

November 2021

Narratives of Success: How Honors College Newcomers Frame the Entrance to College

Cayla Lanier
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Lanier, Cayla, "Narratives of Success: How Honors College Newcomers Frame the Entrance to College" (2021). *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/9163>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

Narratives of Success: How Honors College Newcomers Frame the Entrance to College

by

Cayla Lanier

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Jane Jorgenson, Ph.D.
Keith Berry, Ph.D.
Aubrey Huber, Ph.D.
Michelle Hughes Miller, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
November 1, 2021

Keywords: organizational communication, socialization, honors college, sensemaking

Copyright © 2021, Cayla Lanier

Dedication

I dedicate this work to all of the past, present, and future students, staff, and faculty of the Judy Genshaft Honors College. May you be inspired to always ask questions and continue searching for answers.

Acknowledgements

This work would not be possible without the community that has supported me throughout this process.

Thank you, Dr. Stuart Silverman, for saying yes to an earnest young woman who was bold enough to ask that her conditional admission to the Honors College be made permanent, and for saying yes again when that same woman later asked for a job. Your belief in me then, and throughout my career, has fueled my passion for caring, learning, teaching, and mentoring within this college. It has been a true pleasure to continue building on your firm foundation.

Thank you, Dr. Jane Jorgenson, for guiding and advising me throughout my program and this project. At every turn, you have shared pearls of wisdom that helped me to know which decisions to make and which avenues to explore. I so appreciate your encouragement and kind suggestions, not to mention your attention to detail. You helped me to focus on process, both as an approach to research and as a personal journey, which has been challenging, but intensely rewarding.

Thank you to my amazingly supportive committee, Dr. Keith Berry, Dr. Aubrey Huber, and Dr. Michelle Hughes Miller, for providing a sounding board for my ideas, hard questions that challenged my assumptions, and encouragement to keep going when I felt weary. I truly do have the best dissertation committee.

Thank you to my Honors College family, Dr. Charles Adams, Dr. Catherine Wilkins, Dr. Lindy Davidson, Dr. Reggie Lucien, Dr. Amanda Cutchens, Arnie Mejias, Meg Stowe, Dani Soluna, Megan Braunstein, and every instructor, advisor, and student I have ever talked with. You inspire me daily, your drive fuels my own, your passion for the work we do together

matches mine, and your presence feels like coming home. This is true now more than ever, as we have been separated by the two C's: consolidation and covid.

Thank you to my family, who have cheered, supported, listened, celebrated, and encouraged me every step of the way.

Thank you to my husband, Tony, who has quite literally made it possible for me to complete this project. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue my goals. Thank you for listening to unending drafts of papers. Thank you for being the best co-parent I could ever ask for. Thank you for encouraging me to take all the time I needed, and for making it possible to do so by pushing me out of the house or taking Andrew out for a fun activity while I wrote and wrote and wrote. You've been by my side every step of the way, and I could not have done this without you.

And finally, I want to acknowledge myself. Enrolling in this PhD program rekindled my curiosity, taught me how to ask new questions, gave me the tools to answer them, and gave me the confidence to step into new spaces and join new conversations. This dissertation in particular allowed me to say out loud what I knew in my heart to be true and was an academic companion through some deep introspection, reflection, and connection with myself. The past five years have been challenging and rewarding, and I am a better me as a result of them. I'm so proud of this work and look forward to what comes next.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter One: Welcome to the Honors College! An Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: College Freshmen, Organizational Socialization, and the Honors College.....	8
Higher Education Perspectives on Student Transition.....	8
Reframing Transition as Communication	12
Organizational Socialization	13
Communicating Identity as a Newcomer	17
Sensemaking and Resilience	20
The Honors College	23
Summary	24
Chapter Three: Methods	26
Participant Recruitment and Profile	29
Data Collection: Photo-Elicitation Interviewing	30
Data Analysis: A Phronetic Iterative Approach.....	32
Reflexivity Statement.....	35
Chapter Four: Photo-Elicitation and the Presentation of Selves.....	37
Selecting Photos: Participants’ Processes	38
Sorting Photos: My Processes.....	40
Presenting Friendship: Socially Successful Selves	43
Serious and Not So Serious Students: Academic Selves	53
Performing the Personal: Selfies as Authentic Selves	60
Discussion	67
Chapter Five: Honors College Idioms and Identities.....	71
A Common Language	72
Opportunities.....	73
Different	76
Community	80
Strategic Self-Presentations	84
Tell Me About Yourself.....	84
Reflections on Introductions	88

Another Common Language.....	90
Discussion.....	94
Chapter Six: Resiliencies and Resources	99
Disruptions Upon Arrival	102
Affirming Identity Anchors	102
Employing Alternative Logics	105
Disrupting the New Normal.....	110
Discussion.....	117
Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Implications	120
Implications for Communication	124
Implications for Practice and Future Research	126
Final Thoughts	130
References.....	132
Appendix A: IRB Exempt Determination.....	150
Appendix B: Informed Consent Document	152
Appendix C: Participant Guide.....	156
Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....	159

List of Figures

Figure 1. Flag Football with the Pod.....	44
Figure 2. New Friends.....	44
Figure 3. Roomies in the DR.....	46
Figure 4. Vibin’ at the Beach.	46
Figure 5. Silent Disco.....	48
Figure 6. USF Homecoming Parade.....	48
Figure 7. Homecoming Carnival.....	49
Figure 8. High School Friends.	51
Figure 9. Empty Classroom.....	51
Figure 10. Daily Study Setup.	54
Figure 11. A Novel Lysate.	54
Figure 12. Gen Chem One Lab.	58
Figure 13. Humanities Conference.	58
Figure 14. The Caffeine Tower.	62
Figure 15. An Injured Student Athlete.	62
Figure 16. Not Okay.....	64
Figure 17. Final Grades.	64
Figure 18. What it Means to be an Honors College Student.	73

Abstract

Starting college marks an important period of transition for young people, as they manage multiple changes at once and begin to establish identities independent from their parents. The first year college student experience has been the focus of a great deal of academic research, as scholars and practitioners seek to discover the best way to support students and ensure they remain successfully enrolled at the university. However, very little of this research attends to the specific experiences of Honors College students. Further, a focus on the communicative process of transitioning, or organizational socialization, may add to what is currently known. This study expands existing scholarship by taking a meaning-centered approach to investigate how new honors students experience the transition to college. Data for this project was collected through photo-elicitation interviews with 21 first-year Honors College students enrolled at the University of South Florida. While narrating their first-year experiences through their own images of three key contexts of college life, honors students presented idealized images of themselves as successful. These idealized presentations shaped an “Honors College Student” identity linked to successfully representing the values of the organization and engaging in strategic self-presentations to validate their membership in the organization. When disruptions occurred, students maintained their identities of success by communicating resilience. These findings create a nuanced view of the organizational socialization experience, explicating specific ways in which honors students work to construct identities throughout the extended transition of the first year in college.

Chapter One:

Welcome to the Honors College! An Introduction

Welcome to the Honors College! I'm Cayla Lanier, Director of Advising, and it is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the entire faculty and staff. The Honors College is a small, tight-knit community of intellectually curious and academically motivated students who want to tackle some of the biggest issues in our world today and prepare to become leaders in their fields. We offer an interdisciplinary curriculum through small, discussion-based seminars where you will get to connect with your faculty and each other, developing and sharing your ideas and opinions in the classroom. In addition, you will engage in a diverse array of experiential learning opportunities outside of the classroom, meant to complement the conceptual with the practical, and allow you to begin cultivating practical wisdom, to become globally engaged citizen scholars upon graduation. You will come to rely on your honors faculty, advisors, and peers along this journey, and we will guide, support, and celebrate you along the way. Again, welcome. We're glad you're here and can't wait to get to know you in the coming weeks and months.

Over the last fourteen years of my working life, I have given a version of this introductory speech so many times I could do it in my sleep. Individual words may have changed in each delivery, but the purpose of the message remained constant: to greet new students and give them an idea of what, exactly, they have just gotten themselves into, hopefully in a way that is welcoming and inspiring. As the Director of Advising for the Honors College at the University

of South Florida, it was both my job and joy to provide this introduction, and to guide new students through their entrance to the university.

In my time at USF, I have advised hundreds of students through their transition to the university, orienting them to the people, places, and programs of the Honors College. Many new honors students thrive in the university environment, quickly acclimating to the new academic and social contexts. Others have a difficult time and while most ultimately find their footing, a few students find their entry to the university so challenging that they leave the university after their first semester in college. Though I've developed a working knowledge of the factors impacting honors students' ability to successfully transition to college, there exists little empirical research related to the transition experiences of Honors College students to compare to my observations or inform my work.

The current landscape of higher education in Florida is such that academic success metrics are the key to performance-based funding and state investments in the university (FLBOG, n.d.), and honors students, as the highest achievers on campus, are expected to lead the way. Thus, research supporting best practices and methods for achieving these goals is in high demand. Thousands of studies related to retention and persistence towards degree provide a pathway for higher education practitioners and policy makers to achieve the metrics determined by the state. Yet, very little attention has been paid to strategies and experiences specific to honors students. However, it is in the university's best interest to understand the experiences of all student groups in order to have the best chance of meeting the state-mandated metrics.

In my experience, assumptions about academic preparedness equating to success are not always justified. Each Fall term, we dismiss from the Honors College about 6% of the freshman for having a first-semester GPA of less than 2.75; half of those have under a 2.0. Yet, these

students presented high school GPA's of over 4.0 and standardized test scores that put them in the top 10% of the university's entering class. These dismissal data suggest achieving academic success in high school doesn't automatically result in success at college. There is something in the transition between the two educational settings that can be problematic- even for honors students. Transition refers to coping with change in one's life and is a process of addressing individual characteristics and external occurrences (Schlossberg, 1981). Though more academically gifted or better prepared than their peers, honors students are similar to other freshmen when it comes to dealing with the changes involved in transitioning to college.

Traditional, first time in college students are typically 17-18 years old and have recently graduated from high school. They are asserting their independence: some are moving out of their parent's homes for the first time, whereas others work to establish adult identities while still living at home and commuting to school. Understanding these students' experiences of transitioning to college means also understanding their transition into adulthood. This is a period of significant psychological development and a significant amount of university research on "the college student transition experience" necessarily includes perspectives on psychological, social, and cognitive development of the person as factors related to transition (Rayle & Chung, 2007). For traditional university students, the college years represent a period of liminality (Turner, 1969), in which they are no longer children, but not yet adults. Enrolling in college is the buffer zone between two distinct worlds, setting off an extended transition period of being in-between.

The freshman transition to college is somewhat unique from other life transitions in that almost every aspect of a person's life changes all at once: new school, new friends, new teachers, in some cases, a new residence, even food. Transitioning to college is not simply a developmental activity, but includes the stress of managing many new experiences and decisions,

as well as the loss of others (Badenhausen, 2010). The push and pull of a variety of familial, institutional, environmental, and academic stressors adds to the experience of transitioning to college (Terenzini et al., 1994). Further, the university treats students as autonomous adults, often cutting parents out of the communication stream. For students who have relied on their parents to remind them of assignments and due dates, handle their academic and medical records, and perhaps even provide hot meals and clean clothes, it can come as quite a shock to have to manage these tasks on their own.

Honors students are not immune to these transition experiences. In fact, some aspects of transition stress may be more acute for honors students than the broader freshman population, due to the type of support they received from parents, teachers, and friend groups while in high school. In addition, aspects of the honors student identity may exacerbate the issues. Honors students are known for being perfectionists (Parker & Adkins, 1985; Rice et al., 2006), and avoid asking for help (Badenhausen, 2010; Robinson, 2015). Many of these students are used to excelling with little effort and are quite competitive with their peers (Achterberg, 2005). They are used to being big fish in little ponds; the move to a larger pond with many big fish may be challenging for students (Marsh & Parker, 1984; Rinn, 2005), prompting the need to reconfigure how they see themselves. The high school honors student must evolve into a college honors student.

An “honors student” identity is one of many that students are managing at any given moment. Despite representing many identities, college freshmen are most frequently categorized by their status as newcomers. To enroll in college requires an individual to have left a previous setting (high school) and enter a new one (college), which may include moving locations, changing friend groups, learning new rules and systems of behavior, and leaving behind old

ways of doing things. Transitioning to college, then, is a series of decisions, activities, and behaviors that entail forming and presenting a self who demonstrates an understanding of what it takes to fit in as a member of the institution. Transition, and the identity work involved, is a communicative process involving the new student and members of the broader organization. Further, the Honors College is an organization within an organization and honors students experience a dual entry where they must learn to identify and adopt the values of the Honors College as well as the broader campus of the University of South Florida.

Most of the existing literature on college student transition focuses on the psychosocial and cognitive development of late adolescent/early adults (Achterberg, 2005; Elkins et al., 2000; Washington, 2012). By contrast, communication scholars frame the new student experience processually, as socialization, or learning how to become a member through communication with the organization. Both of these perspectives include substantial bodies of research grounded in a few foundational models. Higher education approaches to transition tend to focus on the specific coping or adjustment strategies students should adopt in order to achieve a “successful” transition (Clark, 2005; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Kelly et al., 2007). Many approaches to socialization utilize stage models to describe and predict individual and organizational behavior (Jablin, 1987). Both approaches assume an ideal outcome as defined by the organization, in the process giving less attention to the individual contributions and contextual experiences that newcomers use to assign meaning to their circumstances. Models allow for neat organization and description of life experiences but overlook the experience of outliers whose realities don’t fit the model, as well as the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. Thus, additional research on the experiences of college student transition is warranted.

This study expands existing scholarship by taking a meaning-centered approach to investigate how honors students experience the transition into college. A meaning-centered approach maintains focus on the participant's perspective, what matters to them, and how they interpret their experiences. Sensemaking analysis places the focus squarely on "the action, activity, and creating that lays down the traces that are interpreted and then reinterpreted" by the participant (Weick, 1995, p. 13). Utilizing a sensemaking approach to understanding college students' transitions means giving specific attention to the ways in which identities are formulated and reformulated through the process of reconciling their experiences and expectations. Further, this study attends to moments of disruption as key narratives that reveal the communicative processes that allow newcomers to create a sense of normalcy in their new environments.

This dissertation utilizes retrospective photo-elicitation interviewing and phronetic iterative analysis to explore the ways in which newcomers to the Honors College narrate their entrance to the university. Findings demonstrate the communicative processes through which newcomers understand, construct, and present identities as honors students through their socialization to the organization. This study extends current research on organizational socialization as communication through attention to narrative processes and adds a vital contribution to research on the first year experiences of Honors College students.

The next chapter provides a brief overview of the higher education research on college student transition, then reframes transition as communication through communication theories of organizational socialization and sensemaking. The chapter concludes with an organizational description of the Honors College at the University of South Florida. Chapter three outlines the methods used for data collection and data analysis. In chapter four, I present key findings related

to the presentation of selves in and through photo-elicitation, demonstrating the ways in which participant's presentations form an idealized role of a successful college student. Chapter five reveals the communicative constitution of an Honors College student identity formed through adopting a common language shared among members of the college. In chapter six, I attend to the disruptions students experienced in their first year and demonstrate the resources they drew on to communicate resilience and maintain an identity associated with success. In the final chapter, I outline conclusions, implications, and ideas for future research.

Chapter Two:

College Freshmen, Organizational Communication, and the Honors College

Much of the extant literature on college student transition comes from higher education scholars and practitioners and attends to psychosocial factors related to the human development of young adults entering college. Reframing transition as communication enables a focus on college freshmen as newcomers and a consideration of the transition to college as organizational socialization. Part of the newcomer experience is navigating and constructing identities that align with the new organization, including reconciling disrupted expectations and unexpected realities that challenge the newcomer's sense of self. This chapter will review existing research in each of these areas and conclude with an organizational overview of the Honors College at the University of South Florida.

Higher Education Perspectives on Student Transition

Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition is foundational to most of the research on college student transitions. She offers a basic definition of "transition" as the process of coping with change in one's life, which requires "a new network of relationships and a new way of seeing oneself" (p. 3). The goal of her theory is a practical one: "to develop preventative intervention, pretransition, as well as effective support and counsel for those in transition" (p. 17), making it very useful for application to higher education settings. Indeed, her theory has been cited over 2,200 times in studies related to college student transitions.

Research on college student transition indicates that successful students navigate transition by adopting coping mechanisms, such as maintaining relationships with friends and

family while forging new relationships at the university (Smith & Zhang, 2009), or through adaptation. Schlossberg (1981) defines adaptation as a “process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (p. 7). Factors that affect adaptation include characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments, including interpersonal support systems, institutional supports, and physical settings; as well as characteristics of the individual, such as psychosocial competence, sex, age, health, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value orientation, and previous transition experiences. These factors speak to the “complex reality that accompanies and defines the capacity of human beings to cope with change in their lives” (p. 3). Though complex due to the many variables influencing how an individual is able to adapt to transition, Schlossberg sees adaptation to life transitions as a model, whereby individuals can be assessed to predict their ability to cope with transition based on depth of personal resources and proximity of the pre- and post-transition environments.

This ability to measure and predict success in transition is what makes Schlossberg’s theory so useful to higher education scholars. If successful adaptation is understood as achieving ideal scores on a list of variables, researchers have a roadmap to investigate which factors are most important to different types of students in different types of university settings. For example, increased social support from friends, but not family, and decreased stress in the first semester are predictors of improved adjustment (Friedlander et al., 2007). Rayle and Chung (2007) reinforced the importance of social connections in their study of mattering, which is the experience of having others interested and invested in our wellbeing (Schlossberg, 1981). Environmental factors such as choosing to live on campus versus off campus also have an impact on adjustment (Hicks & Heastie, 2008).

Many of these studies suggest various implications for intervention from universities, indicating a desire to ensure students have successful transitions and remain enrolled in the university (Kelly et al., 2007). University professionals and researchers (often one and the same) have developed entire programs to support the new student during this time of transition by designing a First Year Experience curriculum that engages new students in and out of the classroom (Ben-Avie et al., 2012; Tinto, 1999; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Surveys and tools such as the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE, n.d.) and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1984) allow universities to gain understanding of their own student population while comparing results to national trends. Entire streams of research are dedicated to identifying best practices for early intervention programs and, ultimately, retaining students (Baird, 1992; Elkins et al., 2000; Jamelske, 2009).

In response to these studies, further work has attended to the personal and environmental factors that are particularly salient to specific populations of students. These studies seek to discover if and how subgroups within the freshman class have unique transition needs, as demonstrated by their persistence and graduation outcomes. Some focus on academic aspects, such factors impacting the experiences of conditionally admitted students (DeVilbiss, 2014) and transfer students (Lazarowicz, 2015). The larger body of research related to personal factors focuses on issues of race, ethnicity, or minority student status, such as difficulties experienced by first-generation students (Terenzini et al., 1994), minority students pursuing a biomedical science pathway (Hurtado et al., 2007), Latino students (Hurtado et al., 1996), and more specifically, Mexican American students (Attinasi, 1989). Other studies attend to unique characteristics of specific student groups, such as student athletes (Gayles & Baker, 2015). These studies reveal obstacles to transition that are common across several sub-groups, such as securing funding for

their education and finding on-campus groups that can provide specialized support and a sense of belonging.

Yet, amongst all of the research on personal factors related to students' transition success, very little attention has been paid to honors students. Rice et al. (2006) incorporated honors students in their study of perfectionism, stress, and depression as factors salient to academic adjustment. However, the focus of the study is perfectionism, and honors students were selected as a convenient population since previous literature had linked honors students with higher levels of perfectionism compared to other groups of college students. In her dissertation, Robinson studied first year honors students' experiences of being on academic probation (2015), while Washington investigated the impact honors programming on institutional adjustment (2012). More recent studies have focused on honors students transitions to remote learning environments due to COVID-19 (Das et al., 2021; Wiltse et al., 2020). Given the precedent for specialized studies according to student subgroups, the lack of research on honors students is noticeable and troubling. Further, the bulk of the research on honors students is published in honors-specific journals, meaning the research may be speaking to a specialized audience, rather than being available in other areas of academe.

Schlossberg's (1981) theory, and much of the resulting literature, rely on human development perspectives that generalize needs and behaviors of young adults and frame transition as an individual accomplishment that can be rated on a scale of unsuccessful to successful. Through this lens, a failure to transition successfully can be viewed as a failure to develop appropriately. These perspectives focus squarely on the intrinsic qualities of the individual, leaving out the organization and the interaction between the two, which provides only a partial view of the phenomenon, and highlighting the need for additional perspectives.

Reframing Transition as Communication

A communication lens requires us to shift our attention from the underlying psycho/social aspects of why individuals experience stress at times of transition to the iterative nature of transition as a process occurring through communication messages and interactions.

Communication research attending to college student transitions represents various meta-theoretical and methodological approaches and is generally divided between studies that focus on the pre-college contexts, and those that research what occurs once the student enrolls in college. These studies emphasize the communicative context of transition, demonstrating that students are always in constant negotiation with the world around them, building on what came before in order to establish what comes next in their transition to college.

In response to Cole et al.'s (2009) call for more research focused on students' pre-college lives, Dorrance Hall and Scharp (2018) applied Family Communication Patterns theory and Communication Apprehension theory to students' perspectives on the impact college transition has on their lives, finding that family values related to open conversation and conformity had an important impact on the student's communication apprehension and perceptions of college. Similarly, Goodboy et al.'s (2016) study linking the impacts of bullying in high school on students' motivation to attend college and their first-semester adjustment, found that those who were bullied in high school continued to struggle to find their place in college. These studies demonstrate the role of pre-college social and relational contexts play in the college transition.

Other studies focus on specific communication interactions occurring during the first year of college. Ruppel et al. (2018) surveyed college students to investigate the impacts of parental communication, especially as mediated through phone and text, on student well-being. Mediated communication is a particularly helpful framework for understanding college transitions, as

today's college students utilize social media to both stay in touch with family and friends in high school while also connecting with their new peers. Transition as communication is further demonstrated in the relational dialectics of new and old selves and relationships present in posts on Facebook by college students in Stephenson-Abetz and Holman's (2012) study. Wang (2014) built upon Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, but utilized an interpretivist approach to focus on student-teacher interactions as a relevant aspect of successful transition to college. Her study identified the communication messages that functioned as turning points in the formation of student-teacher relationships, such as empowering students, minimizing power relationships, and addressing students' personal problems. Gist-Mackey et al. (2018) utilized Jablin's (1987) organizational assimilation model to explain newcomer experiences of first-generation college students and analyze socially supportive messages received from peers during various stages in the transition process, identifying those that occur earlier in the transition to college as most vital.

Organizational Socialization

Jablin's (1984) stage model of organizational socialization provides an interesting frame through which to understand student transitions into college. The model categorizes communication messages, strategies, and interaction into a formal structure that explains the process of transitioning into a new organization. Grounded in management studies, Jablin's work makes use of Van Maanen's (1978) definition of socialization as "the process by which a person learns the values, norms and required behaviors which permit him to participate as a member of the organization" (p. 2). Schein (1988) refers to this process as "learning the ropes" (p. 54.), which includes both being taught about occupations at large and being "indoctrinated" into particular organizations. Together, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) advance the understanding of

socialization as a tool to ensure continuity of organizational culture when adding new members to the organization. They embraced a cultural view of organizational socialization focused on how “specific bits of culture are transmitted within an organization” (p. 7). Van Maanen and Schein’s work aims to advance a broad theory of socialization based on actual experiences as they occur, to understand who is involved, what is done, how and when the processes occur, and what the outcomes are.

Jablin (1984, 1987) expanded Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) theory by focusing on the specific communication processes that occur in socialization. The model assumes that newcomers to an organization enter with “work-related communication histories” (p. 594). In other words, they are not blank slates, but have prior experiences that have shaped their expectations for communication practices within the working world at large, and specific organizations in particular. Jablin (1987) calls this “anticipatory socialization,” which entails actively and passively gathering information from family, friends, school, and media to develop expectations about how to communicate in various work settings. Through this process of information gathering, individuals develop communication expectations that shape their interactions once they join an organization and begin the assimilation process. This stage of the model is easily applied to college settings in the way students gather information about college as a basic first step, then research individual colleges, and develop expectations for what attending college will entail through media, high school teachers, and stories from friends and family.

The second stage, assimilation, is the “process to become integrated into reality” (Jablin, 1987, p. 693) once a recruit becomes a member of the organization, and includes multiple processes in which organizations attempt to socialize newcomers and new members seek to

individualize their role. Jablin identifies two distinct phases of assimilation: encounter and metamorphosis. Encounter is the point at which new members break in to the organization, which often comes as a shock to the newcomer. Through a series of surprises and discrepancies in expectations versus reality, newcomers learn the requirements of the role and the established patterns of behavior and thought within the organization. Encounter is an apt descriptor for students' first year in college, where the expectations they formed prior to matriculating are tested. The next phase, metamorphosis, represents the point at which newcomers attempt to establish themselves as full members of the organization by learning new attitudes and modifying their behavior in order to fit in and gain acceptance. Jablin includes exit as a final stage of the assimilation model, assuming that employees will leave the organization at some point.

Jablin's (1987) communication model of organizational assimilation has been foundational to the study of newcomer socialization within communication. Framing new college students as newcomers to an organization offers a convenient model through which to understand their experiences. The model is not perfect, however. Bullis (1993) identified some constraining possibilities of utilizing Jablin's (1987) model of assimilation to understand newcomer experiences, including assumptions of organizations as bounded entities with clear boundaries to be crossed by newcomers and assumed tensions between individuals and organizations. Bullis and Stout's (2000) feminist standpoint approach to organizational socialization addresses these assumptions by questioning what socialization processes might look like when organizational boundaries are reduced or when women and other marginalized newcomers' experiences don't fit established phases. Bullis (1993) calls for research that identifies what is absent or excluded in current studies on newcomer experiences: missing people

groups or classes of work, and missing (unsuccessful) outcomes that might point to experiences outside of the dominant narrative.

Allen (2000) addresses some of these absent experiences, utilizing Black Feminist Standpoint Theory to add more situated examples. She argues for the “primacy on the role of context in building theory” (p. 179) and inclusion of the social conditions that construct group experiences. Allen joins Bullis and Stout (2000) in critiquing the established models for their assumptions of a “universal experience” based mostly on the experiences of white men, as well as assuming that all newcomers have access to the same information sources.

Despite these calls for more holistic and less static aspects of the newcomer experiences, there remains an over-reliance on models to predict how newcomers become acclimated to an organization, or how to mitigate transition issues for students. Jablin’s (1987) model is particularly complicated when applied to socializing college students, since college is itself a transitory space. Students enter the organization already preparing to leave. Yet, students must transition into the transitory space in order to remain long enough to prepare for their next transition. This complex scenario suggests an ideal college student is one who has the ability to remain in a state of change for an extended period of time and can create a “transition identity” that must be reconciled with other aspects of an individual’s identity.

Theorizing the transition to college as a transition into a transition prompts consideration of transition through the frame of liminality. Turner’s (1969) concept of liminality originated in studies of rites of passage and refers to the time or space in between two more clearly defined spaces, such as childhood to adulthood, or student to professional. Liminal processes typically have a triggering event and are conducted in specific spaces and for set amounts of time, with implications for the transitioner’s identity. Liminars, those in liminal spaces, are literally

between two identities; no longer one but not yet fully another. Liminality offers a space for creativity, where individuals construct identities that provide a sense of security or belonging through the transition.

Liminality has been applied to organizational contexts broadly, and educational settings more specifically. Beech (2011) investigated identity reconstruction of employees who had been fired from their work, applying liminality as the “temporary transition through which identity is reconstructed” (p. 288), to explicate the recognition and reflection work that goes into identity reconstruction. Ibarra (2005) attends to the liminality of voluntary career change and the resulting conflict between old and new identities, requiring a need for identity work to resolve the tension. Turning to education, scholars have posited both dual enrollment, the practice of high school students enrolling in college classes (Hoffman & Voloch, 2012), and the senior year of undergraduate education (McCoy, 2003), as liminal spaces, demonstrating the tensions present in these students’ particular experiences. Applying liminality to the college transition calls attention to the ways in which identities are challenged, made, and remade in communication between the self and others throughout the transition period in order to make sense of the process.

Communicating Identity as a Newcomer

Newcomers may find themselves exploring and negotiating identities as they seek to understand how to fit in with their new environment. Within the university setting, newcomers are leaving behind an identity of high school student and taking on a yet undiscovered college student identity, while other aspects of their selves may also shift, change, or remain the same. Hecht’s (1993) Communication Theory of Identity emphasizes the fluid nature of identity by conceptualizing communication as the performance of several identity layers (Hecht & Hopfer,

2010). These layers (personal, relational, enacted, and communal) are both constant and dynamic, distinct and still overlapping and complementary. This paradoxical description emphasizes the way in which communication *is* identity and identity *is* communication (Hecht, 2015), especially when it is enacted or performed.

Goffman (1959) detailed the ways in which identities are enacted in everyday life by explaining social interactions through the metaphor of a stage. Individuals are actors, deploying certain signals to their audience to ensure they form a favorable opinion during any given encounter. Goffman's dramaturgical theory relies on the concept of a front stage, in which individuals intentionally or unintentionally deploy a series of signals that define the situation for others, including appearance, behavior, tone, affect, and language. Goffman also recognizes the existence of established social roles that call for particular fronts which must be understood by individuals in order for them to pull off a particular routine. Performing these idealized roles requires a socialization process to understand and incorporate the "officially accredited values of the society" (p. 35). Goffman's performance theory essentially suggests that to communicate an aspect of one's self is to do so in a way that is to be understood by others as such. In other words, an individual might enact their identity as a college student by behaving in ways that other college students do: carrying a backpack, dressing casually, using university-specific language, or looking at a computer screen while wearing headphones and drinking iced coffee.

Goffman's (1959) work on presentations of self has been extended further by examining the contexts and forms of strategic self-presentation, or the ways in which we "develop and maintain particular identities in social life" (Schlenker, 1980, p. 6). As individuals go about their daily lives, they engage in various interactions in which they are called to present themselves in a particular way, depending on whether a situation is perceived as identity threatening or identity

enhancing (Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Identity threatening events are real or imagined situations that cast doubt on the individual's character, conduct, or skills (Schlenker, 1980), prompting the individual to engage in face work to offer excuses or provide justifications and thereby avoid blame or social disapproval (Friedlander & Phillips, 1984; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Identity enhancing situations include a wide array of social settings that allow individuals to develop social approval or power in order to be liked and respected by others through assertive self-presentations that maximize or enhance their status in relation to positive events. Strategic self-presentation is present in most every newcomer interaction with their new organization, as they seek to minimize the impact of social gaffes and emphasize their credibility and competence, in an effort to validate their presence. Tomlinson's (2002) study of the role of strategic self-presentation in the socialization of college freshmen identified the ways in which new students were aware of the image they were presenting, and their efforts to make a positive impression on others, in order to make friends and fit the cultural expectations, even as they were learning the specifics of that college culture.

In addition to being established in and through communicative performances, identities are situated in cultural "microcontexts (e.g., communication setting and interpersonal dynamics) and macrocontexts (e.g., larger social and structural forces)" (Yep, 2016, p. 90). Because both micro- and macro-contexts are shifting during the period of transition from high school to college, students can use identities as resources for negotiating new social and environmental settings, while also maintaining previous connections. Social media platforms enable and complicate this identity construction of the "emerging adult" (Arnett, 2000; McAdams et al., 2006) setting up potential dialectical tensions between old and new selves for college students (Stephenson-Abetz & Holman, 2012). Weick (1995) writes, "I derive cues as to what the

situation means from the self that feels most appropriate to deal with it...the more selves I have access to, the more meanings I should be able to extract and impose in any situation” (p. 24).

This consideration of identity as a resource further supports a communicative approach to understanding college student transition.

Theorizing identity as communicatively constituted and contextually situated makes identity an especially relevant aspect of studying college student transition experiences. New college students are welcomed with a barrage of micro- and macro-contexts with every new interaction in their new setting, which presents multiple opportunities for college students to make and remake themselves, flipping through an expanding list of selves to make sense of the interactions in which they engage.

Sensemaking and Resilience

New college students are not completely blank slates, however. As Jablin (1987) posited, newcomers to any organization are shaped by the previous socialization experiences that serve to shape expectations for their new role. Pre-college students form expectations around the college experience based on college-themed television shows and movies, stories shared by parents and older friends or family members, or through their own research (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). Some of these expectations are met, others are not, and students are also blindsided by unexpected experiences. Sensemaking is the process by which people attribute meaning to unexpected or unexplained phenomenon in their everyday experiences. Weick (1995) addresses uncertainty reduction as one of the key occasions for sensemaking, positioning sensemaking as a useful tool for understanding newcomer experiences, which are often filled with uncertainty and ambiguity. Thus, sensemaking offers a promising approach to understanding how new students experience the transition to college.

Narrative sensemaking is a specific approach that focuses on the ways in which people reconcile disruptions by narrating their experiences. Narratives are stories, “communications about personal experience told in everyday discourse” (Browning, 1992, p. 285), as well as accounts, which are verbal statements shared with someone else to explain behaviors that fall outside of the norm (Orbuch, 1997). Taken together, these two definitions highlight important aspects of narrative: 1) they are public, shared externally of the self; 2) they are personal, about one’s own experience; 3) they are about something worth telling, and 4) they are told in common, everyday language. Bruner (1991) expands upon these properties to add that stories follow general pathways, or plots, in order to be recognized, and attributes the “tellability” of a story as being related to its level of breach relative to canonical scripts and cultural norms. In other words, while stories are about personal experience, that experience lies within a larger cultural experience that is widely recognized. What makes a story interesting is the level to which it represents a break from the norm.

Stories are a form of local knowledge that “do not require a technical specialist to know what they mean” (Browning, 1992; p. 287), and thus are an accessible information source for organizational members to understand and establish organizational culture. Stories have narrative accrual, meaning connected stories of everyday happenings become endowed with a privileged status, and their meanings carry weight (Bruner, 1991, p. 18). These connected stories become dominant narratives within an organization, descriptions of the way things are. In this way, Bruner argues, stories become constructions of reality, so that their telling and retelling reinforces organizational structure. This dominant construction of reality can cause disruptions for people who find their experience doesn’t align with the established narrative (Jorgenson, 2016).

If sensemaking is about assigning meaning to events in order to repair disruptions within a flow of experiences, narrative sensemaking analysis attends to the stories that are told as signals of the disruption and meanings made as a result, as well as the process for constructing reality through the repair process. Buzzanell's (2010, 2017) Communication Theory of Resilience attends to episodes of narrative sensemaking in which "actual or anticipated trigger events... prompt individuals' and families' initiation of specific kinds of talk, interactions, and behaviors aimed at developing resilience" (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). Resilience is a communicative process of constituting a new normal after a disruptive event, and includes five processes that "enable reintegration and transformation after change" (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015; p. 411). The first process is *crafting normalcy* by invoking routines and rituals to maintain a sense of familiarity from before the disruption and speak normal into being. *Affirming identity anchors* is the second process, and refers to ways in which individuals reinforce aspects of themselves that remain constant and remind them of their roles in life. The third, *foregrounding positive action and backgrounding negative emotion* is an embodied process that enables individuals to manage disruptive events and bring a new normal into being. *Maintaining communication networks* includes leaning on interpersonal relationships, both new and established, during times of crisis. Finally, individuals can *employ alternative logics* to reframe the situation and exert agency to bring about transformation. Theorized as communication, resilience is an ongoing, dynamic process of constructing normalcy through dialogue, which may include multiple and overlapping processes. Resilience narratives offer a unique insight into understanding how college students attach meaning to disruptions encountered in the transition to college and communicatively construct an ongoing sense of self as college student despite them.

To summarize, reframing transition as communication entails viewing the college student transition as organizational socialization. As organizational newcomers, college students' experiences represent the communicative interactions between the individual/student and organization/university, and add insight into the unique identities and cultures of both. Understanding students' newcomer experiences is key to learning how to better support them. Given the pressures to meet demanding metrics related to freshman retention and undergraduate graduation rates, universities would be well-served by hearing students' perspectives on their experiences of transition.

The Honors College

The Honors College at USF offers an interesting cultural context to examine the organizational socialization of college students. As a macro-context, honors colleges and programs exist in more than half of all four-year institutions around the nation (Baker et al., 2000), and are often a primary recruiting tool to attract academically talented students to public institutions (Robinson, 2015). Honors colleges represent an opportunity to incorporate elite, liberal arts education programs with close faculty relationships and specialized mentoring for high achieving students into a public, state university degree program. For students, joining an honors college adds a sense of prestige to a student's college-going experience, and offers a ready-made identity as honors students to shape new college students' entrance to the university.

The Honors College at USF is also a micro-context; one specific college located at one university. As an academic unit, the Honors College follows a similar structure to other academic colleges, with a Dean, Associate Deans, faculty, advising staff, and administrative support. Students are admitted as freshmen, according to competitive entrance exam and high school GPA criteria, or as upper level students, based on their academic performance in college. The

Honors College at USF includes over 2,500 students, which is 6.4% of the entire undergraduate population, and students represent every academic major and minor offered at USF. Though most students are Florida residents, the College includes students from 41 states and 38 countries, and was recently named a minority majority college with 50.6% students self-identifying as non-White. The Honors College has dedicated space on campus, both academic and residential, and offers an interdisciplinary, research intensive, and experiential-based curriculum facilitated by 8 full-time honors faculty, adjunct and borrowed faculty from across campus, and community leaders who teach according to their areas of practice.

There is a particular brand of “honors” that exists within this college, which is continually constituted by the Honors College administration, faculty, staff, and students. The culture of this college aligns with the culture and strategic priorities of the larger university, but is also grounded in the broader concept of honors education, shared by universities across the nation. Honors education is typically “characterized by in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education” (NCHC, n.d.). The Honors College at USF is a member of the National Collegiate Honors Council, a support organization with nearly 900 member institutions, and college faculty frequently attend the National Collegiate Honors Conference to learn and share curriculum ideas, best practices in student programming and advising, and to stay abreast of trends in honors education.

Summary

The University of South Florida is under immense pressure to meet external performance metrics set by the State of Florida Board of Education, Association of American Universities, and U.S. News and World Report, among others (Executive Summary, n.d.). Freshman retention

is one of those metrics and the university relies on current and timely research to guide decisions about initiatives and programs to support students through their first year. The existing research focused on psychosocial aspects of students' character and development provides a narrow view of students and their lives. Framing student transition as organizational communication and socialization opens additional perspectives of the student experience, including their interactions with each other and the university. Further, a qualitative approach that elicits narratives of lived experiences can reveal underlying assumptions, issues, and relationships that demonstrate how students successfully transition into the college environment and remain enrolled at the university. It can offer specific insights into processes of identity construction as based on students' sense of what is at stake in being successful. Finally, as an understudied subgroup within the larger freshman population, it is important to explore the transition experiences of Honors College students to develop an empirical foundation from which to develop support programs specific to this population. Given the limited research in this area, I developed the following research questions for this exploratory study:

- 1. How do Honors College students narrate their first semester experiences?**
- 2. What/Is there an Honors College student identity?**
- 3. What types of disruptions do Honors College students experience during their first semester transition to college and what communicative strategies do they use to cope with the disruptions?**

To answer these questions, I developed a qualitative study to gather narratives from first-year honors students using photo-elicitation interviewing and an inductive, data-centered process to analyze resulting images and narratives. The following chapter will detail the participant recruitment procedures and participant profile, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter Three:

Methods

The primary aim of this study is to understand the lived experiences of newcomers to the Honors College as they transition from high school to a university setting. Although I had talked with many first-year students in the course of my work, my knowledge of their experience was limited to the content of academic advising conversations and the occasional forced faculty/staff/student social event. I had never explicitly asked first-year students to detail their transition experiences, and any general question of how things were going elicited only vague responses. While reviewing prior research to develop the proposal for this project, I was drawn to studies that included journals and photographs, excited by the rich details and access to inner lives granted by those methods. After years of hearing students respond to my questions with “fine”, I wanted to dig deeper to discover the detailed experiences underlying those answers.

As a result, I chose to employ photo-elicitation interviewing, which in simple terms, entails “inserting a photograph into a research interview” (Harper, 2002; p. 13). Collier (1957) pioneered the method in a study in which typical interviews were not producing the amount of information his research team hoped to gain from participants. After incorporating images of the research topic, he noted, “The pictures elicited longer and more comprehensive interviews but at the same time helped subjects overcome the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews” (p. 858). Visual images can create a natural starting point for interview conversations, as participants may feel less on the spot to fill the role of expert or have their lives and choices interrogated.

In photo-elicitation, photographs are provided by the participant, either taken for the express purpose of the study (Harper, 1987), or selected in response to prompts given by researchers, such as a time they felt a particular way (Mugel et al., 2019). Harper (2002) argues for the use of photo-elicitation in four types of studies, including those of identity and culture. He says, “Photo elicitation offers a means for grounding cultural studies in the mundane interpretations of culture users” (p. 19), indicating a strength of the method is the ability to understand how participants assign meaning to various aspects of their daily lives, both significant and insignificant.

Photo-elicitation interviews are typically open ended, where the researcher invites participants to speak about the photos in a way that is meaningful to them. Bach (2007) stresses the importance of listening and letting the photos do the prodding. When participants provide the photos and respond to prompting from the researcher, they retain control of how they choose to represent themselves and attach meaning to their experiences. In retrospective photo-elicitation studies, participants bring images from a previous time period, which can prompt specific memories, as well as general reflections of what else was going on at the time. As a result, photo-elicitation interviews can generate rich narratives that may extend beyond the parameters of the topic at hand to include detailed descriptions of specific events, as well as sensemaking processes about events related to the image in question.

Photo-elicitation has been used to study the college student experience before. Bates et al. (2019) used photo-elicitation to assess student satisfaction among graduating seniors, and both Harrington and Lindy (1999) and Douglas (1997) utilized photo-elicitation to analyze first year experiences among college students. In addition, photographic methods represent a growing field within communication research, as scholars employ the method to discover how individuals

orient to their workspaces (Wilhoit, 2019; Wilhoit Larson, 2020a, 2020b) and manage food insecurity (Dougherty et al., 2018), as well as to lead anti-racist pedagogy workshops (Sobande et al., 2020). Photo methods are particularly well suited to communication studies since visual images are both discursive and material resources, containing layers of meaning and context. In addition, photo methods are less intrusive and more expedient than traditional ethnographic methods that seek to explore the human experience (Warren, 2018), positioning photo-elicitation as a particularly useful method to approach topics bound by space and time, such as college freshman transition experiences.

However, photo-based methods do prompt some additional ethical and privacy concerns, as visual images can contain identifiable information. Especially given the nature of this study, participants' images convey not only their faces, but also physical locations, including residential spaces. There is a tradeoff between accessing private spaces for research purposes and potentially creating risk to participants' private information via photographic image. I believe the tradeoff is worth it, and worked to manage risk in several ways. First, participants were given full autonomy to select photos for this study with very little instruction, meaning they had the agency to determine how much of their private information they wanted to share. The main rule was that the images had to be their own property. Second, all participants reviewed and signed a consent form that outlined how photographs would be used in the analysis and written up within this manuscript, as well as any future presentations and publications. Participants were given the option to identify any photos they did not want printed. Third, participants were advised that photos featuring other people may be altered or not included in print in order to protect the privacy of those who had not consented to participate. Finally, photographic data were stored in

a password protected folder according to participant number. Participants were made aware of these precautions ahead of time and were able to select photos accordingly.

Participant Recruitment and Profile

This study took place within the Honors College at the University of South Florida's Tampa campus, with participation restricted to first time in college (FTIC) students, over the age of 18, who entered college in the Fall 2019 semester. There were 768 FTIC students enrolled in the Judy Genshaft Honors College for the 2019-2020 academic year.

FTIC is both a descriptive term and a code applied to student records. As a descriptor, FTIC is more precise than the traditional term "freshman," since "freshman" also has two meanings. The traditional meaning refers to first year students who are new to college. However, universities have also linked the term "freshman" to students who have earned between 0 and 30 academic credits. With the rise of students earning college credits while in high school through accelerated means, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment, it became necessary to find a new term to describe first-year students and FTIC became the new moniker. New students enrolled in the Judy Genshaft Honors College at USF bring an average of 31 college credits from their high school work, meaning most students have sophomore standing in academic terms, but are still new to the college experience, and thus considered to be first time in college (FTIC) students. Student records at USF are coded with FTIC if a student matriculates to USF straight from high school.

I received notice that my study was exempt from IRB approval on March 9, 2020, as COVID-19 was just emerging as a threat. On March 13, 2020, USF leadership made the decision to release students for Spring Break and shift to remote instruction for the remainder of the semester. Not only did this disruption require a shift in my interview protocol, but it also delayed

my participant recruitment efforts as the college prioritized communicating academic continuity information to our students and I directed my own team to shift to remote work.

I sent the first recruitment email through the Honors College Constant Contact account to all members of the first-year class on April 8, 2020. The recruitment email explained the purpose and parameters of my study, emphasizing the current lack of research on honors college students, and gave a brief overview of the photo-elicitation method. I followed up with a second email after the end of the term, on May 4, 2020. These efforts yielded 23 responses; two dropped out of the study due to scheduling conflicts. This study did not collect personally identifiable information related to race or gender, however the participants presented in ways that are generally consistent with the demographics of the entire first-year honors class, which is 50% White, 25% Asian, 13% Hispanic, 8% Black, and 4% multiple or other, as well as 60% female and 40% male. Most participants lived in the Honors College Living Learning Community (13), a dedicated residential experience for honors students, were Florida residents (16), and science majors (14). In addition to these basic demographics, participants in this study represent students coming from public and private high schools, as well as homeschool organizations. They include a member of the Herd of Thunder Marching Band, a student athlete, and an Early Admission student who started college while still a senior in high school. While I cannot claim this group to be a representative sample of the entire honors freshman class, those who participated in this study embody many of the characteristics present amongst their peers.

Data Collection: Photo-Elicitation Interviewing

This study followed Mugel et al.'s (2019) format and asked participants to provide three to five digital photographs they took or posted on social media that represented to their first year of college and share them with me prior to the interview. Specific instructions on selecting

images are included in the Participant Guide in Appendix C, and included basic requirements that participants use their own photos. I kept the instructions to a minimum in order to allow the participants to decide what aspects of their experience they choose to share in this study.

I conducted video interviews between March and June, 2020, using Microsoft Teams, a platform used by the university during the shift to remote work and learning. Each student had previously been assigned an account and utilized the program to attend class, meet with academic advisors or professors, and conduct study groups, making this a familiar platform through which to host our conversations. In addition, Microsoft Teams includes a built in audio and video recording tool, as well as an auto-captioning tool through a companion video management program, Microsoft Stream.

Each meeting began with a review of the study information, and I confirmed ongoing consent. I started our conversation with general questions about the participant's background, such as hometown, major area of study, reasons for choosing USF and how they came to be in the Judy Genshaft Honors College. Then we shifted to the photo-elicitation portion, in which I shared the participant's photos on my screen, and asked the participant to describe the photo, when and why it was taken, whether or not it was posted on social media, and why the participant chose to share this particular photo with me for this study. To close the interview, I asked participants to describe what it means to be a member of the Honors College. Detailed interview questions are located in Appendix D. Interview protocol was developed through several pilot interviews that occurred in Summer 2019.

Most participants turned on their video cameras, enabling me to more easily establish a personal connection by smiling and nodding, and to read their physical cues about when to probe for more information, when to interject, or when to move on to a new topic. The two interviews

in which the participants did not turn on their cameras are the shortest of the group and were among the most challenging for me to conduct. Whereas most of the interviews were conversational, with an easy back and forth exchange and lots of laughter that allowed me to probe and expand the conversation, the audio only interviews were more stilted, with short question and answer responses. These participants' experiences were included in the development of the themes, but their brief responses offered fewer details to draw upon within the analysis.

While discussing their photos, I shared my screen so we could both see the image, and I used my mouse to point out areas of the photo mentioned by the participant. The technology-mediated nature of these video chat photo-elicitation interviews enabled me to see the image in question and the participants face at the same time, linking each participant's emotional cues in talking about their pictures to the image itself. In this way, each photo is layered with both a past and present context, offering me greater insight into their reflections and more meanings to draw from the interview.

Data Analysis: A Phronetic Iterative Approach

After conducting interviews, I used the auto-captioning feature within Microsoft Stream to generate captions for the interview recordings. I downloaded the video captions and formatted them into transcripts by listening to the audio portion of the video while reading the auto-generated transcripts to correct improper captions and determine speaker changes during conversation. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes, with the shortest being 29 minutes, 13 seconds, and the longest being 1 hour and 7 minutes. All interviews combined generated 15 hours and 51 minutes of audio and video footage and 286 pages of single-spaced typed transcripts.

After transcription was complete, I employed Tracy's (2018) phronetic iterative approach to data analysis, which started with reading each transcript several times to underline key points and make descriptive notes in the margins. After reading through the first eight transcripts, trends and patterns began to emerge, which guided my literature searches for explanatory preexisting theories, as well as created my codebook for second cycle coding of the remaining transcripts. Initial patterns included references to time (routines, schedules, semester timelines), agency (freedom, independence, dealing with external loci of control), social dynamics (friend making, belonging, sources of information, individual vs group tensions) and dialectics of expectations and surprise. Moving back and forth between literature and data shifted the structures of these patterns, and allowed some patterns to become more salient than others. For example, the expectation and surprise dialectic supported Jablin's (1987) stages of anticipatory socialization and encounter, but viewing the narratives through Buzzanell's (2010; 2017) Communication Theory of Resilience offered new insights about the first year student experience.

Tracy describes the phronetic iterative approach as different from previous grounded theory models (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) because of the emphasis on using phronesis, or practical wisdom (Aristotle, 2004), which "prioritizes contextual knowledge" (p. 62). Phronesis is a guiding concept in Honors College courses, and I found it fitting for this study, since my own observations about the site and students involved were the starting point for this research. Indeed, my interviews and analysis were shaped by my intimate knowledge of the Honors College; I shared a common language with my participants and developed insight into their lives based on my long history of working with similar students. I constantly engaged in a reflexive practice where I noted taken-for-granted assumptions between myself and the participant as fellow insiders within the same organization, and then interrogated

those assumptions to determine if my own contextual knowledge impacted my analysis of the participants' meanings. Tracy's (2018) phronetic iterative approach to analysis is an inductive one that starts with patterns in the data and then uses past research as sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006) to illuminate specific portions of data that can extend previous theories or address problems. By going back and forth between the data and existing literature, new insights emerged.

In addition to analyzing the narrative data, I also reviewed the images provided by participants, both alongside and separate from the interview transcripts. I organized the photos onto a slideshow so I could view each participant's pictures as a set, and then reorganized individual images according to photo content. However, when viewing images, snippets of the interview conversation came to mind, and likewise, as I was reading through transcripts, I frequently recalled their photos. The participants' narratives and images were intrinsically linked in my analysis process, which I attribute to the technology-mediated nature of my interviews.

Since images themselves are ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations by the viewer (Aitken & Wingate, 1993), the narrative participants attached to each photo becomes even more important to understanding the local meanings and social constructs they create within their everyday lives (Kolb, 2008). Further, because the participant has the ability to direct the photo-elicitation interview through the images they choose and the descriptions they provide, it can be assumed that participants are making intentional choices to "communicate a specific topic to the researcher" (p. 18). Kolb suggests researchers using photo interviewing attend particularly to the production of photos in their analyses, as well as the resulting photos and narrative, to hone in on the nature of the topics and socio-cultural frameworks presented by participants. In the case of retrospective photo-elicitation, "production" takes on the additional

meaning of selecting photos for the study, not just making the pictures. Each of these considerations were taken into account in the analysis.

Throughout my transcript review and analysis processes, my research questions remained a guiding construct, which ultimately shaped the organization of my findings. In the following chapters, I share major findings as they related to my research questions, specifically the ways in which Honors College students narrated their first year experience through photos, how their narratives shaped an Honors College student identity associated with success, and the ways in which they communicated resilience through disruptions.

Reflexivity Statement

At every stage of this study, my role as an administrator within the Honors College and my role as researcher have been inextricably linked. My own assumptions and experiences guided the formulation of my research questions, my methodological approaches, my interactions with the participants during our interviews, and my analysis of the narratives and photographs produced by them. As an honors student myself, I feel a certain kinship with my participants. As an administrator within the college, I have insider knowledge of explanatory contexts and relationships that would not be available to an outside researcher, allowing me to read between the lines of what was said and understand it in a broader context. As a result, I embraced a reflexive stance “in which the interpretation of thematic content is enriched by a heightened awareness of the local context” (Jorgenson, 2011; p. 115), rather than trying to distance myself from it.

Throughout the analysis phase, I constantly engaged in a “bending back” (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982) into my own experiences to recognize and note my emotional reactions to participants’ narratives, my assumptions about their experiences, and moments in which I filled

gaps in their narratives with my own knowledge. There were moments in which participants oriented to me as a researcher, over explaining concepts and organizational structures or directly questioning my research protocol. However, most of the participants acknowledged my insider status, noted by their failure to explain aspects of their academic lives that they assumed I was familiar with, especially the use of acronyms and language regarding honors curriculum or campus locations. My reflexive practice entailed noting these moments and interrogating my own read of them to ensure I was not projecting my own perspectives onto the participant's experiences and thereby overriding or missing out on their own meanings. In the following analysis and discussion, several of these moments are noted and explored to unearth additional meanings.

Chapter 4:

Photo-Elicitation and the Presentation of Selves

Today's college student has always had the ability to take photographs of anything they desire, at a moment's notice, through smart phone cameras. The nature of digital images and access to practically unlimited data storage, not to mention the ability to share pictures on social media sites, has changed photo-taking behaviors in general (van Dijck, 2008), and shaped the ways individuals portray themselves and their environments in and through photographs, in particular (Walsh & Baker, 2017). It's not uncommon to see people whipping out their phones to snap photos of products while shopping, taking pictures of their meals, or hosting amateur photo shoots by handing their phone to a friend and posing in several positions in front of a scenic location. Without the cost constraints of cameras, film, and development fees, or the space restrictions of storing prints and albums, people now snap photos with abandon.

The ability to capture images of anything for any reason has interesting implications for retrospective photo-elicitation studies, as participants likely have a plethora of photographs to choose from. Participants in this study were instructed to choose pictures from among those they had already taken to create a photographic representation of their first semester in college. The resulting images included a wide range of contents, from posed groups of smiling faces to snapshots of various scenes on campus, from emotive selfies to candid captures of student activities. Combining Kolb's (2008) focus on the photo production within a research setting and van Dijck's (2008) argument for digital photography as a tool for identity negotiation creates an

analytical frame for viewing my photo-elicitation interviews as occasions for the performance of selves (Goffman, 1959).

In this chapter, I will describe the ways in which first year honors college students narrated their entry to college through photos, with particular attention to how they enacted their identity performances as newcomers in relationship to three key contexts of college life: friendships, academic achievements, and emotional turning points. First, I will discuss how participants oriented to the project instructions and selected the images they wanted to include in the study, then explain my approach to analysis of images and interviews.

Selecting Photos: Participants' Processes

Once students responded to my call for participants, I provided them with a participation guide (Appendix C) that included instructions for how to select photos for this study. Those instructions directed participants to review their photo apps and social media accounts to identify three to five photos they felt represented their Fall semester and send me digital copies prior to the interview. During our virtual conversations, I shared their photos on my screen, and invited the participants to describe the image and explain why they selected it for this study. As we talked about their pictures during the interview, it became apparent that participants oriented to the project instructions in different ways.

Some participants reported starting with their photos, scrolling through their phone apps and social media accounts as a way to remember their Fall semester and decide what was worth talking about. A few students shared that they didn't take many pictures, so the few photos they had indicated what was important to them, and provided a natural starting point for selecting images for the interview. One student reported looking through his friends' social media

accounts to find pictures of himself, since he didn't take or post many photos. Other participants had taken a lot of pictures during their semester and went through a multi-step culling process to narrow down their top five.

For others, the topic of this study prompted reflection of key moments or aspects of themselves they really wanted to talk about, and then they found images that reflected those talking points. One participant said she had a unique perspective as an out of state student and wanted her experience to be included in my study, as did another student who felt compelled to share her challenging experiences, to ensure I had a well-rounded view of all experiences. My participant pool included multiple out of state students and several who conveyed challenging starts to their college experiences, suggesting these students see their experiences as unique and worthy of attention.

Participants arranged their photo sets in several different compositions. Most participants attempted to create a representative sample, seeking to hit all the high points of their first semester. Some were arranged chronologically, with one photo from each month, while others were topical, with a photo from each major area of their life, such as one of their friends, one from a research lab, one from study abroad. A few students wanted to convey a sense of evolution with their photos; one participant showed how his friend group started out large and eventually became a tight group of a few by the end of the term, while another chose photos that represented a "map of knowledge" as his awareness grew from his local community to the state, to national events, to global perspectives through his time in the Honors College.

Some participants acknowledged the "rules" and described how they restricted their choices in order to fit within the parameters of the study; they didn't include any photos of other people so I could use all of them without having to negotiate privacy concerns for those who

didn't grant consent, or they included only photos when they actually had more videos of their experiences. Others didn't attend to the rules at all, lifting photos of themselves from others' social media accounts in order to tell their own stories. Participants in this study were given the same instructions, yet even in their approach to completing the assignment, they demonstrate a variety of interpretations and ways of expressing themselves.

During the photo selection process, participants crafted an image through intentional choices about how they wanted to represent their experiences and their selves. Rather than taking fresh photos to represent who they are today, students were asked to provide a retrospective account, looking through older photos to find new meanings that fit within the context of this study. The resulting conversations were rich and complex, full of comparisons from then to now, historical accounts paired with new understandings. If the interview is a "stage", participants revived past performances while simultaneously presenting themselves in fresh roles, occasionally pulling back the curtain to reveal backstage moments that added layered meanings to their past and current performances.

In the next section, I describe how I approached analyzing the photo-elicitation interviews and developed themes that address the first research question: How do Honors College students narrate their first semester experiences? Then, I identify the frames students used to describe their experiences, with particular attention to the ways in which their narratives work as performances that indicate their understanding of an idealized role of "honors student."

Sorting Photos: My Processes

The 21 participants provided a total of 90 images for this project. Their pictures came from several sources, with original digital photos from smart phone cameras being the most

common (71). I identified 17 photos as screen shots from social media, based on cues from platform formatting, such as like counts, comments, and text overlays, as well as explicit branding. One photograph was taken by a professional photographer associated with USF Athletics and another was from a flyer for a student organization of which the participant was a member. When we looked at the photos together, I often asked if the photo had been posted to social media or kept to themselves. Many participants described taking photos just for themselves, and only selecting photos for the study that they *didn't* post, wanting to talk about those that had “more personal meanings” instead, or to have access to a larger pool of images, including those that weren't “pretty enough for social media.” One participant who did share an image from a social media account described having posted the photo to her “finsta,” a fake Instagram account that is public and more for show, as opposed to her personal account, which is kept private and only for sharing photos with close friends.

By mentioning personal meanings and acknowledging social media norms, the participants demonstrate their efforts at impression management (Goffman, 1959) through their photo taking behaviors, and their recognition of a distinction between public and private photographs. In this context, participants' preference for private photos, those that are taken for themselves or to be shared with a small, intimate circle (Goffman, 1979), is indicative of the close tie between their photographs and their presentations of self. In their application of Goffman's theory to photographic selfies, Walsh and Baker (2017) describe the “seepage” (p. 1188) that can occur between the public and private spheres, such as during “sanctioned viewing of private images” (p. 1195), which occurred in these photo-elicitation interviews as participants shared images with me that weren't deemed acceptable for public sharing through their social media accounts. Walsh and Baker's argument against a distinct public/private dichotomy is

especially clear in the participant's report of maintaining multiple social media accounts to manage layers of privacy (Dewar et al., 2019).

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I began analysis of the photographic data by inductively grouping photos into some basic categories by going back and forth between the image content and the description provided in the interview. Several topic areas emerged. An overwhelming number of photos featured groups of people in social settings, and stories of friendships and campus events dominated our conversation. A second group of photos consisted of classroom spaces and course projects, generating conversations about academic accomplishments. Selfies comprised the third group of photos, which were frequently accompanied by vulnerable introspections about personal growth. A majority of the photos provided by students fit easily within these three categories, with very little overlap. For those that did, I sorted according to the photo content, such as a selfie taken after final grades were posted, which went into the selfie category. A few other smaller categories emerged, including a group of photos that were labelled by the participant as an iconic "This is College" moment and another group in which the photo content and narrative were disjointed.

Further analysis of images and narratives within each category revealed moments where participants presented selves that suggested their awareness of attempts to perform idealized roles. During this phase, I revisited the photos in the two minor categories and re-sorted them into the larger categories based on how the photo content and narrative fit within various performances in those categories. In the next few sections, I share some striking performances within each category, then conclude with discussion of how these performances point to an idealized role.

Presenting Friendship: Socially Successful Selves

When selecting photographs for this study, participants paid a lot of attention to the people and places they got to know during their first semester. Their stories revolved around meeting new people, exploring their local surroundings, and finding their way around campus. Pictures of friends and campus events account for just over 50% (47 out of 90) of all photos submit for this study, indicating the importance of making friends and establishing social connections in the overall experiences of these first semester students. In fact, the process of making friends and stories about spending time with friends remained a constant theme throughout our interviews, regardless of the photo content, suggesting these honors students frame transitioning to college as a primarily social experience.

Making new friends was particularly important for Michael, who came to USF from Ohio. Michael described having a close group of friends in high school, as well as a brother just one year younger who was his “built-in partner” for every sports team drill or school project, so he expected to have to work at making friends once he left his social network behind. After a few lonely weeks of eating meals by himself, he described a breakthrough when one of his pod-mates asked if anyone was interested in playing flag football (Figure 1, next page):

Before that I didn't really know them that well, and that's when I'm like, “Yeah I'll play,” and you know like the first practice I guess we had, that's where we got to become really good friends. So, definitely like sports for me is a good way to connect with people.

Another participant, Nolan, submit the same photo of the flag football team and talked about how wearing a uniform, including the white shirts and sports tights, became part of the weekly

tradition of playing the game. Figure 1 shows these details, as well as the students standing close together, piled on top of each other, and holding up similar hand signs. We can read these details as depicting togetherness and belonging; the students are part of something bigger than themselves. Their smiles add to this interpretation by indicating they are having a good time and enjoying each other. For Michael, this photo is proof that he overcame his initial challenges at making friends and found a sense of belonging, representing his success at transitioning into college.



Figure 1. Flag Football with the Pod.

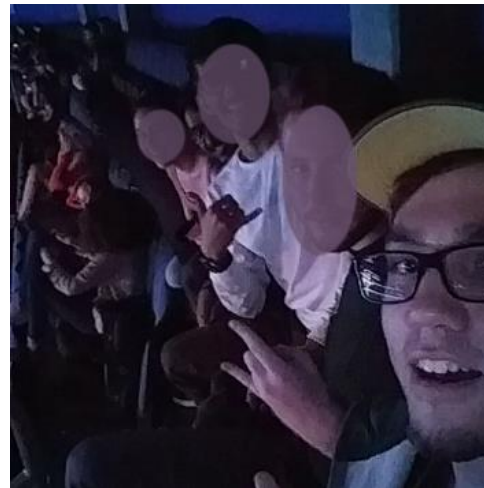


Figure 2. New friends.

Even for students who came to USF with an established friend group, making new friends was an important part of the freshman year experience. Cody described Figure 2 (above) as “entirely new friends [he] made here at USF,” which prompted me to ask about his experience making friends. He responded:

I would say it was more of something I was expecting or like excited about, 'cause I actively tried to make friends, at least the first couple weeks of college and beyond. I would actually be like, “Hey, what's your name? I'm Cody.” I'd hang out in the lobby for like a couple hours reading a book and just say hi to anyone who walked by. So like, I

actively tried to like, create new friend groups because I didn't want to be that guy who came from high school with his own friend group and then doesn't know anyone else outside that friend group. I kind of wanted to make sure that I knew at least the people who would be living with me on my floor pretty well. So I felt like I was able to meet a whole bunch of new people and create a lot of lasting friendships with them.

Cody talks about not wanting to be “that guy,” a stereotype he had presumably heard about prior to coming to USF. Thus, he actively worked to give the impression that he was friendly and outgoing by introducing himself to others, and in the case of this photo, inviting his new friends to attend a concert off campus.

Shalini lived at home and shared photos from different parts of her semester, maintaining a consistent focus on social relationships as a theme throughout the interview. She had grown up as a single child in a culturally conservative home in which she didn't have many social freedoms. Attending college, even while continuing to live at home, represented an opportunity to establish her sense of independence and choose the people she wanted to spend time with. Shalini shared an image of her roommates from a Winter Break study abroad to the Dominican Republic (Figure 3, next page), reflecting on what the friendships meant to her:

Like I said before, since I don't live on campus, I don't have roommates, and I feel like that's another classic college experience, so these were I guess my first roommates, so that's why I really wanted a picture with them.

Studying abroad provided Shalini an opportunity to share a room and significant time with fellow students, which she described as a “mini college experience.” She posted this photo to Snapchat with the text banner, “Roomies [heart] [heart] [heart],” promoting an image that she

was having a “classic college experience.” Later in the interview, Shalini talked about coming to college with a goal of breaking free from her high school reputation of being “just the studious kid.” With this additional context, we can understand this social media post as a public presentation of her social self (surrounded by friends), or her adventurous self (travelling out of the country without her parents), or the new college self (with roommates), or as successfully achieving her idealized multi-faceted self (all of the above).



Figure 3. Roomies in the DR.



Figure 4. Vibin' at the Beach.

Presenting a social self was especially important for Tony. He chose to include a photo of some new friends “relaxing and vibin’ at the beach” (Figure 4, above) to provide an intentional balance against a few other photos of himself in academic settings. He had felt labeled as “one of those honors kids” in high school and, similar to Shalini, wanted to avoid being hemmed in by others’ definitions in order to establish a new sense of self at college. By including photos of himself exploring Tampa Bay with friends, Tony presented an image of being equally successful in his social life as he was in his academic endeavors.

For some participants, attending campus events was the fulfillment of their personal and social goals for college: a chance to start fresh, try new things, become part of something larger than themselves, and exercise agency over their own social lives. This was particularly true for two participants who described non-traditional high school experiences. Sharon attended a very

small high school with only five students in her graduating class, while Reggie was homeschooled for his entire education. They both recalled attending Bulls Nights Out, weekly events held in the student center that were designed to provide on-campus opportunities for students to socialize, relax, and make new connections. They recounted attending these events alone and enjoyed meeting people there, feeling like they were part of the life of the university.

Sharon snapped the photo in Figure 5, below, as she walked out of a Silent Disco, one of the Bulls Night Out events, and later posted it to Snapchat. Silent discos are dance parties in which each dancer wears headphones and can choose from among three different music stations, as well as see who else is listening to the same music based on the headphone lights. Sharon said she selected this photo to represent her Fall semester because it was just one of many new activities she experienced at USF. As a result of her high school experience, she eagerly anticipated engaging in new activities and being more socially involved in college, so this photo represents fulfillment of that expectation. In this interview, the photo and narrative work to support an impression of successful transition – she came to USF knowing nobody and was able to fit in and stay busy. The dark tones, bright lights, and dance floor shown in the photo suggest a night club-like atmosphere. Without a caption to clarify that this was an on-campus event, the image can be read as strategically ambiguous, perhaps allowing Sharon’s social media network to get the impression that she is more social off-campus than was actually the case.



Figure 5. Silent Disco.



Figure 6. USF Homecoming Parade.

As a homeschool student, Reggie had never experienced school spirit or school pride, which contextualizes his description of feeling “USF Bull spirit throughout the campus” and marking the Homecoming Parade (Figure 6, previous page) as a high point in his first semester. He described having felt lonely learning at home and never had a strong connection to anyone or any organization before college; attending USF provided the excitement, community, and belonging Reggie had hoped for. Homecoming Week represented the fulfillment of all he wanted in a college experience. All of Reggie’s photos demonstrated his very deep engagement in activities at USF, contrasting this experience to how unhappy he had been prior to arriving to college. He described challenges of learning alone at home and not having any friends, as well as taking college classes as a young teenager, alongside classmates 7 to 15 years older than him. Prior to attending USF, Reggie was an outsider who never quite fit in. By framing his first semester at USF as primarily social, Reggie presented himself to me as a “peer” (a word he used to describe the other students in his residence hall), as being on the same level as the other students, and for once, as belonging to the larger group and meeting social expectations.

Homecoming was a meaningful moment for Monica, as well, though for a different reason, which she articulated while talking about her photo from the Homecoming Carnival (Figure 7, next page):

I wasn't really involved with a lot of people on campus and of all of my photos from that time period are of me being at home with my family because I came home all the time. My boyfriend also lives here, so it's like, I would just come all the way back to come see him and my friends and everything, and so it was harder for me to have fun on campus. But I do remember this night was like probably, it was a really good bonding moment for me and my roommate and I remember just really loving all the setups of all the different golf carts and everything and all the different parade floats that were coming by. So it was definitely a fun night.



Figure 7. Homecoming Carnival.

Because her family lived nearby, Monica could easily visit home any time she wanted, which she felt impaired her ability to connect with others on campus. She noted that she had to attend the Homecoming events for her student organization, which was the nudge she needed to engage

with campus activities. Later, Monica described posting this photo on her social media as proof that she was “living that college life,” because it shows her wearing USF beads. The staging is noteworthy, as well. She is standing in front of a food truck labeled “Smoking Hot,” and there is a carnival booth behind her. It’s reasonable to believe that she had taken multiple other photos at this event, including the parade, carnival rides, her organization tent, or even with her roommate, the photographer of this image. Yet, she chose this photo to post on social media and for the interview, which suggests that she is working to give an impression of fitting in and enjoying college to meet social expectations, as well as perhaps other gender-related social media norms (Davis, 2018; Rose et al., 2012).

Not every participant had an easy time with friend-making in their first semester, which was especially true for two students that lived at home and had non-traditional high school experiences. Amanda was part of the Early Admission program, meaning she completed her senior year of high school as a full-time dual-enrollment student at USF. She described the tensions she felt because of this status, especially in terms of friendships, while talking about a photo of herself with a high school friend at the state fair (Figure 8; p. 51):

I picked this photo specifically over the aspect of friendship. Because coming in as someone doing early admission, you know, skipping a year, not having known anyone prior... I didn't make a lot of friends first semester honestly, or what I did make was like situational based on the class and the friendships never went anywhere. And the fact that I was taking, you know, freshman classes, so they were in giant auditoriums. That didn't help either. So I basically spent first semester alone. I didn't make any friends. I found it difficult to make friends in such a big class where you constantly change where you're sitting or new people are sitting you by you every day.

Amanda selected a photo of a friend to demonstrate that she didn't have success making friends in college, which I found counter intuitive. I asked if she maintained friendships from high school during her first semester at USF, and she affirmed that they texted and hung out when they could, like at this day at the fair, but her college class schedule and work schedule didn't match those of her high school friends. Amanda later went on to talk about how lonely she felt during long stretches of the day when she didn't have class and all of her friends were in high school. Her decision to advance her academic standing came at a cost to her social life, and she struggled to find connections at USF. This theme was present in another picture of her smiling with her dog. However, the interview narrative revealed that she felt her dog was her only companion and she was actually quite lonely. The comparison of her photos and narrative reveals a tension; her narrative gives off an impression of challenges and difficulty acclimating to college due to her liminal status of no longer being in high school and not yet fully integrating into college life, yet her photos present positive impressions through smiles and posing with their heads close together, suggesting relational closeness.



Figure 8. High School Friends.



Figure 9. Empty Classroom.

Mary also had a hard time connecting with people at USF, which was not new to her. As a homeschooled student, she had completed most of her high school coursework through virtual school or online classes at a community college. She was not involved in any community groups or clubs and didn't have a strong social network going into college. When her honors Peer Mentor made a point to connect with her and invite her to campus activities, it made a big impact, as she described while talking about a photo of the classroom in which they met (Figure 9, above):

OK, so this one is right before my last day of Honors Foundations, which is my favorite class. I'm actually going to be a Peer Mentor this fall, so that was what inspired me to do that. Part of the reason why I enjoyed the Honors College so much was because my Peer Mentor, she is part of the student council and she was like inviting me to like events and stuff. And like whenever I go to events, she was like "Oh my God" and she's like you know, trying to like connect us with, make us aware of opportunities... Yeah, so that's that. It is also the room that I had AOK in so I thought OK, yeah I'm, I'm always in this room where. That's where I had my first bond with students, I don't know. So yeah, that's all that is. Just 'cause I was in that room a lot.

Mary links the photo of the classroom to a particularly meaningful moment of connecting with her Peer Mentor and feeling a sense of belonging. Yet, it's an empty classroom, and not a photo of the mentor, or a photo of herself at any of the activities. There is a dissonance between her claims of enjoying the Honors College and establishing a bond with other students, and the stark, cold image of an empty classroom with nothing on the walls or board and chairs askew. Further, she makes a point to mention bonding with other students, but then pulls back, minimizing the relationships ("I don't know", "that's all that is") and instead identifies the location as important,

not the people. These tensions within Mary's performance leave me confused, unsure of which part of her presentation I should take at face value. Yet, the tensions point to Mary's recognition of an idealized socially successful role, even if she wasn't able to fully carry out a performance of that role.

When preparing their photo sets, participants in this study prioritized pictures that demonstrated their social lives, indicating the depth of their desire to talk about this aspect of their entrance to college. Whether it was selecting a photo of a roommate, because "USF would not have been the same without her," or immediately thinking of his flag football team when reading the call for participants, stories of friendships and campus activities were the main narratives for what starting college meant to these students. College is frequently depicted as a social environment in media representations, such as in the classic films *Animal House* and *Revenge of the Nerds*, as well as more recent television shows such as *Greek*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Community*. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these students anticipated that they would make friends and explore new social activities when arriving at USF. From that perspective, those who conveyed positive experiences with friend-making and attending campus events presented an image of success. The selves they present are smart and social, friendly and popular. They belong within their group, and at the university. However, even those who conveyed challenges with making friends demonstrate an awareness of being socially successful as an ideal role by attempting to perform the role, even if the performance wasn't convincing.

Serious and Not So Serious Students: Academic Selves

Broadly speaking, academic activities played a minor role in the overall content of the photographs and interview narratives, as participants prioritized their social lives. However, three participants talked about the academic aspects of their transition into college in noticeable and

interesting ways. Mitch talked almost exclusively about different aspects of his academic life, from showing photos of his study routine (Figure 10, next page) and a major accomplishment in his research lab (Figure 11, next page), to talking about his involvement in only student organizations that were directly related to his major or would help him network for future research or grad school recommendation letters. Nolan, on the other hand, talked about going to class and interactions with his professor only as a byproduct of describing his daily routine. The rest of his interview focused solely on his friendships and social connections. A third student, Tony, demonstrated how he achieved balance between the two areas of life. The variety of academic performances present in these interviews underscores the unique nature of individuals within the larger group; though united by a common label, they perform that label differently.

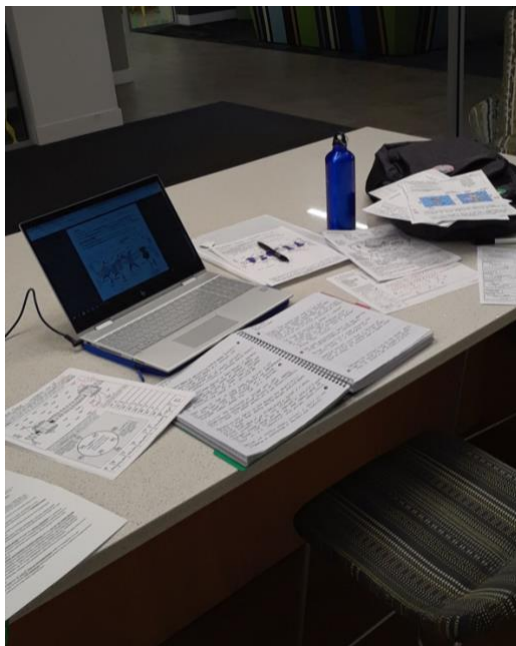


Figure 10. Daily Study Setup

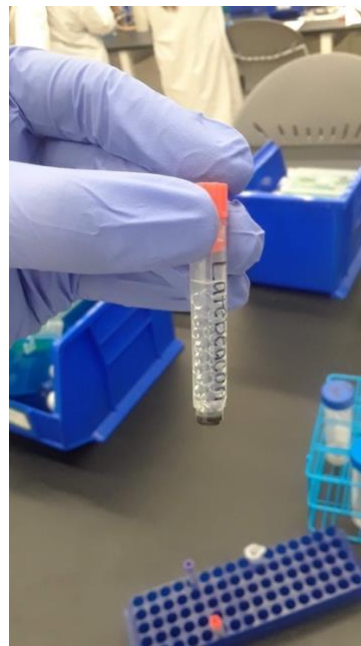


Figure 11. A Novel Lysate

Mitch opened his introduction by describing himself as a “big environmentalist” with aims of working in environmental biology in the future. He participated in a special research program during his first semester, in which he and others tested dirt samples to look for novel

lysate bacteriophage particles. He found one, which is in the test tube pictured in Figure 11, above. His description of the photo explains the importance of this moment for him:

Yes. So this is um a picture of me holding my vial of the uh, bacteriophage lysate that I found through the research with Dr. Peters. Um, so I, I've done kind've minor research projects in high school. I did one on how invasive plant species are affecting local bug populations, and how different soil types affect water quality after runoff. But this was, I mean, those were kind've, not really like as, as hands on as what we had to do here. I mean, we had. I was putting in 10 hours of lab work into this course, and because I know I want to do biology focused research, having this and sending it to the University of Pittsburg, which runs the main lab and stores all of the lysates that are found through the program or all the samples found through the program, having that and seeing what my work came out to, was a really big moment, especially since I came to USF for the research... I knew just how much I was gonna be able to accomplish in the next seven semesters after that.

Throughout the entire interview, Mitch's narratives present an image of an idealized role of "the serious student." Four of his five photos depict academic settings: this lab photo; his homework-filled desk (Figure 10, previous page); his walk to class, which was described in terms of being "grateful to attend this top-tier research university;" and his first day of class in a large lecture hall. Even his fifth photo, a snapshot with his girlfriend, elicited commentary about her major, how they met at science camp, and their similar goals of working in environmental science in the future. While it can certainly be assumed that he engaged in other activities beyond academics, those activities were downplayed in this interview.

This excerpt in particular includes specific references that support his performance. By giving his resume of previous research experiences, Mitch “attempt[s] to give the impression that their present poise and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period” (Goffman, 1959, p. 47). He positions himself as suited for the idealized role he is performing based on his qualifications. This presentation is furthered by the mention of how many hours he spent in the lab. This isn’t grunt labor to be concealed; rather it is a point of pride, a sign of his commitment to his goals, and an indicator of how serious he is. Finally, the end product of his efforts, having his discovery included with others’ findings, signals his success and expectations for future successes in research at USF, and reinforces his performance of an idealized role by hinting at his perception of the values of the organization: research, studying, and commitment to long term goals.

Whereas Mitch framed his first semester in college as a wholly academic experience, Nolan described his entrance to college as purely social. His first response to my invitation to tell me about himself set the tone for the rest of the interview:

OK, well, my name is Nolan and, so, basically, I just play soccer, go to the gym, hang out with friends a lot.

Nolan maintained a cavalier, laid back attitude throughout the interview, both in his manner of engagement and in the way he talked about his experiences. Throughout our conversation, he leaned back in his chair, laughed easily, and spoke an upbeat, almost cocky tone as he discussed social activities, inside jokes with his LLC pod, and the flag football team. He presented himself as friendly, popular, and carefree, projecting confidence in his performance within the interview and conveying a social confidence he held throughout his time on campus. Whereas others acknowledged obstacles and hardships along the way, Nolan described his first semester as

problem-free. An excerpt from a segment of the interview in which he went on a tangent while describing his daily routine is particularly exemplary of this confidence:

But then after like eating, whatever, I go back to my room, usually take like a quick little nap and then I had class at 3:00. Wait, no, 2:00. It was 2:00, because one time I thought it was at 3:00 and I showed up to class like 30 minutes late... Like me and like five of us sat in the front row. Luckily me and my professor are like super cool. So I walk in like 30 minutes late and I'm like, "Hey Zack, how's it going, what's up?". He's like, "Oh so glad you joined us," and I'm like, "Yeah thought class started at three. It really doesn't," and he's like, "No it does not". And I'm like, "Alright, Zack." And I sit down in the very front row, and I was like, I really just walked in front of a lecture hall of like 200 people. It was pretty funny and I was like, whatever. That class was fun too. But we like make jokes and stuff and so he has like really long, like flowy hair. And it's kind of weird 'cause we, one time, we talked about something like, "You know, Zack, you could be like Walmart brand Jesus".

Nolan describes his relationship with his professor as being "super cool," which is language typically associated with peer relationships, and mentions calling his professor by his first name. Further, he relays an episode where he assigned the professor a nickname based on his appearance. All of these moves defy the traditional professor-student relationship, which is usually marked by deference on the part of the student for the position and power held by the professor. If there was any negative response or rejection of these moves from the professor, Nolan concealed them in his recounting of this episode of being late to class. Instead, he presented confidence in his status as being friendly and collegial with his professor, the same self-assurance he likely presented in the moment. His performance suggests a Big Man on

Campus persona, which is ironic given his status as a first semester freshman. This irony was lost on Nolan, however, who maintained his over-confident performance through the interview, presenting an image that is opposite of that performed by Mitch. If Mitch was a “Serious Student,” Nolan performed a role of “Not So Serious Student.”

Mitch and Nolan demonstrate two opposite academic performances of honors students in this study, positioning Tony’s interview as an example of a mix of social and academic identities. The previous section revealed how Tony performed his social self by sharing a photo of his friends on the beach (Figure 4, p. 45). Within his photo set, the beach picture was followed by an image of science equipment (Figure 12, below), which prompted the following description:

This was kind of like more of the academic side of my fall semester. That was Gen Chem One Lab and that was, I don't even remember what that was. That was me trying to do something there.

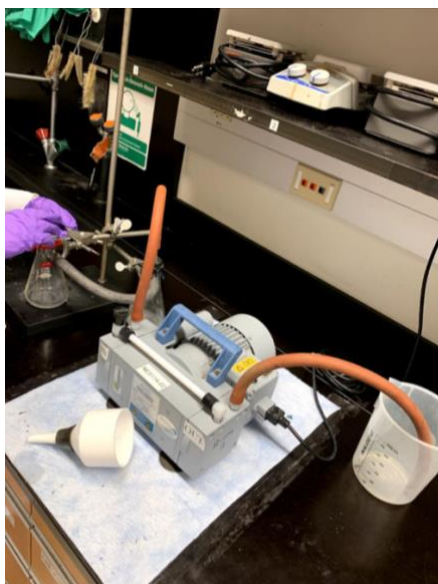


Figure 12. Gen Chem One Lab.



Figure 13. Humanities Conference.

Tony claimed this photo represented the “academic side” of his semester, but limited a fuller explanation of what that entailed by describing the procedure as “something” he didn’t remember. My attempts at drawing out a deeper explanation elicited some details about his high school chemistry class, but didn’t add any additional insight to his academic activities at USF. So we moved on to the next image, of Tony standing in front of a research poster (Figure 13, above), presumably further proof of his academic experiences. In this segment of the interview, he talked about presenting a class paper at the Humanities Conference and being inspired to conduct more research under a faculty member in the future. Finally, when I asked about his process for selecting photos for this project, he revealed the motivations behind his efforts to present an image of successfully achieving balance in his social and academic worlds:

I wanted kind of a balance between, like the fun side of like my past two semesters and the academic side. So I have like, when we’re on the beach, kind of chilling which, which was nice, and then I have like my lab and the research I did and then I also obviously have just like Gasparilla and everything. So I kind of wanted to have like a balanced, kind of give a full picture of what my like fall and spring semester was. 'cause it was a lot of academics, but it was also like a lot of fun with friends... Like in high school, I feel like I made the mistake of only focusing on academics and like passing up opportunities to have fun with friends to like get a higher GPA and everything. But I think my fall semester, like my fall and spring kind of taught me that I can kind of like pick and choose like how far to each side of the scale I want to lean and like what balance I have to have to really make me happy.

While Tony’s initial description of the science lab photo suggests limited importance, his explanation of how he went about selecting photos clarifies the role of each photo within his

interview. If he was trying to portray balance, it was not necessary to dig into each photo as a standalone symbol of his experience. Rather looking at all photos together to see two from academic, two from social, and a fifth from a blended experience reveals the impression he worked to achieve.

It can be assumed that all of these students had immersive academic experiences in their first semester at USF. College, after all, requires attending classes, studying, completing homework, and focusing on grades. Further, these are honors students who demonstrated academic excellence in high school, and are presumably similarly focused on achieving academic excellence in college. Yet, when given the opportunity to define themselves and convey what was most important to them, academic experiences played a minor role for most participants in this study. Tony's reflective moment of describing the impression he was trying to give provides a possible explanation. Despite coming from a variety of high school and home life backgrounds, what unites the participants is a past record achieving high grades and test scores in high school, which enabled them to be admitted into USF's Honors College. As a result, perhaps their academic engagements were just taken for granted activities, not worth focusing on in these interviews. Though there are exceptions, as Mitch demonstrated, these performances suggest an idealized self as being equally successful in other aspects of lives as they have been in their academic lives.

Performing the Personal: Selfies as Authentic Selves

The third group of photos includes selfies. Selfies are often defined as images captured by the subject of the photo and featuring the face, for the purpose of being shared and disseminated on social media platforms (Walsh & Baker, 2017). However, Albury (2015) contests the latter part of this definition to in her exploration of "private selfies," those ordinary,

unremarkable photos created only for the producer (p. 1736). Both of these types of selfies appeared in my study and add to the understanding of the performance of idealized selves developed earlier in this chapter.

Kirsten included an amusing photo of herself standing next to a tower of empty energy drink cans (Figure 14, p. 61), which she introduced with the warning, “this next one is super dumb,” then launched into an eight-minute monologue about her caffeine-drinking habits, her efforts at managing her weight, and her surprise at being able to exert self control and only drink half a can per day. After exhausting these topics, she finally returned to the photo to describe how she started saving empty cans, making a tower with one of each color, and then challenging herself to see how many cans she could save and stack together. Finally, Kirsten shared an anecdote about using the photo to respond to friends and family who asked her how she was doing in college:

It's like, what do you think? Look at my glassy stare and my cans of Monster, you know?

It's like, what do you think?

What started out as a silly photo to document how tall her can tower had gotten became a way to communicate to others how she was doing, even if in a non-serious way. Though she worked to give an impression that she was addicted to caffeine in her text messages, Kirsten went to great lengths with me to detail her relationship with caffeine as not being addictive. Walsh and Baker (2017) attribute the selfie's ambiguous position between traditional notions of public and private life as being “connected to an increasing desire to communicate an ideal image of the self” (p. 1198). Kirsten's caffeine tower pulls double duty as giving a public impression of fitting into college stereotypes about caffeine consumption when she shared it with friends and family, while in the interview it allowed her to present an image of having self-control and being able to

moderate her diet, successfully resisting another college stereotype she mentioned, that of gaining the “freshman fifteen.”



Figure 14. The Caffeine Tower.



Figure 15. An Injured Student Athlete.

While the next photo doesn't quite meet the definition of a selfie, since it was taken by someone else, the photo prompted some revealing insights into the facework that goes into maintaining a performance, in this case, that of a student athlete. Travis shared a photo of himself about to go into surgery as a result of injuring his thumb during football practice (Figure 15, above), explaining:

Whenever I think about my freshman year, I'm going to think about getting hurt during football, and walking around campus for four weeks with a sling, and then my recovery. Instead of practicing every day, I was in the training room trying to get my thumb back to full strength. So that's just something I'll always think about.

This episode is meaningful to Travis partly because recovering from an injury differed from his expectations for playing football during his freshman year. When asked what it was like to be an injured student athlete, he talked first about his public image on campus:

Um, I guess it was good for a little while, whenever the cast was on. I would go to class and people will be like, “Oh my gosh, what happened?” I was like, “Well I play football here,” and they're like, “Oh wow.”... But yeah, so going around I guess, it really lets people know like that I'm an athlete. I can kind of go underneath the radar cause I'm not a freakishly big guy... so I'll kind of go underneath the radar, and so besides like my close friends in classes and some people that just recognize me, a lot of people don't know I'm an athlete so, but with that people were like, “Oh, you, you play here and you got hurt?”. I was like, “Yeah,” so definitely made me stick out a little bit more.

His injury occurred in early September, just a few weeks into the academic year, a time when most first-year students are just getting to know each other and the campus. Travis' injury offered him an opportunity to introduce himself as a student athlete, demonstrated by his answer to questions about what happened to his arm, suggesting that his identity as an athlete is an important part of his self-concept. It is interesting to note that Travis did not mention his role on the team, his feelings about not being able to dress out and play in games, or disappointment at being injured. Instead, he focused on his interactions outside of the athletics center, where he dramatized what would otherwise be invisible work (Goffman, 1959), since he admitted he wasn't immediately recognizable as a football player due to his size.

Several participants included selfies as representations of emotional states they experienced throughout their first semester. This was most pronounced in my conversation with Lindy, who submit a series of selfies that represented a visual roller coaster of the emotions she experienced in her first semester, which is obvious in looking at Figures 16 and 17, on the next page. She launched right into it when describing Figure 16, a selfie in which her eyes are red and puffy, she is not smiling, and her hand is making an OK sign:

Okay, so this was later, like this was right, the day before Thanksgiving I think, and this is immediately after I had broken up with my boyfriend. Because it was a really intense semester for me and he was like interfering with a lot of my studies and I didn't feel like he was supporting me and my decisions, so I broke it off. And this was also right after midterms. I was struggling, wasn't having fun and I'm pretty sure I didn't do well in those midterms so I didn't feel very good about myself at this time. And I was like everything's okay when it wasn't.



Figure 16. Not Okay.



Figure 17. Final Grades.

Lindy explained that she took this photo after crying and feeling overwhelmed about her breakup and poor mid-term grade performance. The OK sign she's making with her hand is ironic; she's making a half-hearted attempt at putting on a positive front despite not feeling good about herself. When asked why she selected this photo, she said:

I just felt like I shouldn't be showing all happy pictures because I struggled so much in my semester. I cried so much in my semester because I, I still struggle with equating my, my self worth to my grades and to who I keep around me and I think that it's good to

show that, like yo, I wasn't okay. I was struggling with something while still doing school. And this was right before break, so I had time to like collect myself. And then you know it's, it's a process and you can't avoid the hardships of that process.

Lindy made a conscious choice to include a photo of her hardship, reflecting on the struggles she endured her first semester. By the time we discussed this photo, almost seven months later, she had gained distance from the experiences and was able to name the underlying issues causing the challenges and come to appreciate them as part of the “process” of self-improvement.

This process is apparent when looking at her next photo (Figure 17, previous page), a selfie in which she is smiling big with her eyes squinched closed and making a “Go Bulls” hand sign. She describes the photo as being taken:

Right after I got my grades back. I ended up only, I got all A's except for an A minus in my chem class, so that was really nice, so I had a 3.96 overall GPA after this semester and I was like, yes, me. So this was me after checking all of my grades and I was really happy about it and I was at my friends apartment because I didn't have anywhere to stay over break so I just crashed at her place and we celebrated right after this picture, and this was right after I woke up. That was probably one of the highlights of my semester, was knowing how well I did with all the hardships that I faced during the semester. So yes, that's it. Go bulls.

Lindy celebrated her academic achievement with a selfie to mark her excitement. In retrospect, this moment took on extra meaning for her, as it represented a profound sense of accomplishment for overcoming several hurdles. Viewed together, both of Lindy’s selfies symbolize a range of emotions and make even more apparent the ways in which photos prompt

introspection and document growth. Neither of these photos were shared on social media; they were “private selfies,” taken only for herself and likely not meant to be shared, even within the “intimate social circle” in which private photos are typically circulated (Goffman, 1979, p. 10). Yet, Lindy shared them with me. Finkelstein (2007) suggests that the “use of the close up asserts the existence of a ruminative interior or self; the camera is the device giving insight into the secrets” (p. 4). Despite not intending to share the photo, Lindy performed for the camera, deploying a mix of signals that gave an impression as full of contradictions as she may have felt on the inside. Here the selfie operates as facework (Walsh & Baker, 2017); by sharing a previous performance of her emotional state, she is giving an impression of authenticity, a quality Lindy valued.

Selfies are typically studied in relation to their presence on social media platforms, linked to performances of interior selves in public spaces. However, the selfies included in this study were frequently not posted on social media, but were made to be kept private or circulated in restricted channels, such as sent via text message to specific, known contacts. The photos captured mundane daily events, such as Kirsten’s caffeine tower and pretty spots around campus, as well as heightened emotional states, such as Lindy’s contradictory selfies and Travis’ surgical gown. The images seem to have been taken without much attention to staging a socially acceptable image meant to be shared publicly, which makes them fascinating within the context of this study. By choosing to share these private photos with me, as representations of their newcomer experiences, my participants invited me behind the curtain into the back stage, where contrivances were noted as such. Yet, performing the back stage is still a performance; through their selfies my participants presented themselves as authentic and self-aware, suggesting these qualities are part of the idealized roles they seek to perform within the interview. Different from

the socially- and academically-focused photographs, which may have been produced for public audiences and presented selves that were socially acceptable in multiple settings, these selfies were presented to an audience of one... me. The result of this private viewing is that the selfies also became vehicles for talking about the emotional aspects of the newcomer experience.

Discussion

One of the benefits of photo-elicitation as an interview technique is the way it allows the participant to exercise a degree of control over their narratives and determine what aspects of their experience they desire to share with the researcher. Harper (2002) suggested photo-elicitation is particularly useful in identity and culture studies for its ability to draw out meanings behind symbolic representations of selves or a particular culture. In an effort to better understand the lived experiences of honors students during their transition to college, I found photo-elicitation to be a helpful strategy in eliciting the stories they wanted to tell. The findings in this chapter support Harper's claim, and extend his argument through the double production process of taking the image for one purpose and selecting it for another, which generated multiple explanations of cultural practices and display layered presentations of selves.

Participants in this study crafted a cultural narrative of the Judy Genshaft Honors College newcomer experience through their photographs, explanations, and interview performances. The cultural narrative produced is one focused on success. This is not surprising, as honors students are frequently discussed in terms of their achievements, accomplishments, high test scores, leadership, and abilities. In my own experience, and as an honors student myself, I can attest to students' desire to get it right on the first try and the ability to easily meet and often exceed stated objectives for most any learning exercise. Yet, this is not the success my participants performed. In terms of their college transition, success is enacted by quickly assessing the social

situation and adapting to local norms. The participants who described their transition to USF as easy often used local language, such as referring to their first-year honors course by an acronym, and casually dropped names of local restaurants and campus spots without explaining them to me. A successful transition as conveyed in these photo-elicitation interviews is linked with the ability to successfully identify and adapt to shared constructions of an ideal USF honors student through performances that support the idealized role. This is how Goffman (1959) describes socialization, emphasizing the link between individual performances and established values of the organization. The next chapter will focus more on socialization, and identify the values these participants attribute to the Judy Genshaft Honors College, as demonstrated in their performances within the interviews.

Using self-produced images to study first year student experiences adds nuance to understanding what success means to these students. While higher education is obsessed with a concept of Student Success that involves persistence, academic performance, graduation rates, and debt ratios, these students are just trying to fit in and make friends. Most of what is known about the first student experience comes from survey responses and anecdotal stories from front line professionals. The limited studies that sought to gain qualitative insights used photos, journals, and focus groups in real time, and participants might have filtered their experiences through the lens of the researcher's interests.

In contrast, this study employed a retrospective stance. While this was partly due to delays in my research timeline because IRB approval occurred during the Spring semester, I count it as a happy accident. Participants took photos during their Fall semester, oblivious to my study and uninhibited by my research agenda. Their photos represent versions of an experience that came under new light once reviewed, selected, and discussed for this project. Utilizing a

retrospective approach enabled access to a previously unobserved space by allowing me to view photos that captured spaces, experiences, and interactions as they were occurring *in situ*, experiences not typically available to researchers or student affairs professionals.

In addition, using images within the interview allowed participants more flexibility in representing their experiences. Pictures are worth a thousand words, after all, and can represent ideas and emotions that words can't always articulate, especially about something as complex as identity and self-concept. I frequently got the feeling that participants were engaging in ongoing sensemaking processes, crafting new meanings during our conversations and left the interview with new insights about their experiences as a result of having engaged in the photo selection and interview process. Multiple participants ended the interview with comments like, "This was fun!" and "Thanks for inviting me to do this. It was nice to look at these pictures again and talk about what they mean to me." Photo-elicitation interviews not only generate more, and more in-depth, content within the research interview, they also add a visual dimension that allows participants to share an experience they can't quite put into words.

This analysis provides unique insights into the ways in which college students understand and respond to perceived social expectations, including the expectations universities have for them. Viewing students' behavior as a performance, especially an idealized performance of success, throws much of what is previously known about students' college transition into question. If students know the university wants them to be successful, they may be inclined to offer positive assessments of their experience. This became apparent to me as I closed each interview with a summative question, "How would you describe your overall transition to USF?" Regardless of the details they shared, participants gave shallow affirmations along the lines of, "good," "a few ups and downs, but overall great," and "challenging at first, but great after that."

Success also means being a good participant and telling the university what they “want to hear” within the institutional context of a research interview.

The next chapter will dig deeper into this definition of success, exploring the ways in which participants identified and acknowledged existing organizational values and norms, as demonstrated through their performances.

Chapter Five:

Honors College Idioms and Identities

The previous chapter explicated ways in which first year honors students narrated images of their social, academic, and interior lives and constructed idealized roles centered on achieving success. Goffman (1959) suggests these idealized roles are part of a socialization process, in which performers learn to present impressions that “fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented...incorporat[ing] and exemplify[ing] the officially accredited values of the society” (p. 35). Success, from a socialization perspective, can be defined as fitting into the organization, or achieving acceptance by others as a full member.

Socialization is a learning process, where newcomers learn through direct and indirect ways how to embody the values of the organization and its members (Van Mannen & Shein, 1979). This learning process takes time, and is necessarily incomplete in the early days of the newcomer period. Goffman (1959) suggests newcomers will receive few cues and have to fill in the gaps on their own through ongoing interactions with others within the organization. Rather than receiving and delivering a script for their new role, newcomers must develop a basic “command of an idiom” (p. 74), or learn a common language they can deploy to signify their membership within the organization. Several researchers have built upon this view of socialization through attention to the specific strategies newcomers use to strategically present themselves in a favorable way. Strategic self-presentation refers to specific responses to social situations designed to enhance or minimize threats to the identities presented in social life (Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Attention to episodes of strategic self-presentation

can illuminate the nuanced ways in which newcomers develop and maintain their identities during organizational entry (Gross et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2002).

This chapter will investigate the common language used by participants within their interviews and identify the strategic self-presentations that newcomers in my study performed during their first semesters in college. The idioms and self-presentation strategies used by honors freshmen combine to create a distinct identity that is observable, adoptable, and made in and through communication with each other and the organization. The findings of this chapter answer the second research question: What/Is there an Honors College student identity?

A Common Language

At the close of each interview, I asked the participants, “What does it mean to you to be an Honors College student?” I had hoped to hear them articulate in their own words the qualities and characteristics they saw in themselves, in order to develop a sense of any similarities in their self-descriptions. Instead, participants interpreted my question more broadly and provided generic answers that pointed to characteristics of the college as a whole. Their answers demonstrate a shared, institutional definition of what it means to be an Honors College student, and revealed a common language picked up during their entrance to the college.

As a first step in analyzing their responses to this question, I used a word cloud generator to look for trends within their raw answers, which was not helpful, as “like,” “just,” “really,” “honors,” and “college” were the most common words after basic articles were removed. To refine the process further, I utilized an inductive coding process to apply common words to related concepts as they appeared within the responses. I then put the code list through the word cloud generator, which gave a much more helpful starting point for understanding the key words and ideas that make up the common language used by these Honors College newcomers. The

as specific courses or, or like early registration or money for specific study abroad programs, but the chance to represent USF as an Honors College student has been a really big part for me, and I don't know how you can put more focus on it, but kind've promoting the unsung experiences of representing USF, I think is a really big part of what you guys do, and what I'm able to accomplish because of that.

Mitch is the student who participated in the special research program that sent his discovery to University of Pittsburgh, and who presented himself as a very serious student during the description of his photos. Here, he rejects tangible definitions of "opportunities," which align more with the benefits the college advertises, in favor of a definition linked more closely to a sense of prestige or privilege. For him, the "opportunity" is to be affiliated with an elite group on campus and have doors opened to him because of his membership in the group. Mitch attributes the prestige to the college itself, or the administration – it's "what you guys do" – suggesting a sort of top-down orientation of opportunities, as though the college creates the opportunities for students to take up.

In contrast, Reggie represented a bottom-up perspective, focusing on the quantity of new experiences available to him and other students:

I feel like I've talked about, you know, myself and I am seeking opportunities. But one thing about the Honors College is that most of the students are doing the same thing.

They want, you know, they want as many opportunities as possible and they always seek new things to do.

Similar to Mitch, Reggie's conception of "opportunities" is tied to what he was looking for from his college experience. Reggie was homeschooled and had very few classroom or social interactions with others his own age, so attending USF meant the ability to engage with others in

a variety of new ideas and experiences. Yet, he observed a similar mindset amongst his peers, suggesting the desire to do as much as possible is a shared aspect of being an Honors College student, regardless of their backgrounds prior to enrolling at USF.

Whereas Reggie focused on the breadth of opportunities, Mary described the depth of engagement available to her as an honors student. She described being an honors student in this way:

I think it means, like, uh, taking advantage of all that, I guess, USF has to offer... you get a more enriching college experience when you are an honors student. So, to me, you know, whatever it is that you're getting from college, you know, experiences, connections, academics, global experiences. That is just going to be amplified like 10 times when you're an honors student... The Honors College gives you an opportunity to be that student times a thousand, so to me it means getting involved. But like actually like really getting involved.

Though Mary lists off several specific activities and outcomes (“experiences, connections, academics, global experiences”), she attributes those to college more generally; the opportunity that is linked with the Honors College is depth of engagement. Yet, she doesn’t describe how this occurs. It’s not clear from her description if she sees the college as responsible for creating opportunities for in-depth engagement, or if being “really involved” is a characteristic of honors students.

Cody listed specific activities, similar to those Mary outlined, but minimized their role or impact on his life as a student:

I feel like the honors program just gives me more opportunity to show who I am and kind of get more like... career exposure... because there’s a lot of different things you can do

with the Honors College, whether it's like studying abroad or like internships, getting more research opportunities, that kind of stuff. I feel like that's the opportunities that are presented, but I don't feel like it's game changing enough to where my life would be completely different if I didn't choose the Honors College.

Of all the students interviewed, Cody provided the most detailed description of the "opportunities" afforded to honors students, directly linking these activities with the Honors College. In reality, these high-impact practices are available to all students enrolled at the university, which is perhaps what he is alluding to by saying they aren't "game changing." Like Mary, Cody recognizes that these activities are available to everyone, yet they play a bigger role in the life of an honors student. It's unclear if it is because these specific activities are promoted by college leadership, or because honors students are more likely to engage in them, and more of them, than non-honors university students.

What is clear is that these students saw a direct association between the Honors College and "opportunities" as a broad concept, even if a well-defined and concise meaning of the term was elusive within the interviews. The term "opportunities" is intrinsically ambiguous and relies on additional context to add meaning; an opportunity is something that allows you to do something. The Honors College is the organization that introduces possibilities, allows students to do something. In the interviews, the focus is less on the specific possibilities and the somethings they can do, and more on the Honors College as the introducer and the Honors College students as recipients.

Different

The second major concept students used to describe what it means to be an honors student was marked by their frequent use of the term "different." The word "different" was used

twice to make distinctions between honors and non-honors aspects of college, which participants labeled “normal.” In those cases, participants described honors classes as different from “normal classes,” where the discussions covered topics “normal people would avoid.” Otherwise, the term “different” took on meanings such as “variety,” “not like myself,” and global.

Sharon initially described what it means to be an Honors College student by setting up a contrast to the “conversations normal people would avoid,” and then went on to describe those conversations in more detail:

Like, I remember in my AoK class, we would talk about a lot of different subjects, and sometimes it got into different subjects like suicide, and um, I remember there was another couple of touchy subjects that normally people would be like, “Oh we don’t need to talk about that.” But we were like, “Well, we want to talk about this, what it means for different people.”

In this excerpt, Sharon uses the term “different” three times. A first read suggests she’s talking about variety, discussing multiple topics within class and how they can have multiple meanings to individuals with varied life experiences. However, her example of suicide, and reference to “touchy subjects” suggests a definition of “different” meaning not mainstream, and even perhaps taboo due to their contentious nature. This meaning becomes clearer a little later on, when Sharon described interactions with students outside of class:

I’ve found it in other conversations as well. I don’t know if it’s because I’ve subconsciously realized they’re in honors and I’m thinking about the different perspectives and stuff, or if it just happens naturally with those certain people... going to get something to eat, or going to a sport game or something... I feel like it’s easy to talk about different things with them.

Here, Sharon was comparing interactions between friends who were in the Honors College and friends that were not. She marks the distinction between those groups by identifying the honors friends as those with whom she can talk about “different things.” She is describing the honors “difference” as being defined by deeper discussions about real life topics that matter and being able to identify other honors students as those willing to engage in those conversations.

Most of the contributions related to diversity came from descriptions of other students. Jeannette described what it means to be an honors student by sharing this observation of her peers:

I feel like to be an honors student, you have to have sort of maybe a broader sense of the world around you, and be a little bit more open minded. I notice this a lot with my friends that are in honors. People are willing to accept things from different places around the world and different ideas from different cultures and everything.

Jeannette links being in the Honors College with being open minded to global perspectives, willing to consider alternate ways of thinking and living. Just after this, she went on to express her gratitude that the Honors College funds study abroad, then shared a summarizing thought that to be an honors student is to be a global citizen. For her, the concept of global citizenship encapsulates the value of difference as it relates to the idealized honors student role.

For others, difference is a much broader concept that goes beyond global perspectives to also include the sheer variety of interests and involvement amongst honors students. Amanda described honors students as being “involved in all different aspects of the campus” and noted that what stood out to her about the Honors College is “the diversity in all of the students there with different majors and students of different backgrounds.” She uses the term “different” to denote students who are not like her, in terms of major, cultural backgrounds, and student

organization involvement, but is most impressed by the variety, how many points of difference there are.

Monica summarizes this idea in her assertion that “no one honors college student is the same,” suggesting a meaning of “different” that aligns with the concept of individuality, which somewhat counterintuitive. Her perspective was shaped by advice she received when she applied to be an honors Peer Mentor:

They were like, “Don’t try to be like a cookie cutter mold. People react to people differently. Not every Peer Mentor is going to be the same. Just because you see one person succeeding doesn’t mean you have to be like that person to succeed. You can do your own thing, choose your own path, be your own person.” So I think the Honors College is just like chasing your own unique passions.

For Monica, fitting into the role of honors student meant embracing her individuality, a tension she didn’t address, perhaps due the source of the message. The “they” she mentions in the beginning of the excerpt are likely Peer Mentor Leaders, upper-level honors students that had worked as Peer Mentors the previous year and would serve as guides and role models for the new group of Peer Mentors. These were presumably successful students who had it all figured out and were able to speak with authority on what it means to be an honors student. By quoting them, Monica supports her claim that individuality is an important aspect of the diversity valued by the Honors College.

Whereas the analysis of participant’s use of “opportunities” provided little insight into detailed meanings, a focus on their use of “different” provided almost as many meanings as uses of the term. “Different” is an umbrella term that can house multiple concepts about what it means to be an honors student, while linking those disparate ideas together into one common

value. These excerpts make evident the numerous ways these students identified embracing difference as a concept central to membership in the Honors College.

Community

The concept of community was another salient meaning that participants in this study associated with the Honors College. A closer look at their descriptions of “community” reveals two additional sub-concepts that appeared as minor themes in the word cloud: belonging and support. These students shared a clear understanding that being a member of the Honors College meant belonging to a group that was caring and supportive.

For Cody, being part of the Honors College meant being able to identify himself with the larger group as a way to position himself within the university, especially as a new student working to establish his social network.

It’s a lot more of like a more tightly knit community, too. It offers a sense of community, because people, they identify with the Honors College. Like you can, there’s a lot of students, especially early in the semester, who had the Honors College t-shirts... and being able to kind of like, “Hey, you’re in the Honors College? I’m in the Honors College, too. Let’s hang out.”

Cody describes a sense of belonging based on affiliation, conveying the assumption that individuals within the group will have similar interests that could lead to close relationships, i.e., being tightly knit. For him, being part of something bigger than himself made the university seem smaller, as he could more easily identify others he assumed would share his interests and want to be friends.

Reggie shared Cody’s view, using the same term to describe the relational closeness within the community, and added more explanation about what those shared interests might be:

I feel like being an Honors College student is being a member of a tight knit community. You know, Honors College students and faculty. And it's a high achieving community as well because... most of the students are doing the same thing. They want, you know, they want as many opportunities as possible.

The last part of this excerpt appeared in the previous section on opportunities. The expanded passage shows how the shared behavior of seeking opportunities and having high standards for themselves serves as a foundation for building a sense of belonging within the community of honors students. Because other students are doing what he is doing, Reggie links these behaviors with what it means to be an honors student.

Shalini described the Honors College community in terms of a support system, emphasizing that whatever you're dealing with, "you still have people who will support you, like you're not just going it alone." Lindy extended this concept of a support system in describing the Honors College as a "team player game," and contrasted her experience with honors students to pre-med students who weren't in the College:

I notice that within the premed honors students, that none of us are gunners. We want to build each other up, and I notice outside of the Honors College there are a lot of gunners. So being an Honors College student is working for yourself and others.

Lindy's term "gunners" refers to overly competitive students who prioritize getting ahead over cultivating strong friendships, and provides a stark contrast to the ideal of being surrounded by students with similar goals who provide a sense of support while working towards a shared goal. Her use of a team metaphor supports an understanding of an honors community that provides support and encouragement as everyone works together towards a common goal. Their peers

could empathize with their struggles and encourage them, and they in turn could encourage others to achieve their goals.

While the participants conveyed more consistency in their descriptions of the Honors College as a community, using similar terms such as “tight-knit” and focusing on themes of belonging and support, their responses to the bigger question of what it means to be an Honors College student remain shallow and lack real substance. These responses stand in contrast to other portions of the interview which elicited rich details grounded in personal experiences, such as this unprompted contribution from Michael:

And I think one other thing actually I want to mention is like, when you're kinda like, just joking or whatever, I found that when I'm like with this group of people, like, honors students I guess, like, so much intelligence with the jokes, per se. Like it's not just stupid stuff, like fart jokes and stuff, it's actually like well-constructed comedy. And even when you're kinda getting made fun of, like what makes a joke good is that, there's a little bit of truth in it, it kind've hurts a little bit. But the way they would say it, it's just so, I don't know, so like welcoming I guess, like it wasn't- it was bullying, but it wasn't bullying, you know. It was like, it made you feel welcomed.

When Michael uses the term “welcomed,” he's talking about feeling a sense of belonging as a result of being teased by friends, friends who are smart enough, like him, to both construct and understand intelligent humor. In this excerpt, Michael described specific communicative acts that create the belonging and support other students could only name as being what makes community.

Up to this point, I have been making a case for interviews as a stage, where my participants were performing the role I am interested in studying. To follow Goffman's (1959)

dramaturgical metaphor - asking the explicit question of, “What does it mean to be an Honors College student?” is the equivalent of a theatre-goer standing up mid-performance and asking the performers, “Hey, what are you doing up there?” I had hoped my question would prompt deep reflection and vulnerable contributions. Instead, I disrupted the performance, so they threw their lines at me. In response to my question, I got buzzwords and jargon, basic idioms that are associated with the Honors College.

Rather than seeing this as a failure, I see it as revealing. These students’ use of the idioms demonstrates the cues they adopted as the “officially accredited values” (Goffman, 1959, p. 35) of the Honors College. Whatever their personal experience has been, they know that the Honors College means opportunity, difference, community, belonging, engagement, and so on. My question was perceived as a test, or a threat to their idealized presentations. Their responses operate as facework, where they gave all the right answers to legitimize their status as members of the college. These types of strategic self-presentations were not limited to only the interview introductions, however. The next section present episodes of strategic self-presentation that add to an understanding of an Honors College student identity.

Strategic Self-Presentations

While in the transcription and initial coding phases of analysis, I frequently came across episodes that prompted memories of conversations and interactions I had observed in my time working with honors students. Participants in this study demonstrated some of the same behaviors I had witnessed in non-research contexts, including bragging about their accomplishments and engaging in a type of friendly competition in which they try to outdo each other with academic achievements. This resonance reinforced these episodes of strategic self-presentation as not just reflective of, but constitutive of an Honors College student identity. The

following sections will detail specific self-presentation strategies used in honors students' introductions to me within the interview and those I have observed in non-research settings.

Tell Me About Yourself

Research interviews are a particular type of talk designed around the task of information exchange (Sarangi, 2003). Participants have access to a particular body of knowledge or experience that is of interest to the researcher, who designs a series of questions meant to elicit that information. Yet, there may exist a tension between researcher and participant related to determining who is the expert (Roulston, 2018). Though researchers may defer to the participants as “the knowing subject,” participants want to appear credible, potentially repackaging their lived experiences into rational, believable accounts (Sarangi, 2003). The opening moments of the interview are an ideal time to investigate the ways in which participants present themselves, especially how they position their experiences as relevant to the topic being studied.

I began my interviews by introducing myself, as both administrator and researcher, then briefly described my study. I turned the floor over to the participant with a two-part prompt: tell me a little about yourself and how you came to USF. This broad invitation could be interpreted in multiple ways to produce a variety of introductions, yet when comparing their responses, some surprising similarities emerged.

Almost every participant began their introduction with a reference to their hometown, and often included their major, as well. Those details were not particularly relevant to this study, and certainly weren't requested in the prompt. This may be a common way for new students to introduce themselves as they meet people on campus and seek to form connections and friendships. Interviews can be unfamiliar communication settings and somewhat daunting to

participants, so this type of introduction was a go-to way for new college students to quickly establish themselves and lead in to more relevant information.

While they varied in length, many of the introductions referenced which high school they attended, particularly if they were affiliated with International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, what they had accomplished in their first year of college, and frequently their long-term career goals, as was the case with Jeannette:

Okay, so my name is Jeannette, and I'm from Lakeland, Florida, so I'm not really that far away from USF at all, and I graduated from IB at Bartow High School. And, so I only really wanted to go to a college in Florida...because of Bright Futures, like I didn't – well, I want to go to doctorate school, so I didn't want to take out a loan and Bright Futures helps with that.

In her introduction, Jeannette specifically mentions graduating from the IB program at her high school, implying she sees this as a relevant detail to understanding who she is. Then, she uses her long-term goals of pursuing a graduate degree and use Bright Futures, a state-sponsored lottery scholarship, to defend her decision to stay in state. These details give an impression that she is academically accomplished and capable, as well as pragmatic and able to plan ahead, validating her choice to attend USF.

Tony also mentioned scholarships in his introduction and explanation of how he came to the University of South Florida:

Yeah, okay, so my name is Tony, obviously. I'm originally from Maryland. I decided to come to USF, mainly just because, like I've always been going to Tampa, kind of like as a vacation spot... and USF gave me like a bunch of pretty good scholarships, and I also got the Genshaft Global Presidential one, so I could just travel abroad, too, which was

really nice. And it was also their seven year BS to MD program, which I was pretty excited about.

While he starts off fairly nonchalantly in describing how he came to USF, simply enjoying the area, Tony focused on scholarships and special programs, including two very competitive and somewhat elite programs. Both the Genshaft Global Presidential Scholarship (a \$10,000 declining balance award funding study abroad) and the accelerated BS/MD program with Morsani College of Medicine require first year students to present an SAT score of at least 1500, which is in the 99% percentile. Typically, less than 80 students qualify for these programs each year, indicating Tony is truly in the top of the class. His inclusion of these details positions him right away as a particular type of honors student – a very high achiever.

Similarly, Monica's introduction positions her immediately as an accomplished student and engaged student leader:

Well, I'm Monica, and am, like you said, now a second-year student. I came from Strawberry Crest High School. I did the International Baccalaureate program, so that immediately put me into place for the Honors College. I'm a double major in business analytics and communication, and I'm also doing a concentration in cyber security for my business major. And actually now, after going through the Honors College, I'm a Peer Mentor for Honors Foundations for the Fall, and I just initiated to become a brother for the Delta Sigma Pi business fraternity on campus.

Monica's introduction reads like a resume, perhaps something she has practiced in her business fraternity. Interestingly, she is the only participant who identified herself as a second-year student, as all the others labeled themselves as first-year students, in line with the focus of this study. This interview occurred at the end of May, just a few weeks after the end of her first year,

yet Monica was already looking ahead and positioning herself according to her future. Her interview gives an impression of having it all together; she appears confident and focused on what she wants to achieve while in school.

These three interviews, and many others that featured similar presentations of achievement, planning, and confidence demonstrate new students' efforts to enhance their image and validate themselves as participants in my study. One participant even told me, "You picked a good person for your research. I have my bullet journal and all my notes right here in case you need to know something." They work to give an impression of being competent and knowledgeable about my topic by drawing on external measures of status, including IB programs and involvement on campus, to provide rational accounts of their experience.

Reflections on Introductions

In my time working as an advisor for honors students I have observed many interactions where students employed similar positioning strategies with each other. There is often a spirit of friendly competition underlying honors students' interactions, where they employ self-presentation strategies to enhance their image with each other and justify their presence within the college.

The advising area of the Honors College building is structured like a fishbowl, where advisor offices open up to a lobby space, and I would frequently overhear lobby chatter while working in my office. The conversations usually went something like this:

Student 1: Hey, didn't you go to [insert high school]?

Student 2: Yeah, I thought I recognized you. We had AP English together.

Student 1: Yeah. So what did you get on the exam?

Student 2: I got a 4. You?

Student 1: Oh, that's awesome. Yeah, I got a 5.

This type of interaction occurred all the time, with the specific circumstances rotating from AP exams to current course grades to professional entrance exam scores. Honors students I've observed have no shame about openly asking each other how they have performed and sharing their own achievements. But this is not idle curiosity. These types of interactions allow students to size each other up, and create an opening to perform for each other.

Tony's mention of the accelerated medical program in his interview reminded me of how often I've heard that type of introduction among students. Not only is the program academically rigorous to join, but it is academically rigorous to continue, as students must take a heavy math and science course load and maintain a high GPA while preparing to take the medical school entrance exam a full year earlier than scheduled. Aligning oneself with this program is a status marker; students can instantly present themselves as academically superior without actually detailing their grades and scores. The program name speaks on their behalf (Jones & Pittman, 1982), such as the way it is used in this scenario:

Student 1: Hey, nice to meet you. So, what are you studying?

Student 2: I'm in biomed. Yeah, 7 year.

Student 1: Oh, wow.

Student 2: Yeah, it's pretty tough.

Student 2's use of "biomed" as an abbreviation for the full name of the major, Biomedical Sciences, and then attaching the abbreviated "7 year," indicates an assumption that everyone knows this major and program so a full explanation isn't necessary. Student 2 responds with an obligatory and appropriate indication of being impressed, and Student 1 downplays it with a small affirmation, "yeah," effectively employing a self-presentation strategy designed to enhance

their image by maximizing their position through affiliation with a well-known, and well-respected program.

These types of competitive interactions in which students try to one-up each other through references to their achievements and abilities are not new to me. However, revisiting them through the lens of strategic self-introductions provides new insights into the roles these interactions play within the larger communicative context of the Honors College and the individual context of honors students. Honors students employ strategic self-presentations to enhance their images and earn approval from each other, justifying their presence within the college. The constant comparisons don't seem to create a hierarchy within the college. Instead, the comparisons are a language that demonstrate insider status.

Another Common Language

Though psychologists focus on the goals of strategic self-performances as they relate to the individual's self-concept and internalization of messages (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Tice, 1992), the presentations themselves are delivered through language. Honors students employ strategic self-presentation through specific terms and constructs, which creates a common language they can identify and adopt to demonstrate their insider status and prove their right to belong as a member of the group and communicate affiliation.

One construct honors students rely on in their self-presentations is standardized test scores. Nolan slipped in some unnecessary details about his academic ability while describing his daily routine:

And then after that, I would go to my Comp 2 class, and that class was super easy for me, 'cause I'm just like a pretty good writer. Like I already took AP Lang and Lit, I just made 3's on both so I didn't get the credit for Comp 2.

Nolan is referring to Advanced Placement English classes he took in high school, which award college credit for earning certain scores on end of year exams. Students receiving a score of 3 on either AP Language or AP Literature can earn credit for ENC 1101 Composition I, whereas those who achieve a score of 4 or 5 on either exam will earn credit for both ENC 1101 and ENC 1102. It's quite common for honors students to earn higher scores and bypass these two classes in their first year. Nolan qualifies the fact that he's taking Composition II, something many other honors students don't do, by both explaining that he took both AP classes but "just made 3's" and describing the course as "super easy" since he's such a good writer. Bourgoin and Harvey (2018) identified learning-credibility tension, "a discrepancy between a newcomer position that requires professionals to learn, and a role-based image that requires credibility" (p. 1611) as an underlying factor behind many interactional contexts for newcomers. Nolan's excerpt demonstrates an effort to negotiate his place in the new organization, working to establish credibility and justify his presence in the current location while at the same time learning where they fit within new academic and social contexts. He draws on his past academic successes and rates his Composition course as easy, relying on the language of AP scores and academic achievement to enhance his image.

While many of the self-enhancing strategies include achievement-based language, participants also engaged in less overt self-presentation strategies. Amanda described encountering trouble transitioning from the format of high school classes to college course structures:

As time progressed, and I realized that, you know, no one's policing me on this, I can basically just skip class. And I was very thankful that I was, you know, smart enough and I studied enough to pass, even though I did skip those classes. I realized it just causes me

more stress and anxiety because I have to worry later about catching up or taking notes in the middle of the semester.

In this excerpt, Amanda describes managing the freedom and responsibility present in the college environment, especially related to class attendance. She presents herself as “smart enough” to skip class and still pass the course. Indeed, she mentions taking notes as a catch-up strategy, rather than a consistent part of her study routine, further qualifying her claim of being smart. Rather than relying on external qualifiers of achievement, Amanda identifies activities she only needed to utilize in an academic emergency (studying, taking notes), thus enhancing her academic abilities.

In these two excerpts, and several others, strategic self-presentations were closely linked with academic ability, and contributed to the construction of an Honors College student identity. Test scores and claims of not needing to study are the language of the culture; employing these terms in relation to their entrance to college allows them to talk their honors student identity into being and prove their membership in the community. This language of performance, ability, and achievement serves to bind the member of the group together and comes to define what it means to be an Honors College student. The result is a tangible, recognizable identity that can be attributed to others, as well as used as a point of comparison to identify out-of-group members, as Michael demonstrated in his retelling of an interaction with non-honors students he met through an ultimate frisbee intramural team that demonstrates this elitism:

I met a lot of characters that just like, it's so weird, actually, to like, see, like, uh. I think one thing that was super interesting to me for meeting new people is that, like, their coursework, I guess. You know, we're all STEM majors, my friends and I, so we're all taking crazy classes. Like kids are taking thermodynamics and stuff their freshman year.

And then I met another kids on the ultimate frisbee team and he's like, "Yeah, dude, I'm getting like straight C's right now." I'm like, "What? What are you doing, science or something?" He's like, "No, I'm just doing business" Like what is that? That's weird to me, 'cause I didn't see that at all from my direct friend group, 'cause we're all like overachievers, right?

Michael begins this story by calling his intramural friends "characters," positioning them in a different category as his direct friend group right away. The reason for the distinction is made apparent in the telling of the interaction about grades and majors. Michael was surprised at that the student was earning poor grades in a major he perceived as being less challenging than science, which reveals assumptions he had brought into the interaction. Michael pursues a STEM major, similar to all of his "overachiever" friends in the Honors Living Learning Community. His assessment that struggling in a business major is "weird" demonstrates how self-presentations related to academic achievement can manifest language of elitism within the Honors College.

In my experience, this major-based elitism is a pervasive talking point among honors students. Those who pursue science and engineering majors frequently look down on other honors students studying the humanities, business, or education. I have not only overheard these types of conversations coming from science students, but I've also frequently heard from students studying non-science areas that they feel left out or like outliers within the college. This major-based elitism is both created in the individual episodes of self-enhancement and self-entitlements shared in honors-to-honors interactions, as well as reinforced in honors-to-non-honors interactions, as Michael demonstrated.

These sorts of interactions demonstrate ways in which honors students size each other up to find their place within the larger group. Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) suggest that “as a byproduct of socialization, people mindlessly present themselves in situations as they have in the past.” At the same time, they argue, new situations or environments may prompt a more active process where newcomers work at fostering a favorable impression among others. Their arguments set up a complex dynamic where newcomers are in constant communication to learn the expectations by practicing them in each interaction. In her study of strategic self-presentation among college freshmen, Tomlinson (2002) identified students’ efforts at learning what sorts of impressions were favorable among their new peers, suggesting that these types of interactions serve as socialization tactics whereby newcomers learn the social expectations and hierarchies present within the organization. Strategic self-presentations focused on academic achievement constitute a culture of competition and academic achievement within the Honors College, which create micro-contexts for establishing an Honors College student identity through self-enhancement and self-promotion (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981).

Discussion

This chapter identified the ways in which honors students constructed an identifiable Honors College student identity through idioms, common descriptions of what it means to be an honors student, and in the language they used to strategically present themselves, both to me and each other. They identified the official language of the college, buzzwords used by the college administration which held shallow meanings to them, as well as the unofficial language of the Honors College students, references to academic achievement and ability used to determine in-group and out-group status. In his description of performances of selves, Goffman (1959) suggests that:

to be a given kind of person, then is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto...A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated" (p. 75).

Thus, to be an Honors College student is to perform as Honors College students do, to use the common language, to wear the t-shirts, and to play the parts in conversation with others.

Newcomers to the organization pick up on both the formal and informal messages presented to them during their entrance to the organization (Jablin, 1984), and adopt them into their own ways of being through the socialization process.

The official descriptions of the Honors College come in the form of recruitment emails, website text, stump speeches given at recruitment events, and welcome messages shared at orientation and convocation programs, like the one I provided in the introduction to this dissertation. The ways in which we, college administrators, staff, and faculty, describe ourselves as an organization has lasting implications on how our new students understand the role they are to perform. This is obvious in the ways they parrot back to us the key values of membership in the organization, down to quoting specific terms from our messaging, such as "high-achieving," "diverse," and "tight-knit community." The students in this study were able to identify common aspects of an honors student identity by describing access to opportunities, different points of view, and community, yet their definitions of each of these concepts was lacking. These are the "cues" Goffman (1959) mentioned, but the new students I interviewed had not yet had sufficient time to practice the cues enough to fill in the gaps and strengthen their performances. This point is made even more salient when considering that this cohort of students left school during Spring

Break of their freshman year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and had not returned by the time of our interviews later that summer.

In addition, newcomers also learn their roles from observing each other. Each student can interpret and perform the cues differently, as seen in the ways some participants described diversity as exposure to multiple viewpoints and interacting with people and ideas not like themselves, while others felt being an honors student meant being separate from the rest of the university. They recognize each other's performances as such, and mimic what seems to work as they learn how to fit in. Though the Honors Living Learning Community tends to be a fairly homogenous group of first-year students, most honors courses are open to students of all years, so newcomers have the ability to observe seasoned peers as role models of the idealized role, as well. The college even features a formalized mentoring program where new students take an Honors Foundations course taught by upper-level honors students who have been trained by a college staff member to follow a common curriculum. Honors College newcomers have multiple opportunities to observe and interact with other members of the college, practicing their performances and crafting their unique version of the Honors College Student identity.

The language of strategic self-presentations focused on academic achievements and abilities is not surprising. By setting high standards for admission, and advertising our application process as competitive, we essentially tell prospective students that they have to be good enough to get in. These are our own strategic presentations; we want to give the impression of being desirable and highly sought out to build interest so they will apply to our program. As a result, we set them up to constantly prove to each other, and to us, that they have a right to be here. For new college students, that means relying on high school accomplishments, such as participation in IB programs, since they have not yet established successes during their first year

of college. So, what does it mean to be an Honors College student? Well, whatever the Honors College says it does. The ways in which the college speaks about itself, explicitly and implicitly, has lasting implications for how students learn to perform once enrolled in the college.

While not surprising, it did take me multiple passes through the data and analysis in this chapter to come to these explanations. In the previous chapter, I noted the participants' lack of discussion of academic achievements because in my first several read throughs of the data, I failed to notice it. Because I also speak the "honors college student language" of academic achievements and abilities, the excerpts and episodes presented in this chapter washed right over me as commonplace and un-noteworthy. Yet, when viewed through the lens of strategic self-presentation, they took on new meaning and gave additional insight into not only how students create meaningful attachments to the organization, but also my implicit role in it. This was a challenging chapter to write, as I constantly had to check my own assumptions of what was going on and interrogate the meanings I attached to my participants' narratives.

The concept of strategic self-presentation offers a dynamic frame through which to view formal and informal interactions occurring throughout the organizational socialization process. In their study of strategic self-presentation strategies used by women in STEM fields, Garr-Schultz and Gardner (2018) demonstrated the ways in which people desire to present different impressions based on the audience with whom they are interacting and will use different strategies to emphasize particular attributes relevant to their audience. Similar to the women in Garr-Schultz and Gardner's study, honors freshman in this study demonstrated different presentation strategies in their answers to my direct question from those that were conveyed in narrative episodes of their first-year experiences. In both types of interactions, honors students

worked to create favorable impressions of being competent and capable students in order to meet the organizational expectations.

In addition, the language generated through these episodes of self-presentation create a cultural context in which an Honors College student identity is situated. When new honors students use the language of academic achievement to present themselves to others, they are literally speaking their identity as an Honors College student into being. However, the Honors College student identity is a context-specific identity. In other words, an Honors College student needs another Honors College student to acknowledge and accept the self-presentation as such. Otherwise, the individual risks their self-presentation being received as obnoxious or arrogant. Rather than being an insider language used to identify and support each other, it's annoying self-promotion. Sharon alluded to this when describing topics "normal people" wouldn't talk about. An Honors College student identity is manifested through their self-presentation strategies with and for each other, but can also be played down in interactions with non-honors students when honors students want to engage with others throughout the university without coming off as arrogant.

The findings of this chapter extend theories of strategic self-presentation by revealing the specific language new honors students use to create favorable impressions and validate their membership within the group. Their use of key concepts associated with the Honors College organization and espoused by those in official roles demonstrate their acknowledgement of the central values of the organization. They can be "good little honors students" who are able to give the right answer on the test. In addition, they employ strategic self-presentations that incorporate academic achievements and emphasize their abilities to enhance their competence and justify their presence within the college. Thus, the language of test scores and buzzwords, major-based

elitism and prestigious academic programs, becomes the language newcomers use to cultivate an identity as an Honors College student.

Chapter Six:

Resiliencies and Resources

The previous two chapters showed how new honors students narrated their entry to college through a success framework, as exhibited by performances of their idealized roles for themselves, as well as by performing in ways that matched the formal and informal values of the Judy Genshaft Honors College. Most of the participants in this study summarized their transition to college as “great”, “easy”, or “rocky at first, but generally good”. Yet, even with these generally positive assessments, counter narratives hinted at some of those “rocky” challenges that triggered a disruption in their stream of experience. Further, a few participants’ stories have not yet been discussed, as they didn’t fit within the dominant narratives of the rest of the group. This chapter will explore those narratives in greater depth, focusing on how new honors students experience and reconcile disruptions in their transition to college, attending to the third research question for this project: What types of disruptions do Honors College students experience during their first semester transition to college and what communicative strategies do they use to cope with the disruptions?

In order to do so, I must shift analytical frameworks. Though Goffman (1959) offers a framework for understanding disruptions to presentations of selves as face threats, his is an interactional one that focuses on how performers react and respond in the moment when their performance is questioned by a fellow performer or audience member. When discussing disruptions in their lives, my participants gave a sense of internal meaning making practices more closely aligned with sensemaking processes in which they “edit[ed] continuity into discrete

categories, observations into interpretations, experience into bounded events, and perceptions into preexisting plans and frameworks” (Weick, 1995, p. 108). Their descriptions of the challenges they encountered included assessments, judgements, and explanations that framed obstacles as “part of the process” of starting college, as one participant put it, demonstrated how they worked to create a sense of normalcy despite enduring many changes at once.

Buzzanell’s (2017) Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR) explains ways in which people communicatively construct a sense of normalcy through disruption by engaging in one or more of the following processes: crafting normalcy, foregrounding positive action and backgrounding negative emotion, utilizing identity anchors, maintaining or utilizing communication networks, and putting alternative logics to work. These processes emphasize the discourses and narratives people use to “integrate new realities into their everyday lives” (Buzzanell 2010, p. 9), and maintain a sense of self that is recognizable and consistent with past conceptions of self. In other words, resilience processes allow people to make sense of a particular experience in a way that fits with the larger stream of experiences making up their lives.

CTR has primarily been used to describe the ways in which people create a sense of normalcy through major disaster or crisis events (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015) or disruptive family events, such as job loss (Beck, 2016), or military deployment (Villagran et al., 2013). However, transitioning to college can also be quite disruptive, requiring new college students to reconcile unmet expectations and unexpected realities with their developing sense of selves (Nelson, 2020). Lindy described her entry to college as quite disorienting, detailing the areas of life that had been impacted:

You're thrown into a different environment, like entirely. You're away from home, you're away from friends, you're away from people that you know. And then on top of that, you're taking very rigorous courses. And on top of that, you're basically thrown into a pool without knowing how to swim, but that's what you have to do- to know how to swim.

Her concluding statement, comparing entering college to being thrown into a pool, conveys her sense of surprise in a tangible way. In the same way that someone pushed into a pool would immediately begin to swim or thrash about to avoid drowning, the new college students in my study engaged in a series of communicative processes to constitute a new normal that allowed them to move forward in their new environment and achieve the success they were used to experiencing.

For some, resilience processes began prior to moving onto campus or the first day of class. Jeannette voiced concern about being paired with a random roommate and shared ways that she prepared for their first meeting:

At first I thought, you know, I would have this set sort of like, a set of rules I guess, like you know, no lights on past this time because I tend to fall asleep early. You know, like no loud music, or stuff like that. But I didn't really have to do that. We got along so well that none of those rules really needed to be implemented. We do have two fridges instead of one fridge. Because we, well, I guess she wanted, I was suggesting to do one fridge and she wanted to do two fridges. So I guess that we didn't steal each other's food.

[laughs] But that, you know, that wasn't an issue, either. Yeah, I had rules and ideas in mind, but I never had to implement any of them.

Jeannette anticipated having to deal with roommate conflicts, based on stories she had heard about “college roommate horror stories”, and prepared ahead of time. By creating a set of rules, she worked to proactively minimize the potential negative impact of living with a stranger. Preparing for hardship by shoring up resources, whether material or emotional, is one way people create short term resiliency when anticipating a change (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012).

Participants in my study described specific disruptions that occurred in the days and weeks after the first day of class, prompting sensemaking about the event that resulted in communicative processes aligned with the Communication Theory of Resilience, including crafting normalcy and affirming identity anchors, but primarily through applying alternative logics to reframe a negative situation into a more positive one. In addition, several participants described disruptions they experienced after adjusting to their new normal, requiring additional sensemaking processes to maintain the status quo of their new college lives. The following sections will explore these processes in detail.

Disruptions Upon Arrival

Affirming Identity Anchors

As Lindy described, moving to college entailed major changes in most every aspect of life. One of the ways in which participants in this study endured those changes was by affirming identity anchors to retain a firm sense of self while adapting to the new environment. For some, that meant holding on to aspects of their high school lives to retain a sense of consistency between their past and present selves. This became apparent in my conversation with Angela, who described several pictures that depicted her campus involvement by linking college activities to her previous interests. While talking about an image of her section of the Herd of Thunder Marching Band, she said, “I love it so much. I had done marching band throughout high

school, so I knew I wanted to do it in college”. Later, we looked at a photo of her standing in front of the College of Education building, holding a USF banner, and she explained how she came to choose her major:

Since I was like in elementary school, I have always loved my teachers and I loved the impact that they had on my life. So I had always like grown up wanting to do something similar. So education like made most sense and fit me and my personality.

Finally, she talked about a student organization she joined during her first semester that proved to be a meaningful point of connection for her:

Throughout high school I did Interact, which is sort of the high school version of Rotaract, so going into the school year I knew that I wanted to join, so it was something that I was like looking forward to, but I didn't know anyone in the group, so getting to that first meeting and meeting people who had the same motivation as me to get out and serve was really great throughout the school year and then once or twice a week we would have like a separate community to bond with throughout the year.

When faced with the uncertainty of a changing physical and social environment, Angela relied on what she knew. While the whole of USF may be unknown to her, she knew what to expect from marching band and Rotaract, and felt confident in those spaces, despite not knowing anyone ahead of time. She narrated her entry to college as a relatively smooth experience, perhaps because she was able to enact familiar routines in this new environment by linking her past successes and present realities and thus reduce the amount of uncertainty she faced when moving to USF.

Similarly, Aarna described overcoming stress in college by using a coping strategy she had learned in high school:

So in the picture I'm holding my computer and like that's my laptop case. So I chose this because the laptop case, it's like a collage of like a bunch of different movies that I saw and like some of my favorite ones. And I picked this because movies have been like a big part of my life and even when I was in high school and like if I was ever like struggling with like class and like managing school and extracurriculars and all that I always like rely on movies to like me make myself feel better and like kind of de-stress and everything. So even like when I came to college, if I ever needed like comfort, I would watch movies for that.

Whereas Angela engaged in college activities similar to those that were part of her high school life to maintain a sense of self that remained consistent, Aarna continued behaviors and rituals that helped her manage stressful situations. Further, she not only continued to watch movies to de-stress in college, but used her laptop case as a visual reminder of her tried and true comfort strategy. The laptop case becomes a symbolic representation of her resilience processes, a reminder that she's made it through hard times before and she can do so again, no matter where life takes her. For both of these participants, bringing past successes into their present circumstances allowed them to create a sense of consistency in their new environments by finding or making points of recognition from their old lives.

For one of the participants, spirituality played a big role in communicating resilience, as she described leaning on this core part of her identity to manage challenges she faced upon entry to college. Gamila talked about how her course schedule caused a great deal of stress, since she had early morning and late afternoon classes with large gaps of time in between, as well as Saturday exams. She was homesick, but this schedule made it hard to drive across the state to the Miami area to visit her family and make it back by early Monday morning to attend class. At one

low point, she thought about dropping out of USF and enrolling in a college closer to home, but she talked herself out of it. She shared this story while describing a photo of a sunset:

So a thing about me is I use, like, the environment around me and, like, objects as symbolic representations of things that could happen to me potentially. It's kind of weird, but, it's just like a sign of hope. So like the really pretty sunset that, it was like right above Tampa at the time. So I was like, you know what? Maybe if I do stay, it's like probably like, what's it called, like a bright, pretty future ahead, you know?

Gamila described another moment where she employed this type of meaning making, where she looked for answers through symbols in her environment, later during the interview. In that except, she described driving somewhere with a friend who worked at a local grocery store and often talked about quitting her job. During the drive, they saw several signs for the store chain, which Gamila interpreted as a sign that her friend should keep her job. In addition to affirming her meaning making framework to process her own personal challenges, she employed this process to help her friends through theirs, further centering this aspect of her identity throughout her tumultuous transition into college.

Employing Alternative Logics

The most commonly utilized resilience process for honors students in this study was employing alternative logics. Some students reframed a negative experience into a positive outcome by finding a lesson or purpose, and others simply redefined an experience as a positive one by minimizing the challenging aspects. Alternative logics also helped students to reclaim agency, where they took ownership over aspects of their college lives in which they actually had little choice.

Mary described several challenging facets of her acclimation to USF, but the common honors course, Acquisition of Knowledge (AoK), was a particular thorn, as she described in this excerpt:

OK, I think that AoK was definitely a good learning experience and I'm glad I took it, but, the experience was not my favorite experience. I thought that it was. I. Like, I'm really. I think that it's an important class and I think that if I were to go back in time, I wouldn't change it. But I think that it was just a lot of reading and so at some point it became kind of frustrating because my professor... He played our discrete seminar sessions mostly based off of Plato and Plato's *Republic*, which I thought was interesting, but at a certain point, it kind of got to be a little too much. I mean, obviously that's interesting to some people, but I kinda would've like preferred if all the reading that I was doing, all the extra work I was doing, wasn't related to that, but. Yeah, I, I did not enjoy AoK, to put it bluntly, but I am glad that I took it because it helped me to organize my time and get used to having a lot of assignments to juggle. If that makes sense.

Mary begins with a positive assessment of the experience, affirming her gratitude at having taken the class, but then shifts to a more negative assessment. She describes her dislike of the course material and the amount of reading, before finally explicitly stating her dislike of the course. However, she turns again to the positive, employing an alternative logic to find a beneficial purpose for the course, that of helping her practice time management. This “feedback sandwich”, where she articulates a positive, followed by a negative, then concludes with another positive is notable because her positive and negative assessments seem to contradict each other. Yet, from a resilience perspective it is productive; employing the alternative logic of reframing a negative

experience as useful allows Mary to reconcile the disruption while maintaining her self-concept as being a good student who is engaged in her coursework.

Andrew employed a similar approach of leading with an initial positive assessment before revealing a more challenging reality. In this excerpt, he was describing his experience living in the Honors Living Learning Community:

I mean, it meant a lot of new people, a lot of new personalities. I got to do some cool things. A lot of cool things. It was a great intro into, a good segue into college, because everyone's new, everyone wants to go try stuff out. So you got a whole group of people like, "Oh let's go to the beach. Let's, let's go here, I want to do this, or let's do that," and that was cool. It was really cool. My roommate was, um, that was an interesting person for sure. He did like to, what was it, like Juul vape inside the room, which, that was, that was not pleasant. But um, he was interesting. In the end, I can't say I really made lasting friendships in the pod. I can't really say that, but for the experience, at least there was. It was fine, even if it was just. We're all just acquainted, or at least I was an acquaintance. I didn't really fit in per se. yeah.

Despite not getting along with his roommate and feeling like an outsider amongst the other students in his pod, Andrew described his time in the LLC as a "good segue into college". This inconsistent account reveals his attempts at reframing the experience as positive, emphasizing the new activities and ability to explore his new area as the main highlight, and downplaying the importance of relationships in his on-campus residential experience. From a resilience perspective, this isn't just a faltering performance or hidden feeling that slipped out by mistake; framing the overall experience as a positive one enabled him to maintain a narrative of a successful first year in college and preserve optimism for a good second year as well.

In the previous section, we saw how Gamila affirmed identity anchors to communicate resilience through her challenges of being far from her family. Throughout the interview she identified several additional triggering events that led to a challenging first semester in college, and employed alternative logics to reframe those experiences, as well. In the following two excerpts, Gamila describes moments in which she lacked agency, yet communicated resilience by reframing the experiences in terms of her own choice:

Well, for the fall semester I never really got the chance to pick my schedule. 'Cause you know, for all freshman incoming kids they picked it for you. So it was like kind of stressful. I had classes in the morning time and I'm not a morning person. And it would be like at 8:00 AM and I have to get up early in the morning, get ready and go to class. So that was kind of hard... Yeah, but then like I got acclimated to being a morning person, which is really weird. But I just started waking up really early and I liked it, like it, it made my day longer for some reason. So in the spring semester like it kind of helped me become like a more active person if that makes sense.

Despite receiving a course schedule made without her input and initially struggling with morning classes, Gamila shifted her perspective to make it an enjoyable experience. She says, “I just started waking up really early” as if it were her choice, and then added the justification that it made her day longer. By owning the decision to wake up early, she reframed the initial challenge as a productive move, proving her ability to deal with anything that comes her way.

Later in the interview, Gamila mentioned getting a job, prompting me to ask if she was seeking financial support or experience, or something else. Her response revealed more of her job-search process, including a triggering event and resilience process:

It was partly both because I definitely wanted some place to gain experience, but the person that I tried to apply to, like I always got denied and then when this one accepted me, I was like you know, if I'm gonna like pick one spot to like, get experience from and if it's a long time out of my day, I wanted to be like something I could use for the future, for like my aspiration to go to med school, which costs a lot of money just to apply. So I was thinking like, I definitely like, I volunteer in other places to gain experience, but I use this one partly for the experience but also for like helping me get there.

Gamila briefly describes receiving rejections in her job search before finally getting an offer, and then quickly reframes the situation as her choice. She says, "if I'm gonna pick one spot" as though she had many offers to choose from, then describes the job in terms of saving money to pay for medical school applications. Despite initially not having much success in getting a job, she rewrites the entire experience to put herself as the decision maker, framing the decision as her choice. This resiliency move allowed her to narrate the experience as one of success. In both examples of having an undesirable schedule and enduring obstacles in finding a job, Gamila employed an alternative logic that prioritized her internal decision making abilities rather than the external factors over which she had little control. It is this focus on her own response to her circumstances that makes these narratives success stories; *she* is successful at turning a negative into a positive, *she* is resilient.

Starting college involves several specific and highly anticipated events, such as move in day, the first day of class, first football game, and many other firsts that can trigger a dissonance between expectation and reality. New students may be able to prepare themselves for some of those culture shocks, but inevitably also encounter unexpected experiences that trigger sensemaking in order to reconcile the disruption into their new lives. Students in this study

engaged in communicative resilience processes to incorporate those disruptions and maintain a sense of normalcy. The narratives they produced are strikingly similar to those of migrant families (Scharp, et al., 2020), who brought aspects of their past into their present as identity anchors that helped them reinforce their sense of self amidst changing environments, and spoke alternative and positive meanings into existence to avoid letting their hardships define the entire experience. Though the circumstances and magnitude of hardships of entering college students and migrant families are incomparable, the lived experience of leaving everything you've known to strike out on your own in the pursuit of a better life is similar. This similarity suggests research on migrant family acclimation and resilience processes as well as other kinds of transitions into anticipated futures may be more helpful in understanding the college student newcomer experience, as opposed to other crisis-type experiences, such as breast cancer diagnoses (Lillie, et al., 2017). In addition, extending the temporal parameters of what it means to transition into college enables a focus on long-term resilience practices (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). The next section will explore resiliencies that occurred after students had settled into the first few months of their new college lives.

Disrupting the New Normal

As you might expect in any transition experience, newcomers eventually get the hang of things and acclimate to their new environment. Several participants in this study found it quite easy to quickly adapt to the routines and norms present in their new college lives and establish a new normal. However, life is never static; reaching a point of comfortable acclimation in a new environment doesn't preclude newcomers, or any organizational member for that matter, from experiencing disruptions in that environment. Several participants experienced disruptions to the new normal, including challenges to their emerging independent student identities, opportunities

to study abroad in a semester exchange program, and getting into a car accident. In each of the examples below, participants engaged in overlapping resilience processes as they worked to make sense of the disruption and fit the episode within the larger stream of experience of their first year in college.

For Terri, a visit from her family during USF's Parent's Weekend prompted a moment of reflection on her acclimation to college, and the new relationship she was creating with her parents as a result:

Cause it was, you know, you come to school like end of August. Then September, you're kind of finding your footing and then October is like, okay, I'm here and I'm ready to do stuff and then. Um, and then, like in the middle of October, your parents come, and you're like, Oh my gosh, I'm a child again. But, like I'm not... I was looking through my photos last night and I was like, yeah, this is a photo where I kind of like realized that I wasn't the high school senior that graduated in June. And like I'm kind of like a new person, but still me. I kind of like grew into like a fuller version of myself away from home.

In this excerpt, she is shifting time frames between the emotions she felt during Parent's Weekend in October, 2019 and the additional reflections gained through preparing for our interview in June, 2020. Terri's statement that she felt like a child again suggests she felt a tension between her emerging independence and her role as a daughter. When she reflected back on that experience in June of the next year, back in her childhood bedroom in her family home, Terri could identify the growth she experienced while away at college. This fuller realization may not have been possible in the moment, but Terri was able to articulate specific interactions

that led to the tensions she felt during this disruptive event. When asked what it was like to have her parents in her new world, she said:

It was a big role reversal, I think. Yeah, and like I didn't realize it at first, but there's a lot of college lingo, that just kind of doesn't translate... And so I was like trying to explain stuff to my parents, and I was like, "Oh yeah, well, this is the MSC," and my mom was like, "The me see? The, the what?" And I'm like, "Oh OK. Yeah." And then I showed them the dorm and everything and my mom was, she was like, "Oh my goodness, you keep your room clean!" And I'm like, "I mean yeah, when you're sharing it with someone else, like you don't want to be that one roommate." And she was just like. It was so weird 'cause it was like, I'm still me but she was like, "Oh my goodness, like you do this now, and you do this", and like, "Oh my goodness you walk to class every day?" And I'm like, "Every day, yes." We were, um before or after the parents left, everyone in the pod, we were all like, yeah this is kind of like you go on vacation but you still get to study on vacation and then your parents come and they're like "Oh, we're on vacation too!" And you're like, "Oh no, no, no this was, this was my vacation."

In this interaction with her parents, Terri describes both being the more knowledgeable person, able to give her family a tour of the campus, and having her new identity challenged, with questions about keeping her room clean. To make sense of this disruption, Terri utilized her communication networks to discuss the event with her college peers in the LLC after the parents left. She described a group conversation, suggesting her experience of disruption was shared by several students in the pod. Together, they crafted a metaphor to describe the experience of having their new lives and identities troubled by their parents' visit. In this episode, Terri and her friends communicatively constructed resilience by reinforcing each other's independence and

collectively protecting and maintaining the new normal they created during their initial months in college.

Other disruptions did alter the new normal these students crafted upon their arrival to college, in both positive and negative ways. Vicky decided to spend her Spring semester as an exchange student in England, while Lindy got into a bad car accident at the start of the term. These triggering events certainly altered the daily lives of both of these students, not to mention their expectations for how their first year in college would go, but they also prompted discursive resilience processes that were conveyed during our interviews.

Vicky described her initial objections to the opportunity to study abroad in Exeter, England for her second semester in college, followed by the sensemaking processes she employed to reconcile the disruption:

Nooo. I, I hated the idea. I was like, this is terrifying. I don't want to go. But I knew that I had to. I'd like, I just was, like, I'm a Christian, so I believe that like, God has things in your life that like He plans for you, and so I, I would, I just like, felt like this was what God wanted me to do. And I was like, I don't want to do it, but I know that I have to. And plus how can you turn down an opportunity like that. So [sigh] I was like I'm gonna do it and I'm gonna try and not have a bad attitude about it [laughs]. But talking to my parents about it was like easy. I, my dad, I know he's like, he's very adventurous, so I knew that he would be totally okay with me going. And I thought my mom might be a little nervous about it, but she was supportive, so.

Vicky used several, overlapping resilience processes in this excerpt. She identified her faith as a Christian as an identity anchor, which reminded her of a belief that God has a plan for her life. This framework allowed her to rewrite studying abroad as an inevitable outcome, rather than a

scary opportunity. Her faith in God's plans are both an anchoring point that helps her maintain a sense of self that knows how to respond in the face of uncertainty and unfamiliar environments, as well a rationalization that allows her to employ alternate meanings, namely that unexpected occurrences are meant to be blessings or lessons sent from an omniscient Creator for her own good. This framework is linked to another resilience process – foregrounding action and backgrounding negative emotion. Vicky said she knew that she had to go because of her faith, so she would do it, and try not to have a bad attitude about it, despite her fear. This resolve allowed her to take action on the many steps required to arrange a semester exchange, including meeting with academic advisors to select courses, applying for a passport, completing program applications, paying a hefty deposit, and purchasing a plane ticket. With each of these actions, Vicky communicated resilience and brought a new, new normal of living in England for six months into being. Finally, Vicky utilized her communication network by reaching out to her parents to garner their support for her decision. This was an important move, as it meant taking the conversation outside of the university environment. Vicky told me that she initially heard about the Exeter program from her Honors College advisor and was encouraged by him to apply for it. By bringing her “adventurous” father and “supportive” mother (her communication network) into the conversation, Vicky added even more discursive support to the idea, making it a firmer reality in all aspects of her life, not just her college life. Many of the other examples of resilience processes in this chapter have appeared to exist as singular discursive actions – one response to one triggering event. However, this excerpt demonstrates the “interwovenness” of resilience processes (Tian & Bush, 2020), emphasizing the ongoing communicative constitution of resilience over time and in multiple discourses.

Whereas Vicky's college acclimation experience was disrupted by an opportunity to start all over again in a new location, Lindy described a disruption that was much more challenging. While talking through her photos, she shared an Instagram post of a digital drawing she made as a result of a traumatic experience:

Okay, so I got into car accident. I was with my ex and a car drove into us going 120 when he was making a left turn so I, my life was put on like hold... I was like, Oh my God, this sucks. This was the first art piece that I had made since then. I made a very emotional piece from when it first happened. Of course my style has changed a lot, but this was like, me feeling more okay with it. 'Cause I completely stopped my art. I got really depressed. I didn't feel okay and I just decided to pick up the pen one day. And, this, I was like alright because I had friends within the LLC and I talked to a few of my professors about it. I was specifically talking to my Pre-Calc professor and he was like helping me through some stuff and I was going to therapy at the time, and I realized that, you know, I was really affected by these things. And I hadn't drawn and drawing is my way to get my feelings out, so I finally just decided to draw something and this was my first drawing that I did since the car accident.

Lindy got into a bad car accident just a few days before school started, but avoided dealing with her physical and emotional traumas, instead focusing all of her energy into participating in college activities such as moving into the residence hall, attending class, and joining student organizations. She initially backgrounded her negative emotions in favor of foregrounding positive actions that would allow her to adapt to her new environment. However, as her emotional needs caught up with her, Lindy began to acknowledge that she wasn't "okay" and employed resilience processes to move forward in a positive way. She began engaging her

communication networks, by connecting with friends in her residence hall, talking with her professors, and seeking professional counseling. As she began processing through her experiences, she re-engaged her artistic side, relying on an aspect of herself that had remained consistent. This identity anchor served as a point of consistency and a reminder that she could continue to move forward in her college life despite this setback. Lindy's excerpt exemplifies the differences in short-term and long-term resiliencies (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012) present in her ongoing transition to college.

Vicky's decision to study abroad for her second semester and Lindy's car accident and resulting physical and emotional challenges illustrate the multidimensional and cascading triggers (Hintz et al., 2021) present in the entry to college. The transition to a new academic and social environment is an extended period of change that includes daily disruptions as students come to understand themselves and their new surroundings. Yet, as these narratives demonstrate, there is no fixed outcome or identifiable moment of "making it". In the midst of learning how to become honors college students, these young adults enter and dissolve romantic relationships, change their majors, get into car accidents, and make life-changing decisions. As soon as new students start to find their bearings and create new meanings of normalcy, circumstances can change. The excerpts in this chapter give insight into the some of the ongoing challenges of being a college student, and the resilience processes they employ to continuously right the ship, so to speak, and remain on course to earn their degrees. This is an especially salient point given the liminality of the college experience, in general (Noble & Walker, 1997). Every semester offers a new set of challenges and opportunities, and students are never quite settled in their identities, as they are always looking ahead to a more stable identity associated with career instead of the temporal identity of student.

Discussion

Resilience is a long-term, life practice developed and maintained in and through communication with others (Buzzanell, 2010, 2017). Short-term crises prompt specific coping strategies that support and reinforce ongoing resiliencies present in the longer stream of experience. The photo-elicitation interviews used in this study elicited narrative capsules, short anecdotes that were cut out from relational contexts and literally put on display through photography. As a result, the narrative data I worked with were mostly clean and concise cause-and-effect stories that concealed much of the messiness of lived experiences, as well as the real-time, mundane, ongoing resilience processes that participants likely never paid attention to, much less remembered to convey in our interviews. In other words, what appears to be neat and simple in this analysis is likely anything but that in reality.

The findings related to resilience processes employed upon arrival to college were mostly confined to two processes, identity anchors and alternative logics, and several were completely missing. It is possible that communication networks were interrupted during the move to college, limiting the effectiveness of that particular strategy to construct resilience through the changes. Angela made that point clearly when she talked about being alone in a new city in the initial days after moving in. She said, “Of course I could call my parents, but, like, I was sort of left to fend for myself in a way,” suggesting there were limits to the support her parents could provide. This may be especially true for students who are the first in their family to attend college, who lack access to knowledgeable support networks (Nelson, 2020). Likewise, foregrounding productive action can be difficult for newcomers who are bombarded with events, activities, invitations from student organizations, navigating a large college campus, and managing their time and health habits for the first time, all at once. The sheer number of new dynamics and experiences

can make it difficult to know which action to take. Thus, the sometimes linked processes of holding on to aspects of their selves that they know to be true regardless of their environment and affirming positive justifications and rationalizations about challenging experiences may be the most accessible strategies to cope with hardship and integrating into their new college lives.

This point becomes especially salient when comparing resiliencies employed during the initial weeks of the semester to those utilized in response to disruptions occurring after they had settled in. Terri, Vicky, and Lindy conveyed additional resilience processes in their disruption narratives, suggesting they had more discursive resources to draw upon when encountering a challenging experience. Spending more time on campus allowed new students to establish local communication networks with peers and professors and understand college structures so they can foreground productive action. This comparison adds a temporal lens to understanding resilience processes used at different points in time during an extended period of disruption with multiple and overlapping triggers. Further, it provides insight into the link between material and emotional resources available to individuals and the different resilience processes they employ. A brand new newcomer may have fewer resources to draw upon than even a slightly more seasoned newcomer.

Many of the excerpts included in this chapter demonstrate participants' discomfort with negativity. When encountering disruptions during their transition to college, these students talked successful outcomes into being by engaging resilience processes that allowed them to maintain a sense of normalcy and consistency with their self-concept as high achieving, successful honor students. It is vital for these students to maintain an identity associated with success, growth, and confidence to move forward in pursuit of their lofty goals. As these young people leave the ultra-structured safety of their high school lives and move into the more nebulous world of college and

beyond, their disruption stories construct anticipatory resilience “through which they understand the possibility of future normals” (Betts et al., 2021, p. 4). Employing anticipatory resilience allows the students to create a bright future that may involve negative experiences and hardships, but that does not become defined by them. Thus, challenges become opportunities to further reinforce their ability to navigate future uncertainties.

The concept of resilience has previously been found to be relevant in studies of college student success, including the first year transition, however the focus has been on psychological constructs of resilience (e.g., Fabis, 2005; Klibert et al., 2014). Instead, the Communication Theory of Resilience (Buzzanell, 2010, 2017) shifts the focus from resilience being an inherent quality that newcomers may or may not have, to a discursive process available to everyone. The study represents one of the first applications of CTR to the newcomer experience, especially the college student newcomer experience. The findings in this chapter serve as a link between previous research identifying the importance of friend-making and belonging (Strayhorn, 2018), connecting with university faculty and staff (Lillis, 2011), and engagement with student activities and organizations (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006), with successful transition and retention outcomes. My participants’ narratives of disruption and resilience provide insight into the communicative processes that underlie each of those outcomes. The findings in this chapter have both extended CTR into a new domain, and added additional understandings of how students communicatively construct persistence in college.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusions and Implications

This study demonstrated the ways in which self-presentations, strategic and otherwise, allow newcomers to the Honors College to communicate their membership to the organization and successfully become Honors College students. When transition challenges threaten that identity, they communicate resilience through affirming their successes, and eventually reinforcing them with other newcomers. Analysis of newcomers' self-presentations and the language they adopt during their acclimation to a new organization reveals the importance of understanding the ways in which messages shared during recruitment and onboarding processes are internalized by newcomers, and suggests those messages warrant review from time to time. In addition, this study extends research using photo-elicitation by adding a retrospective approach, which allows multiple meanings to emerge through the layered context of past and present meanings. As a result, this study adds to what is known about honors college student experiences and identities and presents opportunities for additional research and practice.

I began this project to explore empirically some of intuitive understandings I had developed from years of observation and informal ethnography. New Honors College students are as concerned with their social lives as they are their academic achievements; they seek to find a sense of belonging, often within small communities of other honors students; they value hard work, academic achievement, and personal growth; they are good at figuring out the “right” answer and can get quite competitive in the process of proving their competence to each other; and while they don't enjoy the feeling of failure, they are often able to turn a negative into a

positive and move forward in pursuit of their goals. Honors students are deeply concerned with achieving success, and giving off an impression of success to others. My findings supported each of these assumptions.

However, the process also complicated my understanding by giving insight into the role of the organization in shaping these values and behaviors, especially through interactions during the onboarding process. Louis says “socialization practices that facilitate sense making and, in the process, encourage appreciation of the local culture and acquisition of a setting-specific interpretation scheme ultimately facilitate adaptation to the new setting and progress through the stages of socialization” (1980, p. 245). My findings suggest that students bring their own cultures and interpretation schemes based on their previous experiences, as well as expectations for and basic awareness of the local culture (USF and/or the Judy Genshaft Honors College). Some students in my study conducted extensive research on the Honors College, reading targeted messages sent via email, doing their own web searches, listening to student speakers, and attending recruitment events. Others had practically no baseline expectations for the Honors College; they were “pushed” into it or thought it was an honors society requiring little of them to sustain membership. Interpretation schemes are almost always formed by past experiences, both as extensions of and reactions to previous experiences and viewpoints. One homeschooled student embraced all that USF had to offer, having intentionally chosen a large school with lots of activities to provide what he missed during his formative years. Another struggled to connect with USF, maintaining the limited social circle that defined her childhood. These experiences act as “residue” of previous interactions that stick with new freshmen as they enter their new college environments.

Yet, students in this study defined the Honors College similarly, and presented themselves in very similar ways. Their definitions of the Honors College seemed to parrot many of the promotional materials we send them during their university onboarding, the messages we share in our admissions presentations and orientation meetings. We socialize students into the Honors College through Acquisition of Knowledge, “pushing against their academic disciplinary boundaries” and encouraging them to see themselves as near-equals with professors through discussion-based classes. We socialize students into the Honors College through Honors Foundations, a peer led first year transition course designed to help honors students get the hang of college life. We socialize students into the Honors College through the Honors LLC.

These socialization practices, and my participants’ experiences, confirm Louis’ (1980) claim. These students were successful in multiple senses. They not only maintained enrollment at USF and in the Honors College, but they felt good enough about that experience to participate in a research study that required them to talk to me about their first year, through both photos and stories. They felt confident in and tethered to their identities as honors students, which was demonstrated in their self-presentations during the interviews. Even though many of the students encountered obstacles through the onboarding process, they ultimately saw themselves as successful enough to represent the college in a one-hour interview.

This study extended organizational socialization research into a university setting to understand newcomer experiences of college students, while also contributing to first year college student experience literature from a communication perspective. Much of the previous research on organizational socialization utilized Jablin’s (1984, 1987) stage model to describe the messages individuals receive during preparation and onboarding for jobs and careers. Portions of my data did map onto Jablin’s stages in predictable ways: new college students

learned about college from parents, friends, and media portrayals; students reported feelings of culture shock in their initial encounter with the university; students identified information seeking behaviors upon arrival. In addition, it was clear that participants who relayed more positive and enjoyable experiences felt well-prepared academically and were able to make quick connections through the Honors LLC and find a sense of belonging right away. These findings support First Year Experience literature listing residential experiences as best practices (Inkelas et al., 2007) and highlight the importance of academic preparation (Miller et al., 2007) and belonging (Pittman & Richmond, 2008) as crucial to experiencing a successful transition to college.

Yet, the most compelling aspects of the interviews were the narratives that included rich and vulnerable details about participants' lives. Their narratives demonstrated how they experienced the shock of entering college, including the highs of meeting future best friends and exercising agency over one's own social life, as well as the lows of homesickness, broken thumbs, and roommate conflicts. Participants demonstrated how they constructed identities that fit within their new environment by identifying and adopting the core values of the Honors College and engaged in strategic self-presentations to build up an impression that fit within the cultural context they saw around them. Through their detailed narratives about unexpected challenges and unmet expectations, we saw how they drew on identity anchors and employed alternative logic to communicate resilience and support their budding identities as successful Honors College students.

These narratives demonstrate the merits of retrospective photo-elicitation interviewing for studying life experiences, especially aspects of life that are difficult to access for research purposes. Smart phones and social media apps have changed our relationships with photographs,

since we are as likely to take pictures of mundane aspects of our everyday lives as we are to capture special occasions. Using a retrospective approach to allow participants to repurpose older images for research parameters expands the opportunities for incorporating images in future studies, especially those focusing on transitions. Viewing images across timespans prompt reflections of growth and change, and even silly “throwaway” images take on new meanings when considered through the lens of a research project.

Bozkurt and Tu (2016) argue for consideration of social networks as a stage in which digital identities can be performed, suggesting social networks are “a front stage space entered from private spaces.” Similarly, the photo-elicitation interview is a front stage space where identities can be negotiated through the “sanctioned viewing of private images” (Walsh & Baker, 2017). As an in-between space, a point of “seepage” between Goffman’s private and public spaces (1979), the photo-elicitation interview stage grants the researcher an audience into more private spaces, viewing images that may have been “created only for the producer” (Albury, 2015, p. 1736) where the participants are “conceding parts of the self that don’t fit the ideal” (Goffman, 1959, p. 47). The photo-elicitation interview gives the researcher a front row seat to the front stage, as well as giving participants autonomy to grant a backstage pass when they wish.

These narratives of success also highlight the differences between the Honors College as an organization and those that are traditionally researched within this body of literature. The Honors College is an affiliation, an identity marker, an aspirational ideal, and a peer group. The Honors College is the Dean who sets the values for the organization *and* the pod of students playing board games as they make sense of their transition experiences; the Honors College is the t-shirt they wear with pride around campus *and* the idealized role they must live up to; the

Honors College is simultaneously who they are and who they want to be. Becoming an honors student is an ongoing accomplishment; it is not achieved in a one-time encounter or even a semester-long orientation. Rather, it is an evolving process that changes with each new semester, each new honors course, each new interaction with another member of the college, where each “new” requires an ongoing orientation and integration with the past to make sense of who they are within the present context (Weick, 1995).

Implications for Communication

Jablin’s (1984, 1987) model of communicative socialization has gained popularity because it is so applicable. In particular, his explanation of anticipatory socialization provides a nice funnel metaphor to explain how individuals gather and utilize various messages into usable bits of information to prepare themselves for their next step. This study documented anticipatory socialization message sources related to attending college, and added insight into how honors students access and utilize those messages to form specific expectations and proactive coping strategies, adding an additional perspective to other studies of anticipatory socialization among college freshmen (Anderson et al., 2014; Jahn & Myers, 2014; Latham, 2004).

However, the findings in this study demonstrate the merits of viewing organizational socialization outside of Jablin’s (1984, 1987) stage model. Joining a new organization involves creation of an organization-based identity, which must be negotiated in formal interactions with organizational leaders, as well as informal interactions with other newcomers and established members. Attention to newcomer narratives can reveal how these identities come into being and are maintained through resilience discourses. Finally, the focus on the Honors College as an organization within a larger organization demonstrates the ways in which sub-groups within organizations can impact the overall experience of newcomers, especially if the sub-groups have

distinct organizational cultures that differ from the larger organization. Additional research on organizational socialization from a processual, meaning making perspective may add to what is known about the experiences of newcomers.

In addition, studying the transition into college as organizational socialization supports Bullis' (1993) critique of Jablin's (1984, 1987) model for presenting organizational assimilation as bounded process. The college years are the space in between childhood and adulthood, in which young adults establish independence as individuals and educated contributors to society. The identities they construct and the language they adopt are necessarily attached to the liminal space. These honors students talked about preparing for college alongside, or in the service of, preparing for their long-term career goals. College was but the first step in a series of educational steps, and thus these students saw themselves as preparing for college so they could continue preparing for their careers. Jablin's model ends with metamorphosis, once the newcomer becomes a full-fledged member of the organization. Organizational exit is often viewed as failure to adapt. In this study, failure, as demonstrated by quitting college or being removed from the Honors College, was not an option these students ever considered. Instead, organizational exit is marked by graduation from college, an accomplishment worth celebrating. The analysis of this study demonstrates the existence of a liminal organizational membership and language that is constantly shifting. Even as new students were learning the ropes within the Honors College at USF, they were also preparing to leave; they were planting shallow roots so they could get what they needed to move into the next stage of life.

Further, the existence of a language that is distinct among new Honors College students reveals the resources newcomers adopt during organizational entry. This is a liminal language that gets them in and gets them through the transition period, but eventually evolves. This point

was made salient to me in the days between finishing this draft and presenting it to my committee; during lunch with an alumnus of the college, we talked about passions, personal growth, intellectual curiosity, not GPAs and test scores. There appears to continue to be a language associated with being an Honors College student, but the specific constructs of the language and identity are fluid as the student moves out of the liminal state of college and into their careers. Additional study of the nature and development of the Honors College student identity over time is warranted.

Finally, this study demonstrates the merits of utilizing qualitative inquiry and communication theories to understand college student experiences. As discussed, most of the research done in university settings is accomplished through survey data and statistical analyses. The data and findings produced within this study add meat to those bones, producing a deeper and richer understanding of the lives of individuals that make up our study body. Those surveys may indicate that resilience is an important aspect of enduring hardships to remain enrolled in college and on track to graduation, but the narratives elicited in this study show how that resilience is communicatively constructed, as well as the material and emotional resources available to new students. Higher education settings are ripe with opportunities to employ qualitative inquiry and communication constructs and add to existing and future research on student experiences.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Louis (1980) suggests organizations can facilitate sensemaking in order to facilitate adaptation. Indeed, this study provides examples of this, in the way Terri and her pod-mates collectively made sense of their responses to family visiting by talking together about how the visits went. This example suggests the value of expanding opportunities for group dialogue and

reflection, which the Honors College values. Reflection is currently incorporated into classroom assignments and advising interactions. However, the results of this project suggest these aspects of the college experience should continue and expand. Not every first-year student lives in the Honors LLC. With roughly 700 first year honors students joining the Tampa campus each year, and a total college size nearing 3,000, the college may need to consider creating intentional opportunities for small-group communication to ensure every student feels connected to the college and is able to adapt successfully to their new environment.

In addition, Louis suggests that messages shared during recruitment and onboarding processes will be internalized into a location-specific scheme, meaning new student will form expectations based on the ways in which the college talks about itself, in admissions presentations or orientation speeches, for example. As I wrote the speech in the introduction to this project, I reflected on the fact that I've been giving the same speech since 2008, when I welcomed a class of 300 freshmen into a college of 1,500. We are still describing ourselves as “a small, tight-knit community” even though we have ballooned to a college of almost 3,000 spread across three campuses. Of course, the meaning of “small” and “tight-knit” is relative to both the speaker and hearer, but at some point, the welcome speech warrants review to ensure accuracy. As the college evolves over time in response to changing educational climates, social issues, and university strategic priorities, it is vital for college leadership to ensure the college narrative remains consistent throughout every aspect of the college, from the admissions and recruitment team to the student run Peer Mentor program, from the full time and adjunct faculty to the advising staff, and to college alumni and supporters.

Further, since the inception of this project, the Judy Genshaft Honors College has expanded to the Sarasota-Manatee and St. Petersburg campuses. As the college grows larger,

both in territory and enrollment, it will be important for the college to retain a common organizational identity that is both representative of and relevant to students on each campus, especially given the different campus cultures. Making space for informal and unstructured interactions among honors students will be especially important on the Sarasota-Manatee campus, which is a commuter campus without residence halls. It is within the unstructured spaces that honors students learn to communicatively present themselves as such and construct their identities as Honors College students distinct from their high school lives. Yet as commuter students living at home and continuing to work at their high school jobs, these students have fewer opportunities to enact their new colleges selves. The findings of this study suggest that special programming, such as an overnight retreat or additional off-campus social events, would create opportunities for communicative socialization into the Honors College.

Honors students in this study mentioned several topical areas that warrant future research to discern deeper trends, including the Honors LLC, Acquisition of Knowledge, and Honors Foundations, as socialization structures specific to the Judy Genshaft Honors College. The Acquisition of Knowledge course in particular offers a unique site, as the final assignment is an autoethnography paper focused on lessons learned in the first year. As I write this conclusion, I am currently teaching the course in Fall 2021 on the Sarasota-Manatee campus; with student permission, those autoethnographies could be a promising data source for future analysis that can build on the findings in this work.

Likewise, data from this study related to the LLC and Honors Foundations might be useful in shaping future curriculum and assessment measures. Understanding how students experience these programs, what matters to them, what they find meaningful (and not), can help the faculty and staff of the JGHC further develop programs that provide the local sites of

meaning that will continue to facilitate sensemaking processes and successful acclimation to the college and university.

Finally, given the lack of research available on honors college students, and the important role these structures and students play for universities around the nation, this study provides a model that others might consider following to develop broader understandings of students enrolled at various colleges and universities around the nation. Currently, National Collegiate Honors Council monographs and conferences contain the bulk of knowledge regarding honors student experiences, not to mention the lived experiences of honors faculty and administrators. This study demonstrates the need to publish research about Honors Colleges and Honors College students more widely in academic journals. I encourage honors faculty, staff, and directors to continue sharing their own knowledge with others.

Final Thoughts

Through the analysis and writeup of my research, I was careful to stick close to the data and present my findings as objectively as possible. My participants' presentations of successful selves and employment of a language focused on achievement and abilities is neither good nor bad; it just is. However, as an administrator of the college, there are implications of these findings that I find troubling. The culture of competition and achievement is not always helpful. Students who are motivated by competition thrive in this environment, but others will suffer under the weight of constant comparison.

This is furthered by reconsideration of participants' use of the term "different" in their descriptions of what it means to be an honors student. While the analysis demonstrated the multiple uses of the term as lacking depth of meaning and emphasized the term as a buzzword associated with the college, their responses also suggest these students link being members of the

Honors College with notions of exclusivity and elitism. These are not values I associate with the college, nor are they values I would want others to associate with my work or with our students. Establishing a sense of belonging can positively impact retention within the organization, but it can become toxic when belonging is created through exclusion. Language matters; it has the power to bring people together and to tear groups apart. It is my hope that this study demonstrates the importance of cultivating a culture of belonging and community through the language of inclusion, care, and recognition of the value of all people.

The language of success matters, too. All too often, the concept of “student success” emphasizes retention and graduation rates, policies designed to push students through college as fast and with as little debt as possible. These perspectives overlook the students completely. The narratives of success presented in this research reveal the layered and complex ways in which students define success for themselves. Their language of success incorporates academic achievements (which most certainly will lead to retention and timely graduation), but it emphasizes living meaningful lives while in pursuit of their academic goals. For these students, success is deeply personal and felt on a daily basis, through their interactions with their peers and faculty, through their introspections and self-reflections, and through their ability to challenge themselves to grow as people and scholars. These narratives of success are gratifying to hear and see in print. It is my sincere hope that this project can lead to additional focus on a student-driven concept of student success that incorporates what matters to them, as contributive to a definition of student success that can also support legislated metrics.

References

- Achterberg, C. (2004). Differences between an honors program and honors college: A case study. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, (5)1, 87-96.
- Achterberg, C. (2005). "What is an honors student?" *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council - Online Archive*. 170. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal/170>
- Agarwal, V., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2015). Communicative reconstruction of resilience labor: Identity/identification in disaster-relief workers. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 43(4), 408-428.
- Aitken, S. C., & Wingate, J. (1993). A preliminary study of the self-directed photography of middle-class, homeless, and mobility-impaired children. *The Professional Geographer*, 45(1), 65-72.
- Albury, K. (2015). Selfies, sexts, and sneaky hats: Young people's understandings of gendered practices of self-representation. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1734–1745.
- Allen, B. (2000). "Learning the ropes": A black feminist standpoint analysis. In P. Buzzanell, (Ed.), *Rethinking organizational and managerial communication from feminist perspectives* (pp. 117–208). Sage.
- Anderson, I., Lerstrom, A., & Tintle, N. (2014). First-Year students' use of social network sites to reduce the uncertainty of anticipatory socialization. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 26(1), 101-122.
- Aristotle. (2004). *The Nicomachean ethics* (J. A. K. Thomson, Trans.). London, UK: Penguin Books.

- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>
- Attinasi, Jr., L. (1989). Getting in: Mexican Americans' perceptions of university attendance and the implications for freshman year persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 60(3), 247–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1989.11775035>
- Bach, H. (2007). Composing a visual narrative inquiry. *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, 280–307. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552.n11>
- Badenhausen, R. (2010). “Help, I need somebody”: Rethinking how we conceptualize honors. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 11(2), 27-31. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcjournal/260/>
- Baker, D. P., Reardon, S., & Riordan, K. (2000). Creating the upper track in American higher education: An organizational ecology of the rise and spread of honors education. In *Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Sacramento, CA*.
- Baird, L. L. (1992). Where do we go from here?: Implications for researchers of how college affects students. *The Review of Higher Education*, 15(3), 364–373. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1992.0026>
- Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1984). Measuring adjustment to college. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31(2), 179–189. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.31.2.179>
- Bates, E. A., Kaye, L. K., & McCann, J. J. (2019). A snapshot of the student experience: Exploring student satisfaction through the use of photographic elicitation. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43(3), 291–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1359507>

- BCSSE. (n.d.). BCSSE Survey, Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement. Retrieved from: http://bcsse.indiana.edu/survey_instruments.cfm
- Beck, G. A. (2016). Surviving involuntary unemployment together: The role of resilience-promoting communication in familial and committed relationships. *Journal of Family Communication, 16*(4), 369-385.
- Beech, N. (2011). Liminality and the practices of identity reconstruction. *Human Relations, 64*(2), 285–302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710371235>
- Ben-Avie, M., Kennedy, M., Unson, C., Li, J., Riccardi, R. L., & Mugno, R. (2012). First-year experience: A comparison study. *Journal of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness, 2*(2), 143–170. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jasseinsteffe.2.2.0143>
- Betts, T., Hintz, E. A., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2021). Emplotting anticipatory resilience: An antenarrative extension of the communication theory of resilience. *Communication Monographs, 1-24*.
- Bourgoin, A., & Harvey, J. F. (2018). Professional image under threat: Dealing with learning–credibility tension. *Human Relations, 71*(12), 1611–1639. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718756168>
- Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500304>
- Bozkurt, A. & Tu, C. H. (2016). Digital identity formation: Socially being real and present on digital networks. *Educational Media International, 53*(3), 153-167.
- Browning, L. D. (1992). Lists and stories as organizational communication. *Communication Theory, 2*(4), 281–302.

- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/448619>
- Bullis, C. (1993). Organizational socialization research: Enabling, constraining, and shifting perspectives. *Communication Monographs*, 60(1), 10–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759309376289>
- Bullis, C., & Stout, K. R. (2000). Organizational socialization: A feminist standpoint approach. In P. Buzzanell, (Ed.) *Rethinking organizational and managerial communication from feminist perspectives*. Sage.
- Buzzanell, P. M. (2010). Resilience: Talking, resisting, and imagining new normalcies into being. *Journal of Communication*, 60(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01469.x>
- Buzzanell, P. M. (2017). Communication theory of resilience: Enacting adaptive-transformative processes when families experience loss and disruption. In *Engaging Theories in Family Communication* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Clark, M. R. (2005). Negotiating the freshman year: Challenges and strategies among first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 296–316.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0022>
- Cole, J. S., Kennedy, M., & Ben-Avie, M. (2009). The role of precollege data in assessing and understanding student engagement in college. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009(141), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.286>
- Collier, J. (1957). Photography in anthropology: A report on two experiments. *American Anthropologist*, 59, 843–859. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1957.59.5.02a00100>

- Das, B. M., Walker, C., Hodge, E., Christensen, T., Darkenwald, T., Godwin, W., & Weckesser, G. (2021). Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on honors college students: A Qualitative content analysis. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 22(1). 169-181.
- Davis, S. E. (2018). Objectification, sexualization, and misrepresentation: Social media and the college experience. *Social Media + Society*, 4(3), 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118786727>
- DeVilbiss, S. E. (2014). The transition experience: Understanding the transition from high school to college for conditionally-admitted students using the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. *Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research*. 187.
<http://Digitalcommons.Unl.Edu/Cehsedaddiss/187>.
- Dewar, S., Islam, S., Resor, E., & Salehi, N. (2019). Finsta: Creating "fake" spaces for authentic performance. In *Extended abstracts of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems*, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3290607.3313033>
- Dorrance Hall, E., & Scharp, K. M. (2018). Testing a mediational model of the effect of family communication patterns on student perceptions of the impact of the college transition through social communication apprehension. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 46(4), 429–446. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2018.1502461>
- Dougherty, D. S., Schraedley, M. A., Gist-Mackey, A. N., & Wickert, J. (2018). A Photovoice study of food (in)security, unemployment, and the discursive-material dialectic. *Communication Monographs*, 85(4), 443–466.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2018.1500700>

- Douglas, K. (1997, November). *Impressions: How first-year African American students pictured a research university*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Albuquerque, NM.
- Elkins, S. A., Braxton, J. M., & James, G. W. (2000). Tinto's separation stage and its influence on first-semester college student persistence. *Research in Higher Education, 41*(2), 251–268. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007099306216>
- Executive Summary. (n.d.) Strategic Renewal, Office of the President, University of South Florida. Retrieved from: <https://www.usf.edu/president/strategic-renewal/>.
- Fabis, S. J. (2005). *Determining the efficacy of resiliency training and conventional stress management instruction in a university student population*. (3194808) [Doctoral Dissertation - The University of Utah]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Finkelstein, J. (2007). *The art of self invention: Image and identity in popular visual culture*. I.B. Tauris & Co.
- FLBOG (n.d.). Performance-Based Funding. Florida Board of Governors, State University System of Florida. Retrieved from: <https://www.flbog.edu/finance/performance-based-funding/>
- Foubert, J. D., & Urbanski, L. A. (2006). Effects of involvement in clubs and organizations on the psychosocial development of first-year and senior college students. *NASPA journal, 43*(1), 166-182.
- Friedlander, M. L., & Phillips, S. D. (1984). Stochastic process analysis of interactive discourse in early counseling interviews. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31*(2), 139.

- Friedlander, L. J., Reid, G. J., Shupak, N., & Cribbie, R. (2007). Social support, self-esteem, and stress as predictors of adjustment to university among first-year undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(3), 259–274. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0024>
- Friedlander, M. L., & Schwartz, G. S. (1985). Toward a Theory of Strategic Self-Presentation in Counseling and Psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 32*(4), 483–501. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.32.4.483>
- Garr-Schultz, A., & Gardner, W. L. (2018). Strategic Self-presentation of Women in STEM. *Social Sciences, 7*(2), 20.
- Gayles, J. G., & Baker, A. R. (2015). Opportunities and challenges for first-year student-athletes transitioning from high school to college. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2015*(147), 43–51. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20142>
- Gist-Mackey, A. N., Wiley, M. L., & Erba, J. (2018). “You’re doing great. Keep doing what you’re doing”: Socially supportive communication during first-generation college students’ socialization. *Communication Education, 67*(1), 52–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2017.1390590>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor.
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender Advertisements*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Goodboy, A. K., Martin, M. M., & Goldman, Z. W. (2016). Students’ experiences of bullying in high school and their adjustment and motivation during the first semester of college. *Western Journal of Communication, 80*(1), 60–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2015.1078494>

- Harper, D. (1987). The visual ethnographic narrative. *Visual Anthropology*, 1(1), 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.1987.9966457>
- Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 1, 13–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860220137345>
- Harrington, C. F., & Lindy, I. E. (1999). The use of reflexive photography in the study of the freshman year experience. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 1(1), 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.2190/882H-WYWR-BKDG-GF25>
- Hecht, M. L. (1993). 2002—A research odyssey: Toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communications Monographs*, 60(1), 76-82.
- Hecht, M. L. (2015). Communication theory of identity: Multilayered understandings of performed identities. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Emerging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 175-187). Sage.
- Hecht, M.L. & Hopfer, S. (2010). The communication theory of identity. In R. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of identity*, 1 (pp. 114-119). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Hicks, T., & Heastie, S. (2008). High school to college transition: A profile of the stressors, physical and psychological health issues that affect the first-year on-campus college student. *Faculty Working Papers from the School of Education. Paper 14*.
http://Digitalcommons.Uncfsu.Edu/Soe_faculty_wp/14, 6.
- Hintz, E. A., Betts, T., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2021). Caring for patients without personal protective equipment (PPE): Material conditions as multidimensional cascading triggers for resilience processes. *Health Communication*, 1-10.
- Hoffman, E., & Voloch, D. (2012). Dual enrollment: Strategies, outcomes, and lessons for school-college partnerships. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 158, 101-107.

- Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Spuler, A. (1996). Latino student transition to college: Assessing difficulties and factors in successful college adjustment. *Research in Higher Education*, 37(2), 135–157. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01730113>
- Hurtado, S., Han, J. C., Sáenz, V. B., Espinosa, L. L., Cabrera, N. L., & Cerna, O. S. (2007). Predicting transition and adjustment to college: Biomedical and behavioral science aspirants' and minority students' first year of college. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(7), 841–887. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9051-x>
- Ibarra, H. (2005). *Identity transitions: Possible selves, liminality and the dynamics of career change* (Vol. 51). Fontainebleau, Insead.
- Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z. E., Vogt, K. E., & Leonard, J. B. (2007). Living–learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(4), 403–434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-006-9031-6>
- Jablin, F. M. (1984). Assimilating new members into organizations. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 8(1), 594–627.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1984.11678591>
- Jablin, F. M. (1987). Organizational entry, assimilation, and exit. In *In FM Jablin, LL Putnam, KH Roberts, & LW Porter (Eds.), Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (pp. 679–740). Sage.
- Jahn, J. L., & Myers, K. K. (2014). Vocational anticipatory socialization of adolescents: Messages, sources, and frameworks that influence interest in STEM careers. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(1), 85-106.

- Jamelske, E. (2009). Measuring the impact of a university first-year experience program on student GPA and retention. *Higher Education, 57*(3), 373–391.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9161-1>
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self*. (Vol.1, pp. 231-262). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Jorgenson, J. (2011). Reflexivity in feminist research practice: Hearing the unsaid. *Women & Language, 34*(2), 115–119.
- Jorgenson, J. (2016). Performing the ‘two-body problem’: An analysis of academic couples’ career sensemaking as revealed through joint storytelling. *Journal of Family Communication, 16*(4), 403-418.
- Kelly, J. T., Kendrick, M. M., Newgent, R. A., & Lucas, C. J. (2007). Strategies for student transition to college: A proactive approach. *College Student Journal, 41*(4), 1021–1035.
- Klibert, J., Lamis, D. A., Collins, W., Smalley, K. B., Warren, J. C., Yancey, C. T., & Winterowd, C. (2014). Resilience mediates the relations between perfectionism and college student distress. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 92*(1), 75–82.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00132.x>
- Kolb, B. (2008). Involving, sharing, analysing—Potential of the participatory photo interview. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 9*(3), 25.
<https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-9.3.1155>

- Latham, S. C. (2004). *Anticipatory socialization and university retention: An analysis of the effect of enrollment at a faith-based secondary school on the progression of students through a faith-based university*. (3137448) [Doctoral Dissertation, The Florida State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Lazarowicz, T. A. (2015). *Understanding the transition experience of community college transfer students to a 4-year university: Incorporating Schlossberg's transition theory into higher education*. (3688491) [Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Nebraska - Lincoln]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Lillie, H. M., Venetis, M. K., & Chernichky-Karcher, S. M. (2018). "He would never let me just give up": Communicatively constructing dyadic resilience in the experience of breast cancer. *Health Communication, 33*(12), 1516-1524.
- Lillis, M. P. (2011). Faculty emotional intelligence and student-faculty interactions: Implications for student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 13*(2), 155-178.
- Louis, M. R. (1980). Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 226-251*.
- Lucas, K., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2012). Memorable messages of hard times: Constructing short- and long-term resiliencies through family communication. *Journal of Family Communication, 12*(3), 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2012.687196>
- Marsh, H. W., & Parker, J. W. (1984). Determinants of student self-concept: Is it better to be a relatively large fish in a small pond even if you don't learn to swim as well? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 47*(1), 213–231. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.47.1.213>

- McAdams, D. P., Bauer, J. J., Sakaeda, A. R., Anyidoho, N. A., Machado, M. A., Magrino-Failla, K., White, K. W., & Pals, J. L. (2006). Continuity and change in the life story: A longitudinal study of autobiographical memories in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Personality, 74*(5), 1371–1400. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00412.x>
- McCoy, B. T. (2003). *The senior year: A study of transition, liminality and students' perspectives of their final year as undergraduates.* (3078708) [Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Miller, J., Janz, J., & Chen, C. (2007). The retention impact of a first-year seminar on students with varying pre-college academic performance. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, 19*(1), 47-62.
- Mugel, O., Gurviez, P., & Decrop, A. (2019). Eudaimonia around the kitchen: A hermeneutic approach to understanding food well-being in consumers' lived experiences. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 38*(2), 280–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915618825267>
- Myerhoff, B. & Ruby, J. (1982). Introduction. In J. Ruby (Ed.), *A crack in the mirror* (pp. 1-35). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- National Collegiate Honors Council. (n.d.) *About NCHC.* <https://www.nchchonors.org/about-nhc>
- Nelson, P. (2020). *Defying the Odds: Exploring the ways first-generation college students enact resilience.* (92) [Master's Thesis, University of Kentucky].
- Noble, C. H., & Walker, B. A. (1997). Exploring the relationships among liminal transitions, symbolic consumption, and the extended self. *Psychology & Marketing, 14*(1), 29–47. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6793\(199701\)14:1<29::AID-MAR3>3.0.CO;2-Q](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199701)14:1<29::AID-MAR3>3.0.CO;2-Q)

- Orbuch, T. L. (1997). People's accounts count: The sociology of accounts. *Annual review of sociology*, 23(1), 455-478.
- Parker, W. D., & Adkins, K. K. (1995). A psychometric examination of the multidimensional perfectionism scale. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 17(4), 323-334.
- Pittman, L. D., & Richmond, A. (2008). University belonging, friendship quality, and psychological adjustment during the transition to college. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 76(4), 343-362.
- Rayle, A. D., & Chung, K. (2007). Revisiting first-year college students' mattering: Social support, academic stress, and the mattering experience. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 9(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.2190/X126-5606-4G36-8132>
- Rice, K. G., Leever, B. A., Christopher, J., & Porter, J. D. (2006). Perfectionism, stress, and social (dis)connection: A short-term study of hopelessness, depression, and academic adjustment among honors students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53(4), 524–534. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.53.4.524>
- Rinn, A. N. (2005). Trends among honors college students: An analysis by year in school. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 16(4), 157–167.
- Robinson, M. (2015). *The lived experiences of first-year, first semester honors college students placed on academic probation*. (718) [Doctoral Dissertation - University of Central Florida]. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/718>

- Rose, J., Mackey-Kallis, S., Shyles, L., Barry, K., Biagini, D., Hart, C., & Jack, L. (2012). Face it: The impact of gender on social media images. *Communication Quarterly*, *60*(5), 588-607.
- Roulston, K. (2018). Qualitative interviewing and epistemics. *Qualitative Research*, *18*(3), 322-341.
- Ruppel, E. K., Burke, T. J., Cherney, M. R., & Dinsmore, D. R. (2018). Social compensation and enhancement via mediated communication in the transition to college. *Human Communication Research*, *44*(1), 58–79. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqx003>
- Sarangi, S. (2003). Institutional, professional, and lifeworld frames in interview talk. *Analyzing race talk: Multidisciplinary approaches to the interview*, 64-84.
- Scharp, K. M., Geary, D. E., Wolfe, B. H., Wang, T. R., & Fesenmaier, M. A. (2020). Understanding the triggers and communicative processes that constitute resilience in the context of migration to the United States. *Communication Monographs*, 1-23.
- Schein, E. H. (1988). Organizational socialization and the profession of management. *Sloan Management Review*, *30*(1), 53–65.
- Schlenker, B. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Schlossberg, N. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *9*(2), 2–18.
- Schneider, D. J. (1981). Tactical self-presentations: Toward a broader conception. In J. T. Tedeschi (Ed.), *Impression management theory and social psychological research* (pp. 23-40). New York: Academic Press.

- Smith, W. L., & Zhang, P. (2009). Students' perceptions and experiences with key factors during the transition from high school to college. *College Student Journal*, 43(2), 643–657.
- Sobande, F., Schoonejans, A., Johnson, G. D., Thomas, K. D., & Harrison, A. K. (2020). Enacting anti-racist visualities through photo-dialogues on race in Paris. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 40(2), 165–179.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-01-2020-0019>
- Stephenson-Abetz, J., & Holman, A. (2012). Home is where the heart is: Facebook and the negotiation of “old” and “new” during the transition to college. *Western Journal of Communication*, 76(2), 175–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2011.654309>
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.
- Tedeschi, J. T., & Reiss, M. (1981). Identities, the phenomenal self, and laboratory research. In J. T. Tedeschi (Ed.), *Impression management theory and social psychological research* (pp. 3-22). New York: Academic Press.
- Terenzini, P. T., Rendon, L. I., Lee Upcraft, M., Millar, S. B., Allison, K. W., Gregg, P. L., & Jalomo, R. (1994). The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories. *Research in Higher Education*, 35(1), 57–73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02496662>
- Tian, Z., & Bush, H. R. (2020). Half the sky: Interwoven resilience processes of women political leaders in China. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 48(1), 70-90.
- Tinto, V. (1999). Taking retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college. *NACADA Journal*, 19(2), 5–9. <https://doi.org/10.12930/0271-9517-19.2.5>

- Tomlinson, S. D. (2002). *The roles of communication and self-presentation in the socialization of college students*. (3053565) [Doctoral Dissertation-University of Washington.] ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Tracy, S. J. (2018). A phronetic iterative approach to data analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research*, 19(2), 61–76. doi:10.22284/qr.2018.19.2.61
- Turner, V. (1969). Liminality and communitas. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*, 94(113), 125-30.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Gardner, J. N. (1989). *The freshman year experience: Helping students survive and succeed in college*. Jossey-Bass Inc.
- van Dijck, J. (2008). Digital photography: Communication, identity, memory. *Visual Communication*, 7(1), 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357207084865>
- Van Maanen, J. (1978). People processing: Strategies of organizational socialization. *Organizational Dynamics*, 7(1), 19–36. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(78\)90032-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(78)90032-3)
- Van Maanen, J., & Schein, E. H. (1979). Toward a theory of organizational socialization. In *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 1, pp. 209–264). JAI Press.
- Venetis, M. K., Chernichky-Karcher, S. M., & Lillie, H. M. (2020). Communicating resilience: predictors and outcomes of dyadic communication resilience processes among both cancer patients and cancer partners. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 48(1), 49-69.
- Villagran, M., Canzona, M. R., & Ledford, C. J. (2013). The milspouse battle rhythm: Communicating resilience throughout the deployment cycle. *Health Communication*, 28(8), 778-788.

- Walsh, M. J., & Baker, S. A. (2017). The selfie and the transformation of the public–private distinction. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(8), 1185–1203.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1220969>
- Wang, T. R. (2014). Formational turning points in the transition to college: Understanding how communication events shape first-generation students’ pedagogical and interpersonal relationships with their college teachers. *Communication Education*, 63(1), 63–82.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2013.841970>
- Warren, S. (2018). Photography in qualitative organizational research: Conceptual, analytical and ethical issues in photo-elicitation inspired methods. In C. Cassell, A. Cunliffe, & G. Grandy, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods: Methods and Challenges* (pp. 239–261). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526430236.n15>
- Washington, C. (2012). *The expected adjustment and academic outcomes of honors college students*. (3536137). [Doctoral Dissertation, Old Dominion University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (Vol. 3). Sage.
- Wilhoit, E. D. (2019). *Investigating materiality and meaning in workspaces through photo-elicitation interviews*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526462411>
- Wilhoit Larson, E. (2020a). Where is an organization? How workspaces are appropriated to become (partial and temporary) organizational spaces. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 34(3), 299–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318920933590>

Wilhoit Larson, E. (2020b). Creating home at work: Humanistic geography and placemaking in organizations. *Culture and Organization*, 1–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2020.1861453>

Wiltse, E. C., Gonda, M., Massmann, C., Williams, K., & Bott-Knutson, R. (2020). Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on honors student learning, institutional connections, and intent to return to campus. *Journal of the European Honors Council*, 4(1), 1–22.

<https://doi.org/10.31378/jehc.143>

Yep, G. A. (2016). Toward thick (er) intersectionalities: Theorizing, researching, and activating the complexities of communication and identities. *Globalizing intercultural communication: A reader*, 86-94.

Appendix A: IRB Exempt Determination



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 9, 2020

Cayla Lanier
4202 E Fowler Ave
ALN 241
Tampa, FL 33620

Dear Cayla Lanier:

On 3/6/2020, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY000411
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	Honors College Student Identity and Transition
Funding:	None
Protocol:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Honors College Student Identity and Transition Protocol 3.2.2020

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about

A PREEMINENT RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638



whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Tatyana Harris
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

A PREEMINENT RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669

University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

Page 2 of 2

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study
Title: Honors College Student Identity and Transition
Study # 000411

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Cayla Lanier, who is a Doctoral Candidate in the Communication Department of the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Jane Jorgenson. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at the Judy Genshaft Honors College at USF and is supported/sponsored by Dr. Charles Adams, Dean of the Judy Genshaft Honors College. The purpose of the study is to understand how honors student identity is developed during the transition to college in the first semester. Participants will be asked to share photos taken during their first semester in college, which will be used to prompt conversation during interviews, and later analyzed alongside interview transcripts.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you are a first-year student enrolled in the Judy Genshaft Honors College at USF.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, standing in the Judy Genshaft Honors College, recommendations, or access to future opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation, though you may receive a benefit from future programming or improved services developed as a result of the findings of this study. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life. Talking about memories and experiences may invoke feelings of discomfort or vulnerability, but no more than a conversation with any person about these topics.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Your photos will become property of the researcher to be used only in the context of this research study. Some of your photos may be published in relation to this research study as examples of study findings. This means the researcher may show your photo(s) on screen during an academic research conference, print them on a research poster to be used at a conference, printed within the dissertation document, and/or printed within an academic article related to the study.

While you may provide photos that include people other than yourself for the interview, any photo



USF RESEARCH & INNOVATION

including other people will be excluded from any print or publication use, since those people have not given consent. You may also identify any other photos you want excluded from publication.

Why are you being asked to take part?

You are being asked to take part because the research team believes your experiences are important and worthy of being studied, despite the limited published information on first-year honors students' experiences.

Study Procedures:

Participants will be recruited during the Spring 2020 term to share with the researcher photographs that represent first-semester transition experiences and then discuss the photos during an interview. Participants will receive a guide with instructions on how to select and send photos to the researcher.

Participants will be asked to participate in an individual interview to talk about their first semester experiences, sharing the photos that feel most representative of their experience. Interviews will be recorded so the researcher can remember details of the conversation. These interviews will take place via video chat during the Spring 2020 semester and will last no more than one hour.

Interview questions will include asking participants to share their meaningful photos and to talk about:

- Where and when did this photo take place? Why did you take it? What was happening in this moment? What else was going on during this point in the semester?
- What does this photo represent to you? Did you take any other photos that represent the same thing? How are they alike or different to you?
- As you think about your own transition experience, how have you changed from high school to last semester (Fall) to today? (How) Has your understanding of yourself as an honors student changed?

Total Number of Participants

20-30 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, access to resources or support services, or ability to remain in the Judy Genshaft Honors College.

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study. There is a possibility to gain a sense of belonging and/or a greater sense of self-understanding through the process of reflection and storytelling during the interviews.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study. Talking about memories and experiences may invoke feelings of discomfort or vulnerability, but no more than a conversation with any person about these topics. Participants can receive referrals to free campus resources to address these feelings, if necessary.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

Your information or photos collected as part of the research will be retained for up to 4 years for future analysis related to first-year honors student experiences. Interview transcripts and photographs will be saved with non-identifiable file names to protect your privacy.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Data collected for this research will be stored at the Judy Genshaft Honors College, located at the University of South Florida in the United States.

The following information may be used and disclosed to others:

- Your research records, including your photographs and captions
- Your contact information, including your name, e-mail address and your mailing address



Your personal information collected for this research will be kept as long as it is needed to conduct this research. Once your participation in the research is over, your information will be stored in accordance with applicable policies and regulations. Your permission to use your personal data will not expire unless you withdraw it in writing. You may withdraw or take away your permission to use and disclose your information at any time. You do this by sending written notice to the Principal Investigator at the following address: Cayla Lanier, 4202 E Fowler Ave, ALN 241, Tampa, FL 33620.

While we are conducting the research study, we cannot let you see or copy the research information we have about you. After the research is completed, you have a right to see the information about you, as allowed by USF policies.

If you have concerns about the use or storage of your personal information, you have a right to lodge a complaint with the data supervisory authority at the University of South Florida.

What if new information becomes available about the study?

During the course of this study, we may find more information that could be important to you. This includes information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind about being in this study. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Cayla Lanier at 813-974-3087. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in Research

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research participant speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research participant has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix C: Participant Guide

STUDY TITLE:

Honors College Student Identity and Transition
Study Number 000411

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Cayla Lanier
Department of Communication
813-974-4646
cclanier@usf.edu

PARTICIPATION GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to understand how honors student identity is developed during the transition to college in the first semester. Participants will be asked to send via email or Instagram Direct Message 3-5 photos of their first-year experiences to the researcher, which will be used during follow up interviews. Interviews will occur via video chat and will last less than an hour, including conversation about the photos specifically, and your experience as an honors student more generally.

As a reminder, your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequence. This participation guide is meant to help you prepare for the interview, which will include talking about your experiences transitioning from high school to college, your experiences as an honors student, and the ways you have documented these experiences through pictures and/or social media posts.

Prior to the Interview

Review your social media accounts and photo app to look at pictures you posted or took during the Fall 2019 semester. Identify 3-5 photos that you believe represent your experiences during this time period and send your photos to the researcher, Cayla Lanier, via email (cclanier@usf.edu), or Instagram DM (@firstyearhonors) prior to your interview. For email, include your name in the email and use the subject line “Honors Student Transition”. In DMs, include your first and last name.

- **Social Media Posts**

Screen shot the post, including the photo, date posted, and any caption you included. Do not include any comments in the screen shot.

- **Photos Taken but not Posted**

Send the photo directly to the researcher with date and location of photo.

All photographs must be your personal property, taken by you. You may not include a photo taken by someone else.

During the Interview

Interviews will be held via video chat, using the software Microsoft Teams. The researcher will have electronic copies of the photos you sent, so you can refer to them during the interview. Photographs will be tagged with your participant code and identification numbers, but no other personal information. Interviews will be recorded, video and audio, so the researcher can transcribe the interview for analysis.

After the Interview

Your photos will become property of the researcher to be used only in the context of this research study. Some of your photos may be published in relation to this research study as

examples of study findings. This means the researcher may show your photo(s) on screen during an academic research conference, print them on a research poster to be used at a conference, printed within the dissertation document, and/or printed within an academic article related to the study.

While you may provide photos that include people other than yourself for the interview, any photo including other people will be excluded from any print or publication use, since those people have not given consent. You may also identify any other photos you want excluded from publication.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
 - a. Major, hometown, living on or off campus
 - b. Why did you choose USF?
 - c. Tell me about how you came to be in the Judy Genshaft Honors College.
 - d. How is your semester going so far?
 - e. What does your typical day look like?
2. I asked you to select a few photos to represent your experience as a first semester college student. Do you mind sharing those now?
 - a. Tell me about this picture.
 - i. What is going on in the picture?
 - ii. When did this occur?
 - iii. Why did you take this photo?
 - iv. [If photo posted on social media] Why did you choose to post this photo?
How does the caption relate to the photo?
 - v. [If photo was not posted on social media] Is there a reason you chose to take this picture but not post it?
 - vi. Why did you select this photo to share with me for my study?
 - vii. Are there any other photos you want to share with me?
 1. [repeat previous questions for each photo]

- b. Thinking back over the last few months, are there any other memorable moments or “mental snapshots” that come to mind as particularly relevant to your first semester experiences?
- 3. I’d like to show you a photo now and get your take on it. [use stock image from Judy Genshaft Honors College marketing materials]
 - a. Have you seen this photo before? What is going on here?
 - b. Does this photo represent you? Do you see yourself in this photo?
 - i. If yes, in what ways? What aspects of yourself?
 - ii. If not, what aspects of how you see yourself are missing? What aspects of these students are NOT you?
- 4. I am particularly interested in how honors students experience the transition from high school to college.
 - a. As you think about your own transition experience, how have you changed from high school to last semester (Fall) to today?
 - b. What does it mean to you to be an Honors College student?