades, while trying to blend in as a "real" SU student. This transition from being more than the sum of their grades did not take place until one year later, once they became comfortable in their new collegiate environment. Afterwards, participants cited the importance of crafting connections with their professors as a source of academic support and professional guidance (Lester et al., 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Socio-academic Integration as a Renegotiation of Student Identity

The findings in this study support the argument by Deil-Amen (2011) that CCT students' interactions on campus are rooted in socio-academic integrative experiences. Here, participants discussed a renegotiation of their student identity to specifically reflect

their expressions and relationships, through academic sources of connection. While at community college, participants described an educational pursuit characterized by personal motivations and actions. For example, many participants noted the lack of communicating their student identity with others due in part to the negative stigma associated with community college students, as well as purposefully disconnecting from the community college. Here, participants used student centrality (Bowman, 2014) as a way to focus on their overall academic goals. Once participants acclimated to SU, their social networks changed to include relationships with faculty and on-campus peers through academic channels, such as clubs in their academic major.

Moreover, several participants formed their student identities based on how they were perceived by the campus professionals they came into contact with. In this sense, participants focused the construction of their student identities based on the professional connections they crafted with professors and academic advisors. Numerous participants expressed to the researcher that they engaged in purposeful networking and rapport building they engaged as it related to information-gathering for academic classes, future recommendations, and career paths. All but one participant expressed how their relational identities played a role in their campus integration. Appleseed did not make these connections and expressed a desire of transferring into another four-year institution. Perhaps the participants purposeful socio-academic integrative experiences, as suggested by Lasota and Zumeta (2016), were a driving factor in their institutional commitment and academic persistence at their four-year institution.

Theoretical Implications

Identity Gaps can be Advantageous

Scholars who interpret the lived experiences of individuals should utilize theories that contribute to the ways individuals create meaning in their lives (Baxter Magolda, 2009). As such, attention should be directed towards the study's ability to provide insight into theory and generate new ideas and research questions. Framed by Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity (CTI), this study offers a nuanced understanding of particular communicative identity experiences of CCT students. Specifically, the study's findings illustrate how identity gaps can serve as a positive contribution to an individual's student identity efforts. For example, identity gaps are often connected with negative outcomes such as depression and lower levels of communication satisfaction (Hecht et al., 2004; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008). However, Jung and Hecht (2008) suggested that identity gaps can also be beneficial to individual's identity efforts.

The results of this study support the notion that the presence of an identity gap can allow an individual to manage their identity in productive ways. For example, participants' accounts highlighted how they experienced a communal-personal identity gap in which cultural stereotypes of community college students misaligned with their student self-perceptions. As participants were battling feelings of self-doubt in their abilities as a student, they were also having to create scripted transfer responses as a way to fight the communal stigma of being a community college student. Yet, participants felt as though they were savvy students and used their academic performance and relationships with others to affirm and support that positive student identity. Therefore, the communal-personal identity gap appears to help CCT students facilitate a positive student identity. This finding adds to the small but growing body of literature that indicates the value of less studied identity gaps, like the communal-personal identity gap.

Moreover, Maeda and Hecht (2012) discovered how identity gaps can foster positive change in the experiences of always-single Japanese women by re-framing their identity. This was also evident in Colaner and colleagues (2014) study in where the relational-relational identity gap of adoptees elicited positive changes aiding in the construction of rewarding identities (Colaner et al., 2014). The results of the present study also contribute to how within frame identity gaps can promote positive identity reframing. In this case, participants noted how their self-reflections as a student changed based once they transferred to SU (signaling a personal-personal identity gap). Participants carefully crafted a positive student identity, defining themselves as a savvy student while in community college. However, this savvy student identity was considered trivial at their four-year institution. Instead, participants re-framed their identity to reflect aspects of personal growth as a student instead of defining themselves through the sum of their grades, reflecting a growth mindset. Additionally, these findings generate important questions about how CCT students utilize student centrality and social support as a way to develop a positive student identity.

Student Centrality and Social Support in Community College

Bowman and Felix's (2017) study suggested that student identity centrality can serve a key role in student success providing a buffer between students' negative experiences and their goal commitment. As explained by Bowman and Felix (2017), students with higher student identities are more likely to engage in behaviors associated with being a student, such as participating in class, interacting with faculty, completing homework, and spending a significant amount of time studying. Therefore, students with higher student centrality are more likely to have higher rates of persistence in college.

The present phenomenological study contributes to previous research on student identity centrality (Bowman & Felix, 2017) by offering an understanding of how community college students' identities interacted with their decisions to persist to four-year institutions. Participants in the study carefully crafted and continually engaged in enactments and relational associations to support a positive student identity. For example, participants often described themselves as savvy students, often reflecting on their ability to make smart and strategic choices by understanding what was best for them personally, academically, and economically. Participants enacted student savvy inward reflections through successfully engaging in behaviors associated with being a student, such as being studious, earning above-average grades, and developing their confidence in skills, equating to a learning/growth mindset. Previous research has shown that social involvement contributes to student success and persistence (Astin, 1984; Tinto,1993) Yet, in this study, participants consciously avoided social involvement and connection in community college. Instead, participants' focus on their student identity, or higher student identity centrality, served as a buffer to the negative stigma associated with community college students, promoting their goal commitment to transfer to a four-year institution.

Furthermore, participants made sure to engage in associations where their student identities were supported, including family members, like-minded classmates, and community college professors. Existing research in CTI suggests that social support from family members and friends via the relational frame can act as a moderator between identity gaps within the personal frame (Maeda & Hecht, 2012; Wadsworth et al., 2008). For example, participants noted battling feelings of self-doubt, actively disconnecting

from the community college through nonparticipation with incompatible classmates and student clubs, they often highlighted their future educational goals with scripted transfer responses. Instead, participants were strategic in who they spoke with and garnered support from as a way to support positive student identities. This finding that CCT students strategically use relational identities in order to be accepted and supported is important for two reasons. First, the findings suggest that social support does not just impact identity development, it is a part of it. Social support can be influential in shaping CCT students' identity in the personal frame. This finding is particularly important for family members, friends, and community college professors who might not realize how their support, or even lack thereof, can make a keen difference in how CCT students' construct their student identities.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The way which 15 CCT students understand their student identities, at both their two-year institutions and their four-year institutions, provides a number of avenues for further research. The findings and conclusions of the present study should be considered alongside its limitations. First, a potential limitation of the study involves its focus solely on retrospective, self-report data. The researcher chose to use retrospective participant accounts in order to observe the ways in which CCT students understood the way their experiences informed their student identities. The researcher's intent behind this decision was to allow for the exploration of how participants' identities were negotiated after they had transitioned to their four-year institution. While useful in the current study, this type of data collection limits the scope to which student identity is developed. For that reason, it is possible that participants' recollections of their CC interactions may have reflected

exaggerated accounts. Future research could explore the ways in which community college students develop their student identities and how this supports or hinders persistence. Furthermore, future research could also investigate through longitudinal methods how community college students develop their student identities while attending their two-year institution and if conceptions of their identities change as a result of transferring to a four-year institution.

Second, the results of the study, indicated different identity gaps present while participants attended their two-year and four-year institutions. Future research might explore the presence and role of such identity gaps at both types of institutions. While the findings of the study suggest that identity gaps play an advantageous role in CCT students' identity management, are there identity gaps that might be detrimental to their persistence in their two-year and four-year institutions. For instance, Orbe (2004) found that identity gaps can be problematic for first-generation college students, especially when relational partners play a significant role in co-constructing their identity. The findings of this study suggests a call for more research to move beyond the often studied personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps (Hecht & Choi, 2012) and examine less studied identity gaps such as communal-personal and within frame, like personal-personal, identity gaps (Kam & Hecht, 2009). Much of the CCT literature reflects indicators of success for transition (D'Amico et al., 2014; Packard et al., 2013), yet the focus of identity development is virtually non-existent. Further research might more comprehensively, through both qualitative and quantitative designs, examine CCT students' development of their student identities, what identity gaps that may appear, and

outcomes associated with adjustment, retention, and persistence (Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016; Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2016).

Finally, the results of this study highlighted the experiences and identity negotiations of students who transferred from different two-year institutions into one four-year institution, Southern University. While SU serves a large, diverse student population, this institution is also considered the top-transfer serving institution in North Carolina. As a result, future research might examine student identity development through other types of four-year institutions. Specifically, further research is needed to explore if CCT students have the same student identity negotiations at institutions who are less transfer-friendly, such as elite four-year institutions (Dowd et al., 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Additionally, not all transfer students begin their educational journeys at community colleges. Today, the transfer of students between institutions varies including different types of transfer populations, like lateral, reverse, and double-dipping (Shapiro et al., 2018). An extension of student identity research might involve different types of transfer students, such as those who transfer between different four-year institutions (lateral transfer). This might also shed light on how the experiences of different institutions and types of transfer students understand their student identities.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The focus of this study was to explore how CCT students' lived experiences inform their identities as students. Tinto (2006) suggests that actions to improve first-year experiences of students created positive and lasting impacts on student success. The findings from the present study yielded two important recommendations for institutional

policy and practice regarding first-year transitions at four-year institutions: (a) creating

customized support for CCT students, and (b) facilitating earlier connections.

Creating Customized Support for CCT students

Four-year institutions are welcoming more transfer and non-traditional students,

yet many still lack effective programing to help this population of students succeed

(Zubernis et al., 2011). To this end, four-year institutions should assess their overall

approach towards transfer students, implementing change that would improve their

transfer experiences. The findings of the study indicated that participants found SU's

transfer orientation to be "useless" in helping them to navigate physical spaces and

university systems. Participants also highlighted an unawareness to support resources at

SU, which suggests a need for more guidance during their first year of transition. This is

important to note, as it took participants one year to feel as though they could navigate

campus systems and structures. Once participants were able to comfortably navigate their

environment, this signified a turning point in their identity management and sense of

belonging on campus.

In regards to institutions, one approach in employing a successful college

foundation for beginning first-year students is a freshman seminar course. The goal of a

freshman seminar course is to develop college-level academic skills, orientations to

campus locations and system structures, as well as how to mitigate challenges in

acclimating to their new collegial environment (Mamrick, 2005). As demonstrated in the

study's findings, CCT students would benefit from a transfer seminar program to aid in

their transition processes. This has been suggested in the transfer literature for institutions

to utilize transfer transitional programs (Grites & Farina, 2012). For instance, Adams and

Curtis's (2014) study on transfer seminars, found that 84% of their participants reported increased levels of communication confidence, ease in building relationships with faculty, and obtaining relevant academic information. Perhaps the inclusion of a transfer student seminar in academic curriculums could aid in facilitating CCT students' engagement to take place earlier than in one year. This could provide an early vehicle of connection and identity formation through the delivery of campus resources, centers, and navigation of campus systems. Transfer student seminars could provide an opportunity for CCT students to explore their previously conceived notions of their student identities, and reflect on how that "fits" or "changes" in their new collegiate environment.

Other possible implications for CCT students' identity experiences at four-year institutions are the potential development of mentorship programs designed for CCT students. The literature frequently mentions how orientations are geared towards beginning first-year student experiences (Flaga, 2006; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Townsend, 2008). Many participants noted how the information presented to them at SU's transfer orientation did not represent what they needed as a transfer student. Given that CCT students' identification with the institution occurred once they made meaningful connections, mentorship programs could help foster these connections earlier. Perhaps a CCT student to CCT student mentorship program would foster these early connections helping new CCT student learn about activities and on-campus resources.

Regarding policy, state and federal agencies evaluate institutions based on graduation rates and degree completion (Bailey et al., 2017). The findings of the present study suggest that CCT students develop their identities at their four-year institutions through academic interactions, clubs, and knowledge of the institution's cultural practices

and space. However, major world events, such as COVID-19, have resulted in the sudden

shift to distance learning removing students from the physical classroom and campus.

Community colleges offer distance learning at a higher percentage than four-year

institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2015). To that end, community college students are more

likely to have experiences in online courses. Yet, participants noted the importance of

making physical connections through opportunities of exploration, support, interactions

with others as a source of their identity formations. To this end, one recommendation for

state and even federal systems is for continued and increased institutional funding for the

creation of additional support resources and services. Institutions may need to find new

ways to create connection opportunities for CCT students beyond the online classroom as

a way to facilitate their academic success.

Facilitating Earlier Connections

Several studies and theories have articulated the relationship between student

engagement and an increased likelihood of retention, persistence, and academic success

(Kuh et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). As suggested by Tinto

(1993), the first year of college is the foundational source for future student success. As

revealed by the study's findings, faculty play an important role in facilitating adjustment

and engagement experiences at the four-year institution for CCT students. Most

participants felt the environment at their four-year institution was not conducive in

fostering relationships with their professors, as to what they had become accustomed to at

their community colleges. For instance, many participants cited a lack of approachability

of professors due to the larger classroom sizes, leading to a fear of attending their

professors' office hours. As a result, faculty need to be aware of the academic and social

adjustments CCT students face when acclimating to their new collegiate environment. Educating faculty can help them revise their approach towards classroom interactions. One suggestion for faculty is to make a point of simply talking to each student throughout the semester in order to garner a sense of approachability, instead of expecting students to come to office hours as a source of interaction. For participants, once they were able to interact with their professors, they began to build a rapport and were no longer apprehensive in attending office hours.

CCT students tend to engage through academically based activities (Lester et al., 2013), while understanding the importance of networking as a way to hone in on their future career goals. Participants discussed how they built professional relationships with faculty and students through academic clubs. Perhaps professors could also create collaborative working environments within their larger classrooms that facilitates higher rates of interaction and encourages group work among classmates. This could aid CCT students in forming early academic connections in order to acclimate quicker to their four-year environment, as well as work through their student identity management. In addition to encouraging student engagement via the classroom, CCT students could also create opportunities for connection and engagement during their first semester at their four-year receiving institution. As noted by the participants, there was a need for more guidance on campus systems and structures during their first year of transition, and they just had to figure things out for themselves. As such, CCT students could create opportunities for campus exploration during their first semester by spending time on campus. Several of the participants noted that they would only stay on campus to attend

class and leave immediately after. Perhaps CCT students could use their first semester to spend time on campus learning how to navigate campus systems and structures.

Conclusion

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored how the lived experiences of CCT students informed their student identity development one-year after transitioning to a large, public four-year institution. To achieve this goal, the researcher first examined the communicative identity experiences materialized in discourse through self-reflection, performances, relational partners, and community members of CCT students at their two-year institutions. Consistent with the principles of CTI, the data indicated eight distinct manifestations of identity emerging from those discourses. Next, the researcher focused on the ways in which CCT students negotiated their student identities as a result of attending their receiving four-year institution for at least one-year. These findings revealed eight additional themes contained with the four frames of CTI surrounding the renegotiations of the participants' student identities.

Taken together, the researcher determined specific meaning making processes generated to inform the ways in which participants crafted and negotiated their student identities. First, while in community college, participants carefully crafted a positive student identity by (a) engaging in identity validating behaviors, and (b) resisting community college identities. In community college, participants crafted a pragmatic learning mindset in where they are focused on being savvy by leveraging their smart and strategic college choices. Once participants transferred to their four-year receiving institution, they engaged in identity negotiations through discursive communicative strategies by (a) honoring their education journey, and reframing their student identity to

reflect (b) growing as a person. On SU's campus, participants' student identities shifted from a pragmatic learning mindset, to a growth mindset in where they focused on their holistic development as a person. From the findings, the researcher concluded that (1) student centrality at community college is a form of goal commitment for CCT students, (2) CCT students' identity gaps can be advantageous, (3) specific turning points in CCT student identity management, and (4) socio-academic integration aids in the renegotiation of CCT students' identities.

The number of CCT students in the United States continues to grow. For this reason, it is imperative to engage in ongoing research that addresses student identity and its impact on adjustment and engagement. It is the researcher's hope that the findings of this study offer valuable contributions in fostering greater understanding surrounding the unique experiences of CCT students, and in turn, develop programming and resources to facilitate smoother transitions, stronger institutional commitments, and increases in overall persistence.

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APPENDIX A. PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Welcome message:
You are invited to participate in a research study to understand how community college transfer students negotiate their student identities at their four-year institution.

We are asking SU students 18 years and older, who have transferred from a U.S. community college and have been enrolled at SU for at least two semesters to complete two personal one-on-one interviews with the principal investigator discussing your experiences as a community college transfer student.

First, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire confirming your participation eligibility, some demographic information, along with the informed consent process.

If you meet the eligibility requirements of the study, you will be contacted to partake in the second and third phases of the researcher study.

The next steps in the study will consist of two interviews. You will have the choice to conduct the interviews face-to-face or virtually through a Webex video meeting. The first interview will last approximately 60 minutes, focusing on your transfer experiences at SU. The second interview will take place two-three weeks after the first interview, lasting for about 60 minutes. During this second interview, we will discuss the various aspects of your acclimation experiences at SU.

If you choose to participate it will require an estimated total time commitment of 2.5 to 3 hours to complete all three phases of the study. To express my gratitude for your time and completion of all three phases of the data collection process (online questionnaire, first interview, second interview), you will receive a $20.00 Amazon gift card.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

For questions about this research, you may contact Brandy Stamper, email address here, phone number here or Dr. Ryan Miller, email address here, phone number here.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Compliance at phone number here or email address here.

Participant Eligibility
Instructions: Please select one answer for each of the following questions.
1. Are you at least 18 years old?
   ____ Yes
   ____ No
2. Did you begin your post-secondary education at a community college and then transferred to SU?

____ Yes
____ No

3. Have you been enrolled at SU for at least two semesters, not including the Spring 2020 semester?
____ Yes
____ No

If the participant answers yes to all of the questions above, they will have met the criteria for the study and will be directed to complete the next set of questions.

Non-eligible Participant response

Thank you for willingness to participate in our research study about community college transfer students' post-transfer experiences at SU. Unfortunately, you did not meet the study's eligibility criteria and cannot participate in this project.

For questions about this research, you may contact Brandy Stamper, email address here, phone number here or Dr. Ryan Miller, email address here, phone number here.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Compliance at phone number here or email address here.

Background Information

The next three questions deal with your demographic information.

1. To which gender identity do you most identify?
___ Woman
___ Man
___ Gender Non-Binary/Genderqueer
___ Not listed, please specify _____
___ Prefer not to answer

2. What is your racial or ethnic identification?
___ American Indian or Alaskan Native
___ Asian or Pacific Islander
___ Black or African American
___ Hispanic or Latino
___ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
___ White or Caucasian
___ Multi-racial
___ Other, please specify _____

3. What is your age? ____ years (fill in the blank)

The next set of questions pertains to your community college background and your

student status at SU.

4. What community college did you attend? _____ (fill in the blank)

5. If you completed a degree/certificate/diploma before transfer to SU, what was it? (select all that apply)
___ AA (Associate in Arts)
___ AS (Associate in Science)
___ AAS (Associate in Applied Science)
___ AFA (Associate in Fine Arts
___ Certificate/Diploma
___ I did not complete a degree, certificate/diploma before transfer

6. How much time elapsed between your attendance at your community college and enrollment at SU?
___ Less than one year
___One to two years
___Three to five years
___Six to ten years
___More than ten years

7. What is your current class standing at SU?
___ Freshman
___ Sophomore
___ Junior
___ Senior

8. What is your current major at SU? _____ (fill in the blank)

Please complete the final set of questions about your contact information to begin the next phase of participation in this study.

9. Please provide your name and the best email address for me to use to contact you about participating in this study. _____

10. Please indicate if you would prefer for the interviews to take place face-to-face or via Webex video conferencing.
___ Face-to-Face Interview
___Virtual Webex Video Interview

11. What is your availability for an initial one-hour interview? Please list specific dates and times. *(Example: MW 9-10am)* _____

Survey Submission Response
Thank you for willingness to participate in our research study about community college transfer students' post-transfer experiences at SU.

If you are selected for an interview, you will be contacted by Brandy Stamper (principal investigator) via the email you provided in the survey within the next 7-10 business days.

For questions about this research, you may contact Brandy Stamper, email address here, phone number here or Dr. Ryan Miller, email address here, phone number here.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Compliance at phone number here or email address here.

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to be Part of a Research Study

Title of the Project: Renegotiating Identity: Understanding the Communicative
Negotiation of Community College Transfer Student Identities

Principal Investigator (PI): Brandy Stamper, M.A., Doctoral Candidate, Department of
Education Leadership

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ryan Miller, Assistant Professor & Higher Education Program
Director, Department of Educational Leadership

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation is voluntary. The
information provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have
any questions, please ask.

<u>Important Information You Need to Know</u>

- The purpose of this study is to understand how community college transfer students
negotiate their student identities at their four-year institution.

- We are asking SU 18 years and older, who have transferred from a U.S. community
college and have been enrolled at SU for at least two semesters to participate.

- First, you will complete an online eligibility questionnaire that includes
demographic information. If you are eligible, you will then complete two 60-minute
interviews either in person or virtually by video call. The interviews will occur two
to three weeks apart and will be audio recorded or video-recorded (video calls).
You will be asked to share your experiences as a community college transfer student
(1st interview) and to share the various aspects of your acclimation experiences at
SU (2nd interview).

- If you choose to participate it will require an estimated total time commitment of 2.5
to 3 hours.

- There are little anticipated risks associated by participating in this study. The
interview questions are personal and you might experience some mild emotional
discomfort. For example, we will ask you about specific experiences that defined
how you felt about being a community college student. You may choose to skip
questions, avoid topics, or discontinue participation at any time.

- You will not personally benefit from taking part in this research but our study results
may help us better understand how community college transfer students negotiate
their identity as a student at their receiving institution.

Please read this form and ask questions you may have before you decide to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the transfer and acclimation experiences of community college students one year after transferring to a large, public four-year institution. Specifically, this research study seeks to understand how community college transfer students negotiate their student identities once at their receiving institution.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study.
You are being asked to be in this study because you are an undergraduate student at SU and have transferred from a U.S. community college.

What will happen if I take part in this study?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete a short pre-interview questionnaire answering questions about your community college background, your current major at SU, and demographic information. You will also participate in two personal one-on-one interviews with the PI through virtual video conferencing. The virtual interviews will occur using the PI's WebEx video conferencing room. You will be provided with the URL link to access the private virtual video conferencing room The first interview will focus on your experiences at your community college. The second interview will take place two to three weeks later and will focus on the various aspects of your acclimation experiences at SU. Each interview will be video recorded and last 60 minutes. You must agree to be video recorded to participate in the study.

What benefits might I experience?
You will not directly benefit from being in this study. However, the knowledge gained from this study may contribute to our understanding of how community college transfer students negotiate their student identities at their receiving institution. Findings from this study will contribute to understanding the communicative behaviors and messages community college transfer students receive from their four-year institution, providing possible suggestions for student success.

What risks might I experience?
There are little anticipated risks associated by participating in this study. The interview questions are personal and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort. For example, we will ask you about specific experiences that defined how you felt about being a community college student. You may choose to skip questions, avoid topics, or discontinue participation at any time. There is an unlikely risk of breach of confidentially. The steps explained below will mitigate this risk.

How will my information be protected?
All of your responses will be kept confidential. You will choose a pseudonym, thus

separating your unique name and identity from your responses. In addition, during transcription, any other identifiers (names of people and places) will be replaced with pseudonyms as well. The virtual interviews will be video recorded. Once the virtual interview is complete, the audio will be extracted from the recording in order to perform transcriptions and the video recording will be destroyed. Once audio transcriptions are complete, the audio file will be destroyed. All digital copies of your contact information, interview documents, including audio files and transcriptions, will be stored in a password-protected cloud-based network with access restricted to the research team. Other people with approval from the Investigator, may need to see the information we collect about you. Including people who work for SU and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study is over?
After this study is complete, study data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies without asking for your consent again or as may be needed as part of publishing our results. The data we share will NOT include information that could identify you.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?
You will receive one $20 Amazon gift card after you complete the 1) online questionnaire, 2) first interview, and 3) second interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the study before completing all three phases of the study you will NOT be eligible to receive the $20 Amazon gift card.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?
For questions about this research, you may contact Brandy Stamper, email address here, phone number here or Dr. Ryan Miller, email address here, phone number here.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Compliance at phone number here or email address here.

Consent to Participate
If you agree to participate in this study, please state the following: I (state your name) understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

APPENDIX C. INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PROJECT INTRODUCTION: Thank you for your interest in this study. This study is being conducted to gain a better understanding of how community college transfer students negotiate their student identities one year after transferring to a large, public four-year institution. The findings will assist institutions in understanding how to engage and serve community college transfer students. Please review the Informed Consent document and let me know if you have any questions!

I'd like to ask you some general questions about your educational experiences from your community college and how you and others might understand your status as a community college student. Additionally, you will need to think of a pseudonym that I can use so that your real name is not being used. What name would you like to use instead of your real name?

Please fill in here: _____

Do you have any questions before we begin?

OPENING THE INTERVIEW - To begin, the first set of questions are about how you came to the decision to enroll in (insert name of community college).

1. **Decision Making experiences:**
   a. How did you decide to enroll at (insert name of community college)? *Follow up prompt*
i. How long did you think about enrolling in (insert name of community college) before you actually enrolled?
   b. Tell me about your decision-making process that brought you to enroll in (insert name of community college) at the time that you did. *Potential follow-up prompts:*
. Did you talk with other people about this decision? If so, who?
i. Was there a significant event that made you want to enroll when you did? If so, what was it?
   c. Tell me about your feelings at the time you enrolled, when being a college student became "real" to you.

2. **Community College Experiences**
   a. Tell me a little about your experience as a student at (insert name of community college)?
   b. What did you think about (insert name of community college)? *Follow up prompt*
      i. Did you enjoy attending community college? Why or why not?
      ii. Can you tell specific experiences that defined how you felt about (insert name of community college)?

IDENTITY QUESTIONS - Now we are going to focus on your experiences in (insert name of community college). I want you to think about (insert name of community college), the teachers, and the other students.

3. **Personal Frame**:
a. How would you have described yourself as a student at (insert name of community college) to others? *Follow up prompt*
i. How, if at all, has your experiences at (insert name of community college) affected your perception of yourself as a student?
      b. What did it mean to you to be a "good student" or an "average student" or a "bad student" at (insert name of community college)?
      c. What did it mean for you to be a community college student at (insert name of community college)?

4. **Enacted Frame**:
a. Can you describe specific experiences that defined how you felt about being a community college student?
b. How would you describe being a student at (insert name of community college) to other people? *Follow up prompt*
i. Was being a student at (insert name of community college) something you talked about with other people? How would you describe those conversations? *Follow up prompt:*
a. How, if at all, did you talk about your status as a student at (insert community college) to your friends?
b. Family members?
c. Community Members?
d. Coworkers?
e. Professors?
f. Other classmates?

5. **Relational Frame**: Now, I would like to focus on your social interactions with others at (insert name of community college).
a. How would you describe your relationship with your professors at (insert name of community college)?
i. With your classmates?
ii. With the staff at (insert community college name)?
iii. With advisors at (insert community college name)?
iv. Your relationship with other family/friends as a result of attending (insert name of community college)?
b. Tell me how you think teachers (or other school officials) viewed students?
. In what ways were you made aware of these categories?
i. What meaning did you attach to these categories?
c. Tell me how you think your classmates categorized students?
. In what ways were you made aware of these categories?
i. What meaning did you attach to these categories?
d. What were your interactions like with your classmates during group projects or assignments?

6. **Communal Frame**

a.   Tell me what it was like being a student at (insert name of community college).
Follow up prompt:

i. Focusing on teaching and learning, how would you describe your schooling experiences at (insert name of community college)?

b.   What do you think the term "community college student" means to others (like professors, classmates, staff, friends, family)?

c.   Were there other groups or organizations that had an important influence in your experiences here at (insert name of community college)? *Follow up prompts*

.Can you tell me a bit about the groups with which you most closely identify or feel a sense of belonging to?

a.   What exactly do you or the group members do or say to create that sense of belonging or connection?

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW - We've really covered a lot today! I have just a few more questions and we'll be done.

1. What specific words come to mind when you think about your experiences at (insert name of community college)?
2. Do you have any questions for me?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about what we just discussed?

APPENDIX D. SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PROJECT INTRODUCTION: Hello! Thank you for agreeing to chat with me again regarding your transfer experiences here at SU. The goal of this chat is two-fold: First, I have been conducting my initial analysis of the themes that have emerged from the interviews and want to review these findings with you to see if they resonate for you. Second, I have just a few remaining, clarifying questions I would love to run by you to see if you can provide some insight. Does that sound okay? If so, let's get started with a look at some of the initial results:

Here is where I will talk about some of the themes that have emerged:

Do you have any questions before we begin?

OPENING THE INTERVIEW - To begin, the first set of questions are about how you came to the decision to enroll in SU and your expectations about your experiences at SU.
1. **Transfer Experiences**
a.   Tell me about your decision-making process that led you to transfer to SU?
Potential follow-up prompts:
 i. Did you talk with other people about this decision? If so, who?
ii. Was there a significant event that made you want to enroll when you did? If so, what was it?
b.   Tell me a little bit about your degree program and where you are in your major at SU?
c.   What were you expecting your experiences as a student at SU to be like before you transferred?
 i. How, if at all, did your expectations differ from your experiences?
ii. Can you describe specific experiences that illustrate these differences in expectations and what you experienced?

IDENTITY QUESTIONS - Now, I would like to go into more detail on your specific experiences at SU. I want you to think about SU, the professors, staff, and the other students.

2.   **Personal Frame**:
a.   How would you describe yourself as a student here at SU to others? *Follow up prompt:*
 i. How, if at all, has your experiences at SU affected your perception of yourself as a student?
b.   What does it mean to you to be a "good student" or a "average student" or a "poor student" at SU? *Follow up prompts*
c.   How, if at all, have your descriptions of what it means to be a "good, average, or bad student" changed from (name of insert community college)?
d.   What does it mean for you to be a transfer student here at SU?

3. **Enacted Frame**
a. How, if at all, conscious are you about being a student who started off at a community college?
i.Can you describe specific experiences that defined how you feel about being a community college student who transferred to SU?
b. How would you describe being a transfer student at SU to other people? *Follow up prompt*
. Is being a student at SU something you talk about with other people? How would you describe those conversations? *Follow up prompt:*
1. Do you talk about being a student at SU outside of the classroom? How would you describe those conversations?

4. **Relational Frame**: Now, I would like to focus on your social interactions with others at SU.
a. How would you describe your relationship with your professors at SU?
i.With your classmates?
ii.With the staff?
iii.With advisors?
i.Your relationship with other family/friends as a result of attending SU?
b. Tell me how you think teachers (or other school officials) categorized students?
. In what ways were you made aware of these categories?
i. What meaning did you attach to these categories?
c. Tell me how you think your classmates categorized students?
.In what ways were you made aware of these categories?
i.What meaning did you attach to these categories?
d. What ideas do you believe others hold about you in terms of you being a student who came from a community college when you are working in a group with your classmates?

5. **Communal Frame**
a. Tell me what it is like being a transfer student here at SU. *Potential follow-up prompts:*
i.Do you feel like you are having a different experience than students who began here as Freshman? In what ways?
ii.Do you think being a transfer student provides any advantages that students who started as freshman at SU do not have?
iii.Do you think being a transfer student provides any disadvantages to you in any way?
b. What do you think the term "transfer student" means to others (like professors, classmates, staff) here at SU?
c. Are there other groups or organizations that have an important influence in your experiences here at SU? *Follow up prompts*
.Can you tell me a bit about the groups with which you most closely identify or feel a sense of belonging to?

1. What exactly do you or the group members do or say to create that sense of belonging or connection?

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW - We've really covered a lot today! I have just a few more questions and we'll be done.

1. What specific words come to mind when you think about your experiences here at SU?
2. Do you have any questions for me?
3. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences here at SU?