

St. Francis Xavier University

THAT WAS ME THEN:
HOW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN RESIDENCE
SHAPE NARRATIVE IDENTITY

By

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Abstract

Postsecondary campus residence can be an environment that either enhances or hinders students' academic success, social development, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Residence is as much a place to learn and grow as it is a place to sleep for students. It is the role of student affairs educators to provide not only a safe and comfortable environment, but through mentorship, the experiences to nurture personal growth as they move through emerging adulthood, transition to university, and navigate independence. The experiences during this phase, and more importantly how students make sense of them, play a critical role in healthy identity development. Using methods of campus tours, interviews, and online engagement, this narrative inquiry explored how five senior undergraduate students retold and reflected on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. The stories the participants shared, and more importantly how they made sense of their experiences, showed evidence of personal development and higher learning. The findings suggest that student affairs educators working in Residence Life could employ a narrative identity development approach to working with emerging adults living on campus, which would align with the developmental tasks they are grappling with during their undergraduate years. Implementing such an approach requires a philosophical stance that student affairs practitioners are educators who contribute to the educational mission of the university and have a responsibility to support students to navigate the transition to adult life.

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Glossary of Terms

American College Professional Association (ACPA): An association of student affairs professionals based in the States. The ACPA publishes a scholarly journal called the Journal of College Student Development and is revered as a leading source for student affairs research.

Association of Atlantic College and University Student Services (AACUSS): An association for student affairs professionals specifically in Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.

Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I): An association for professionals specifically in housing and Residence Life. ACUHO-I publishes a scholarly journal called the Journal of University & College Student Housing.

Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS): A Canadian association for student affairs professionals.

Residence Assistant (RA): A live-in, paid student leadership position responsible for leading community building activities and peer mentorship on a floor or section of a residence. The RA also shares on-call responsibilities with other RAs and is expected to respond to emergencies and disruptive incidents in the residence after hours. They are normally the front-line enforcers of the residence rules.

Residence Life Coordinator (RLC): A live-in, full-time professional staff member that supervises RA teams and oversees day to day management of one to three residence buildings. RLCs often have residence student conduct management responsibilities. RLCs share on-call responsibilities with other professional staff and are called to manage crises and incidents after hours. RLCs act as mentors and provide support and coaching to RAs.

Senior Residence Assistant (SRA): A live-in, paid student position that has some additional leadership and mentorship responsibilities beyond those of a Residence Assistant.

Student Affairs: The professional field that provides services and supports to post-secondary students; it encompasses a broad range of non-academic functions such as Residence Life, student misconduct policies and procedures, career services, student advising, health and counselling services, and other student services.

Chapter 1: Learning about Learning in Residence

My story begins as a first generation, undergraduate student living in residence at, what was then known as Brescia University College (Brescia), affiliated with (and now integrated with) Western University in London, Ontario. I was an average student, academically speaking, but I loved living in residence and all the extracurricular opportunities that provided. I took part in activities such as movie nights, intramural sports, holiday themed events, different religious celebrations, and bus trips to local events hosted by the residence-leadership team. I met new friends, learned about where in the world they were from and their family traditions. Brescia was an all-women's Catholic university, founded by the Ursuline Sisters in 1919 ("Brescia University College", n.d.). The Ursuline Sisters believed in higher education accessible to women at a time when very few women attended university. While I was there, Brescia was going through a significant change, transitioning from sole leadership by the Ursuline sisters to a lay-person governance structure. The planning process for the transition provided many opportunities for students to engage and give input on the new structure. Participating in the planning process was a powerful and formative experience for me. I recall conversations with Sister Theresa, who was part of the leadership team and lived in residence with us. Sister T., as we called her, talked about the long history of the college and the strong-bold women who lead the college through many milestones. Women in leadership was the cornerstone of Brescia, and as students, we learned by the example of some amazing women, who saw a need and stepped up to fill that need. We also witnessed what it means to lead with grace and humility through a significant change as the Ursulines handed over leadership of the college after 85 years.

Sister T. talked about the mixed emotions she and other Ursuline sisters had about the change and what led to the decision. As a community, the Ursuline sisters reflected on the history

of the college and the values upon which it was built. In the end, they were sad that their time of leadership was over, but proud that their legacy of women leading women would continue with the strong foundation they build at Brescia. They opened three years of dialogue and collaborative planning with alumni, staff, faculty, and students. They taught me that everyone has something valuable to contribute. There are many perspectives of the world, and each offers a new way of understanding that enriches our worldview.

In my first year at Brescia, I met Michelle who was a year ahead of me. She was involved in student leadership as a Residence Assistant (RA) and was also part of the transition planning team. Michelle and I became good friends, and I tagged along for many meetings and events when I could. By the end of my first year, Michelle encouraged me to apply to be a residence floor senior, which was a volunteer-student leadership role. I had never done anything like that in high school. I felt that if Michelle could see me in a leadership position, maybe I could be a leader. I got the role and became the floor senior for 3rd Main. I lead floor meetings and organized events and activities to build our community and school spirit. I was also part of a Residence Council with other floor seniors where we planned residence wide activities. The following year I was the successful applicant for Residence Chairperson of the Residence Council. I stayed engaged in various roles through all four years of my undergrad and loved that part of student life. However, *student* and *life* were two separate things. The student part, academic habits and skills, was not as natural for me. Like many first-generation students, I relied on peers for support and motivation. Living in residence surrounded by my classmates, we planned study sessions and helped each other understand theories and concepts from our coursework. If I had not lived in residence, I believe I would not have been successful. Being part of a community in which members encouraged each other, and celebrated successes together

was the richest part of my undergraduate experience. This is when I began to discover that learning is more than acquiring knowledge in a classroom. That set me on a path and a career in student affairs where I would develop my understanding of learning as a lifelong process that is experienced through and with others. Through my own undergraduate years and my work, I have come to see that learning is both an academic and non-academic phenomenon. In July 2015, after more than 10 years working in Residence Life, I moved from Ontario to Nova Scotia to start a new job as the Director, Student Life at St. Francis Xavier University (StFX).

Personally, and professionally, I have witnessed how the residence experience can have an important impact for undergraduate students' academic success, social development, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Lane Vetere (2010) emphasizes that:

other than convenience, the Residence Life program provides a value-added benefit for students living on campus versus those living in a rented room or apartment off campus. Residence Life programs should be designed to build community in the residence halls and provide and/or support learning opportunities that promote student development. (p. 79)

Like many student affairs professionals, I believe that residence is as much a learning space, as a place of residence, and it is our job to provide not only a safe and comfortable environment with all the amenities, but also the experiences and mentorship to nurture personal growth. I was mentored by Sister T. and my friend Michelle, and with their encouragement, I had the courage to explore who I could be through leadership responsibilities. The example of the Ursuline sisters, who valued education *for all* and their commitment to social justice, taught me that we all have a responsibility for the next generation to lead by example. The learning I experienced outside the classroom was as valuable to me as the courses I took at Brescia. When I think of the

degree I earned, foremost in my mind is all the education I gained thanks not only to faculty, but also to staff and my peers during those four years.

I am not a trained teacher in the formal sense, but I am an educator in that my work with undergraduate students facilitates their personal growth and adolescent-early adulthood development. Professional associations have devised standards that emphasize the role of student affairs in the overall educational mission of postsecondary institutions (see ACUHO-I Professional Standards, 2020). As a student affairs educator, I believe that my role is “that of advisor, guide, and fellow traveler rather than that of authoritarian” (Knight, 2008, p. 105). This is the mindset I bring to my role, and I encourage in my team while working with students. As advisors and guides, we approach conversations with students about their experiences and challenges in ways that help them reflect on and makes sense of these experiences as they transition to adulthood. I have observed that students’ social life can be active, especially in residence. Students form friend groups that connect in residence after classes, go to meal hall together, and often celebrate shared successes and milestones, such as the end of exams or spring break. Through these social activities students feel a sense of belonging to a group, which is important for persistence and progression in university (Tinto, 1993). Sometimes student social life encompasses high risk behaviours such as unhealthy substance use, stunts or pranks, and damage and destruction of property. In a group, students tend to take more risks and conform to what they perceived is expected by their peers and may be rewarded with cheers and encouragement in the moment. I find that students who get into trouble for their destructive actions frequently express their shame and embarrassment afterwards, and articulate that their behaviour was not a good representation of who they believe they are as people. When I connect with a student to reflect on an incident and focus on learning rather than admonishment, the

student seems to appreciate it and is more likely to return for conversations with me in the future, and less likely to get into trouble again. Working with students in this way is an important part of the work of student affairs educators, particularly in residence, and contributes to students' holistic learning and these experiences are central to their development living in residence.

From my perspective, the role of educators (faculty, instructors, and those in student affairs) is to help students discover how to navigate their own learning, so they can adapt quickly in the fast-paced and rapidly changing global context (Knight, 2008). I think of the example of the Ursulines, reflecting on their changing role at Brescia and how they believed that it was time to steward in the next generation to lead. Their humility and reflexivity allowed them to see a different possible future for the College that was their legacy. They approached their relationship with students as mentors and guides; they saw us as the next generation of leadership in the world. Student affairs professionals, like me, who approach their role as educators, and coach students to reflect on events in their lives, consider their relationship with students as co-constructors of knowledge, guide, and facilitator. Baxter Magolda (2003) examines this relationship between educator and student and argues that "becoming critically aware of one's own 'composing of reality' requires acknowledging that one's identity is part of knowing" (p. 232). This important connection between oneself and one's reality is key to what I suggest is the starting point of a holistic view of education in the undergraduate context. Educators must create the conditions for students to reflect upon and interpret experiences in active construction of knowledge with peers and educators alike. As students prepare to take on global challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, human rights, and access to healthcare and education, the variety of perspectives and ways of being in the world are more diverse than ever. Information is instantly available from anywhere in the world. Community is no longer constrained by

geographic location. Students today must be open to many perspectives and allow more than one truth to be possible.

Introduction to the Study and Research Questions

Identity development is the primary task of young people as they approach adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Arnett, 2000). As a result of reflecting on my own journey as a student, and a student affairs professional, I am interested in how the experiences of students living in residence contribute to healthy identity development. Often senior students reflect on their experiences, particularly during the first year, and talk about their mistakes and challenges in terms of their growth and development. For an 18-year-old living away from home for the first time, residence living is an intensely social experience. The stories of this experience, and the meaning students attribute to the stories, shape who they are and help them find who they want to be. This study explored how five senior undergraduate students retold and reflected on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. The main research question was:

1. How do senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens?

One of the goals of this research was to gain insights to build and strengthen how student affairs professionals contribute to the educational mission of their postsecondary institution. There are two subsuming questions that guided the methodology and analysis towards this goal:

2. How do students perceive Residence Life staff and programming as facilitating or contributing to their narrative identity development?
3. What are the implications of this research for reshaping Residence Life programs using a narrative identity development approach?

In the next section, my theoretical framework provides a foundation of theories and concepts that align with my epistemological and ontological views and informed the research at every phase.

Theoretical Framework

I embraced a theoretical pluralism, which enhanced the value of the inquiry (Bohman, 1999). There are four significant theories that form the conceptual framework for this research: emerging adulthood, student development theory, narrative identity, and *bildung*. The aim of the research, as noted in the previous section, was to explore how undergraduate students retell and reflect on their experiences living in residence. Each of the four theoretical viewpoints offered me a different lens through which to consider my conversations with student participants and other data generated, and why my research topic is important now. Throughout the research process, the theoretical framework guided the development of the methodology and informed the methods and questions I posed to participants. During the early coding part of the data collection phase, I used the framework as a lens through which to begin to identify emerging themes and ideas. The framework was also useful in developing the discussion of my findings and implications in the final chapter.

Emerging Adulthood

First coined by Jeffrey Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood theory introduced a new stage of life between adolescence and adulthood. This stage of life is distinct from adolescence and adulthood and represents, approximately, the ages between 18 to 25. Arnett (2000) looked at the demographic changes that occurred over the last half of the 20th century, particularly in developed countries. Arnett (2000) found that the kinds of commitments associated with becoming an adult, such as marriage, financial independence, career, and worldview, were made later than in previous generations. Attending postsecondary after high school became more

common. Long term commitment in a romantic relationship on average occurs almost 12 years later in life than in the 1970s (Statistics Canada, 2002/2020). An extended period of exploration and experimentation, when identity formation is a significant developmental task (Erikson, 1968), is a distinguishing feature of emerging adulthood theory. Emerging adults spend more time exploring different worldviews before making enduring commitments. Many of the theories commonly referenced in the student affairs profession were developed before emerging adulthood theory was introduced. However, new research in student affairs is beginning to reexamine student development with an interdisciplinary approach that considers the complexity of identity formation, social and psychological development, and the impact of social media (Zhang et al., 2022).

Student Development Theory

Student development theory is a broad set of theories and models related to undergraduate students and their growth, each with their own approach to understanding youth development. Broadly, student development theory is concerned with the processes involved in the interpersonal and intrapersonal growth of students that influences their sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Jones & Abes, 2011). Student development as a field of study traditionally drew heavily from psychosocial theories of development, and later shifted towards humanist psychology introduced in the last half of the 20th century, to understand how emerging adults develop and express identity. New contributions to research on identity, and on development from adolescents to adulthood, continue to expand the perspectives of student development. My approach in this research was grounded in the evolving and broadening understanding of student development theory as an overarching theoretical perspective within which is situated the growth and development emerging adults experience at

university. This grounding implies that in addition to academic learning, there is also a responsibility for universities to be intentional about how they support and facilitate the inter/intrapersonal growth of students. I began this research with the unwavering belief that student development is intertwined with academic learning in university, and all experiences – academic and non-academic in nature – contribute to identity formation.

Narrative Identity

Narrative identity theory, introduced in the early 2000s, conceptualizes how identity is created and recreated through social interaction. Identity is understood as an evolving story we tell ourselves and others about who we are (McAdams & McLean, 2013). As natural storytellers, humans share knowledge through stories about experiences and the meaning of those experiences. Narrative identity theory is rooted in social constructivism and extends this epistemological stance to a co-constructive process of identity creation and recreation. Identity is both expressed and created through the sharing and feedback of stories between people. As we move through new experiences and contexts, our understanding of an experience in the past changes and holds new meaning in connection to who we are now and who we might become. Students entering university from high school (around age 18) are developmentally at a formative time, grappling with more independence and personal responsibility, defining who they are becoming as they approach adulthood. The experiences during this phase, and more importantly how students make sense of them, play a critical role in healthy identity development. Narrative identity theory contends that the life story connects the past, present and future, creating one cohesive self (McAdams, 1992). Students nearing graduation reflect on their university journey and share stories of the defining moments they experienced along the way.

Bildung

The German concept *bildung* is a philosophical one, and adult-child developmental practice, with deep meaning that is hard to translate in few words. According to Davey (2006), the word *bildung* translates to “formation, cultivation, and education” (as cited in Kim 2016, p. 127), although its essence is more complex. *Bildung* represents a striving towards morality and self-understanding. This aligns well with the humanism philosophy that people are inherently good and want to be good. It involves a choice, or continuous choices, to “[nurture] and [foster] the self to become somebody, which goes beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge and skills” (Biesta, as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 127), as I experienced at Brescia as an undergraduate student. *Bildung* is both the goal and the action through which we strive to be good and moral. Taylor (2017) argues for a rethinking of *bildung* from a posthumanism perspective. A posthuman *bildung* values our “dynamic entanglement” with other people, animals, and things in the world. This perspective of *bildung* “reworks the individual’s process of self-development, unfolding, and self-cultivation not as an inner, private, or purely individual experience but as a dynamic enactment or practice that happens intra-actively” (Taylor, 2017, p. 11). The choice we have is to strive to become aware of the relationships that are part of our narrative. Similarly, Wahlström (2010) suggests *bildung* is about being open to seeing and interacting with new and different things and people and the process of discovering one’s identity through those experiences. In other words, we do not discover ourselves in isolation with our own agency, selectively deciding what and who influences who we are. We are created through interactivity with others and the world.

Acknowledging Multiple Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical framework situates my positionality as the researcher in relation to the existing literature (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). I adopted a pluralist perspective which aligns with

the exploratory aim of the research. To explore participants' stories of their first year and how their identity making was shaped, it was necessary to be open to multiple ways of understanding. The four theoretical lenses—emerging adulthood, student development, narrative identity, and *bildung*—differ from each other in their contextual viewpoints related to the developmental and learning experiences of young, undergraduate students.

Emerging adulthood theory refers to a distinct period of life about which theorizing began because of industrialization and describes the broad, shared characteristics of youth in the transition to adulthood. Adulthood is defined by exploration of, and eventual decisions about, relationships, career choice, and worldviews and occurs by approximately 25 years of age (Arnett, 2000). The narrow scope of emerging adulthood theory, in terms of age, is a useful lens for this research because it dives deep into the global socioeconomic context in which youth are navigating their way to independence as the end goal. Narrative identity theory goes beyond the entrance to adulthood to view the practice of exploring and learning about the world and oneself as a lifelong process, situating identity formation as ongoing identity evolution that is contextual and fluid. Enduring decisions about values and beliefs may be challenged, questioned, strengthened or altered through new experiences and changes in context at any stage of life.

Student development theories form the roots of practice for educators specifically in postsecondary settings. Student affairs educators draw upon a broad set of theories related to the student experience: psychosocial, identity theories (including social, racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender), moral and spiritual development, transition theory, human ecology, and experiential learning (Patton et al., 2016). Educators and research in student affairs specific contexts seek to understand the student experience and how best to support students' overall social, personal, and academic success. Success goes beyond simply acquiring knowledge. *Bildung* provides a lens

through which to view the personal development, how one comes to understand and takes responsibility for one's sense of self (Wahlström, 2010). This is an important theoretical perspective of identity at a deeply personal level. Equally important, the theoretical perspective also presents a view of *bildung* as central to the role of educators, responsible for the upbringing of youth. Each of these theoretical perspectives views the context of a person's identity—how it is shaped, and how it is expressed—from a unique angle and depth.

Chapter Summary

To lay the foundation for the chapters that follow, I introduced myself and my positionality as a researcher. My personal and professional experiences nurtured my interests in understanding the kinds of learning and development that occur in campus Residence Life as part of the transition to adulthood. I stated my assertion that universities must take a holistic approach to undergraduate education for emerging adults that aims to foster a lifelong learning mindset in which students open themselves to new understandings through interactions with each other and their environment. I introduced the study presented in my dissertation, which aims to explore how senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. I introduced a theoretical framework with four theories that provided the lens through which I viewed the design of the study, the analysis of the data, and the discussion of the findings overall.

In the chapters that follow, I will lay out a review of the literature relevant to the aim of the study, the methodology and methods used in this narrative inquiry into stories of senior students as they reflect on their first-year experiences in residence. In addition to my analysis and discussion of the data from multiple theoretical perspectives, I will offer a discussion of the insights and implications from the learnings of the study. Next, I explore the literature to define

concepts and current theoretical perspectives related to university student learning and development, approaches to Residence Life, and identity development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present the foundational theories and current literature in three thematic areas. The first theme, learning and development, explores various perspectives in higher education and the tensions between the perspectives in the absence of a common definition of learning and development. The second theme presents the literature related to campus residence living, the philosophical orientation in the field of student affairs with respect to Residence Life, and the current learning approaches to Residence Life programs. Finally, the third theme deals with evolving theoretical perspectives of identity development as students live and interact in increasingly complex and global contexts, on and offline.

Perspectives on Learning and Development in Higher Education

Learning and student development are terms sometimes used interchangeably, especially in fields such as student affairs that are interested in the learning that occurs outside formal education (i.e., the university classroom or lab). However, as Saljo (2009) notes, researchers in other areas of higher education (e.g. Alexander et al., 2009) have tended to distinguish learning from developmental changes and processes of young university students. For these researchers the term learning has commonly been used in relation to the learning that takes place within the structured academic setting, while development refers to intrapersonal and interpersonal growth that occur during the undergraduate university years. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that there is a dynamic relationship between learning and development by which learning prompts psychological developmental processes that only occur through interaction with people or the environment. In his view, development refers to cognitive and mental functions: “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 35). Today, the diversity of theoretical

perspectives emphasizes that the “what” and the “how” of learning is of interest in several disciplines – anthropological, interactional, sociological, sociocultural – and extends beyond simply cognitivist and behaviorist views. There is general agreement across fields that learning is much more complex than the cognitive processes and behaviours that create understanding of new concepts (Saljo, 2009). Attempts to find a common understanding of the learning process, oversimplifies the complexity of learning, and devalues the various theories of learning, rather than appreciating the “position in the learning landscape and the vista on learning that each position affords” (Alexander et al., 2009, p. 177). With this caution in mind, this section explores the literature on learning from various perspectives.

Attempting to find a common language to examine and discuss learning across fields of study, Alexander et al., (2009) propose nine principles of learning which they contend should not be misunderstood as a simplification of already established understandings for those who study learning:

Principle 1: Learning is change

Principle 2: Learning is inevitable, essential, and ubiquitous

Principle 3: Learning can be resisted

Principle 4: Learning may be disadvantageous

Principle 5: Learning can be tacit and incidental as well as conscious and intentional

Principle 6: Learning is framed by our humanness

Principle 7: Learning refers to both a process and a product

Principle 8: Learning is different at different points in time

Principle 9: Learning is interactional. (p. 178)

The authors refer to their perspective as “topographical” as they use the analogy of a learning landscape and acknowledge learning includes components of physiology in the brain, cognitive functions, and social and environmental contexts past and present (p. 176). They also contend that learning is more than consciously acquiring new knowledge:

Often learners cannot give an explicit rendering of when learning occurred, how learning happened, or how they were changed. Even in the classroom where academic development is the business at hand, much of learning lives in the water table below the surface. (Alexander et al., 2009, p. 179)

Thus, the educational experience for the learner is more complex than acquiring the new information intended in a lesson plan. Beyond coming to understand a topic or concept, individuals learn how to negotiate and form an argument for a position about a new topic through discussion with others, which exercises interpersonal skills associated with development.

In a classroom setting, the process of learning, the methods used by the educator to share new information, the extent to which students participate in dialogue, the learning environment, and the learner’s motives and confidence about learning contribute to the learning experience in different ways for different individuals. Adding another layer of complexity to the learning “in the water table below the surface” (Alexander et al., 2009, p. 179) is the meaning-making process of the learner. Invisible to the individual or those around them, new information filters through a lens of their own personal histories, experiences, social and cultural contexts (Fried & Associates, 1995). The “inevitable, essential, and ubiquitous” nature of learning in principle 2 of Alexander et al. (2009, p. 179) model signals this complexity.

Learning Competencies and Cognitive Processes

With these layers of complexity in mind, researchers in K-12 education, such as Ellis et al. (2012) and Veenman et al. (2006), have determined the value of teaching students cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, vocabulary, and strategies for the purpose of supporting students to become independent learners. An example is found in the Atlantic Canada Framework for *Essential Graduation Competencies*, which outlines a set of competencies beyond literacy and numeracy in six areas: citizenship, communication, technological fluency, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and personal career development (Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, 2015, p. 3). Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005), proponents of learner-centred curriculum in higher education, embrace the concept of learning below the surface and state that not only does higher education need to understand the value of competency development, similar to that outlined in the *Essential Graduation Competencies* above, but also incorporate it into the curriculum, supporting students to become graduates who are able to manage their own learning processes. For Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005), the developmental aspect of learning is composed of skills and knowledge of human development, which they assert should be explicitly included in curriculum. By intentionally incorporating the “teaching of learning related behaviours...higher education will accept the responsibility of developing individuals able to design and manage their own learning and growth” (Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005, p. 87). These authors call for a change in the role of faculty from subject matter experts in a field of study to facilitators of learning skills that will serve students well beyond their undergraduate degree. The drastic shift in the ways information can be instantly distributed and accessible with new technologies also presents a need for faculty, and staff, to create conditions for students to enhance developmental competencies and capacity to interpret new knowledge and develop appreciation for the importance of lifelong learning and development (Cleveland-

Innes & Emes, 2005). Researchers in education recognize the role of educators as more than knowledge disseminators to students waiting to receive their wisdom (Knight, 2008). Knight (2008) urges educators to think of teaching as facilitative, “helping students learn how to learn themselves, so that they will develop into self-sufficient adults in a changing environment” (p. 106). The ability to select and use appropriate choices from a range of competencies is key to this self-sufficiency. Yet, how do we know if a student is going beyond rote learning of facts to developing learning skills as they explore new subject matter in a course? Assessment of learning in formal settings such as in university programs tends to focus on a student’s capacity to interpret and integrate new knowledge. One example of a well-known model that provides a range of categories for evaluating learning is Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy, which describes the outcomes of learning beyond simply remembering facts.

Bloom’s taxonomy was first developed in 1956 and is now widely applied by educators to design and assess teaching and learning in three learning domains: cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude) and psychomotor (skills) (Heer, 2021). The cognitive dimension is the most robust area of the model and has been revised and updated, as shown in Figure 1, to include categories for classifying the type of knowledge, from concrete to abstract, across categories of cognitive processes, ranging from low to high complexity of thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002).

Figure 1

Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy Knowledge Categories and Cognitive Processes

Concrete knowledge		→	abstract knowledge
Factual	Conceptual	Procedural	Metacognitive
Knowledge of terminology	Knowledge of classifications and categories	Knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms	Strategic knowledge

Knowledge of specific details and elements	Knowledge of principles and generalizations	Knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods	Knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge Self-knowledge
	Knowledge of theories, models, and structures	Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures	

Lower order thinking skills \longrightarrow higher order thinking skills					
Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Recognizing	Interpreting	Executing	Differentiating	Checking	Generating
Recalling	Exemplifying	Implementing	Organizing	Critiquing	Planning
	Classifying		Attributing		Producing
	Summarizing				
	Inferring				

Note. Adapted from Heer, 2021

The taxonomy is widely used as a measurement tool for educators to design and assess teaching and learning of information and as a framework for consistency in learning goals across the education system. Krathwohl (2002) notes that repeated analyses of learning objectives in different educational settings show that most often the objectives fall under the lower complexity category of “remembering,” yet the more complex categories that involve understanding and using knowledge tend to be the most important goals of education. Keeling and Hersh (2011) are deeply concerned about what they perceive to be the poor quality of higher education and argue that what is missing from higher education is “higher learning,” which involves building capacity

in students for critical thinking, complex problem solving, ability to see other perspectives, and personal accountability. Higher learning should involve “deep, soul-searching, mind-expanding, life-enhancing learning...persistence alone is not student success” (Keeling & Hersh, 2011, p. 8). This conception of higher learning is analogous to both the Essential Graduation Competencies of the Nova Scotia Department of Education (Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, 2015) and the metacognitive knowledge and higher order thinking skills of the revised Bloom’s taxonomy (see Heer, 2021).

Bildung as the Purpose of Education

The idea that learning is a process that involves more than memorizing and repeating knowledge passed on from generation to generation has been part of the educational discourse for more than a century. *Bildung* (introduced in Chapter 1) or closely related concepts such as growth (Dewey, 2012), are central to an educational philosophy in which the role of educators is deeply relational, acknowledging that education involves more than the content of a curriculum. Dewey (2012) argued that learning is a natural part of a person’s daily interactions, and that formal education should involve growth education in which individual citizens reconcile their personal beliefs with the social needs of the whole community. Thompson (2022) illustrated how 18th century European philosophy of *bildung*, was influential to Dewey’s conception of growth and *bildung*—specifically, Hegel’s expression of *bildung*. Hegel posed *bildung* as an educational process that shapes the moral subject to be self-reflective, always striving to “harmonize individual desires with a collective social interest” (Thompson, 2022, p. 2534). Biesta (2002) also viewed *bildung* as individually, socially, and politically enmeshed while one is actively reflecting on who they are and their part in community. Therefore, *bildung* is and should be a central concept of educational philosophy because it is “about more than simply the transmission

of our facts and values to the next generation” (Biesta, 2002, p. 344). Education also involves cultivating intangible qualities such as “confidence, resilience, responsibility, enjoyment, engagement with others, learning culturally, discovering promise of self, and extending of the self as a growing person in the world” (Foran & Robinson, 2017, p. 8) – qualities that are nurtured through the continuous striving for *bildung*. *Bildung* is the aim and the process of being open to interacting with others and to challenging one’s own beliefs because of those interactions. In this way, Biesta (2002) argues, *bildung* is not a transition to enlightenment into the right way to live, but a lifelong exploration of many ways of living.

From the views of Dewey and Biesta, the purpose of education is to raise up the next generation by passing on knowledge and values and, more importantly, to foster an appreciation and respect for one’s own and others’ individuality. Aligned with this view, but considering the role of educators, Mollenhauer (1983/2014) presents *bildung* as a process in which both student and educator (and other adults) are engaged. The four principles of education Mollenhauer (1983/2014) identifies – presentation, re-presentation, *Bildsamkeit* (or susceptibility to influence), and self-activity – provide a practical framework with *bildung* as a centralizing goal for education. The first two principles, presentation and re-presentation, are about what educators convey to students through stories, texts, images, and by example. The last two principles, *bildsamkeit* and self-activity, are about how students make sense of what has been conveyed and begin to adopt or challenge their own values through reflection – how they experience their own *bildung* (Wivestad, 2014).

Mollenhauer (1983/2014) emphasizes *bildung* as the true purpose of education. Through mutual engagement with self and others in the world “*bildung* is deeply personal, embedded in biography and culture...and often decisively shaped through a relationship” (Friesen, 2021, p.

281). From this perspective, educators must balance their involvement to allow the student the freedom to act as they choose, even if that means risking failure. In failing, the student expresses their inherent character and encounters opportunities to evaluate and possibly revise their beliefs and values. According to a review of Biesta's *World-Centred Education*, Guillemin (2024) presents Biesta's view of freedom as the freedom to lead one's own life in relation to the world, where we encounter "reality checks" that remind us that we are subject to social, political, and cultural rules (p. 5). Where Mollenhauer (1983/2014) emphasizes the educator's role in recognizing and drawing out a child's readiness for *bildung*, Guillemin (2024) notes that Biesta argues education is about risks, that the educator's role is to provide the opportunities to encounter the world and experience the reality checks. In either view, the relationship between educator and student remains central to *bildung* as a central purpose of education. Wivestad (2014) underscores the relationship and states that education "should include upbringing from something negative as well as upbringing from something positive" (p. 8). As life challenges one's *bildung* or growth, in the form of criticism, failures, and reality checks, how one comes to make sense of these failures is the substance of the process of *bildung* which is shaped directly and indirectly by educators and peers.

Returning to the idea that *bildung* is a process in which both student and educator are engaged, Foran and Robinson (2017) share a discussion on the reflections of pre-service teachers who recognized that teaching and learning are deeply relational and humanistic. The pre-service teachers were tasked with delivering a curriculum in a new geographical and cultural setting and found that they often let go of the formal lesson plans they prepared in favour of getting to know the children and their way of life. In their reflections, the pre-service teachers realized their own growth as an outcome of adapting to a different culture and to re-evaluating their understanding

of what their role is in the education of young people (Foran & Robinson, 2017). The authors' finding that the pre-service teachers realized how important it is to get to know students personally is in harmony with Mollenhauer's principle of *Bildsamkeit*. In *Bildsamkeit* the educator must "respect and draw out a child's inherent character" (Friesen, 2021, p. 287). By being open to doing things differently and learning from the children, the pre-service teachers were experiencing their own *bildung* and learning a new way of living.

The conversations on the purpose of education intersect with those of identity in that our values, what matters to us individually, are entangled with our culture, our way of life, and the desire to instill values in the next generation (Friesen, 2021). Teacher educators, such as Foran and Robinson (2017) recognize that a rigid centralized curriculum focused on outcomes oversimplifies the complexities of social life and may miss opportunities for growth and learning of the intangibles mentioned above. Explored in the next section, these missed opportunities, along with an exploration of experiences outside formal educational settings, are sometimes framed as informal learning and compared – contrasted to a curriculum and outcome-based approach.

Formal and Informal Learning

Another way learning is conceptualized is with the dichotomy between formal and informal learning. Bloom's taxonomy, for example, assumes a distinction between formal and informal, because the aim is to state the explicit intended learning the student is to gain from the formal-educational experience. Formal learning implies structured educational settings, such as a classroom. Informal learning occurs in a variety of settings and contexts in school, community, and at home. One important quality of informal learning is that it is often a result of the learner's initiative and interests rather than an expected outcome (Callanan et al., 2011). Two of the nine

principles put forth by Alexander et al. (2009), presented above, align with this depiction of informal learning: “principle 2, learning is inevitable, essential and ubiquitous” and “principle 5, learning can be tacit and incidental as well as conscious and intentional” (p. 178). Learning is not a choice for humans; it is a natural outcome of both structured formal settings and informal everyday interactions. As Alexander et al. (2009) succinctly put it: “being alive means being a learner. Being alive for humans brings with it the inevitability of learning, as well as its necessity” (p. 178). Callanan et al. (2011) reframe the formal-informal dichotomy with five major factors that consider the effectiveness of types of learning:

- 1) whether or not the focus of the activity is on deliberate teaching and learning;
- 2) how socially collaborative the activity is (including scaffolding by others who are more expert in the domain);
- 3) how much the activity is embedded in meaningful tasks with tools available, rather than abstract tasks designed for teaching;
- 4) how much initiative the learner has in choosing what and how to learn; and,
- 5) whether there is assessment of the learning that has important consequences for the learner. (p. 648)

This framework of five factors offers a way for educators to be more intentional about informal interactions and settings. The five factors put forth by Callanan et al. (2011) also allows for an expanded definition of “educator” to include other adults and even peers in everyday settings.

Social Construction of Learning

Another prominent view is that learning is socially constructed. Learning is not only an individual process of taking in information and categorizing or synthesizing it internally.

Learning is a social and interactive process that is vital to knowledge creation (Vygotsky, 1978).

The physical and social environment are critical factors for learning (Adams, 2006). Matthews et al. (2011) studied the role of a purpose-built informal learning space for students enrolled in a science program at a postsecondary institution. They noted that students spend more time outside of the classroom while at university and as such, more attention should be paid to the informal, or as the authors term it “social learning spaces” (Matthews et al., 2011, p. 107) where students choose to congregate. What they found was that the social learning space was “a medium through which the social and academic aspects of university life can coincide” (p. 107) as students engaged with each other, supporting deeper understanding of concepts and material in their common area of study. Similarly, Wenger (2011) promotes social learning spaces as places where students can share experiences of practice with peers in a learning community. Social learning spaces are places for students to not only share and discuss academic curriculum material, but also to practice higher learning (Keeling & Hersh, 2011) or higher order thinking (Krauthwohl, 2002), enact the learning in “the water table below the surface” (Alexander et al., 2009, p. 173), and grow towards becoming independent self-sufficient adults (Knight, 2008).

Perspectives on Learning and Development in the Field of Student Affairs

Parallel to the conversation in research on learning, the field of student affairs has evolved significantly in the last 30 years, with the shift from traditional student development theoretical views to a focus that shifts towards a holistic concept of development and learning. Historically, the conception of student affairs grew from the awareness of the need to provide for services and support beyond academics. The disciplines of psychology and sociology established in the early 20th century brought about the study of human development, distinct from academic learning (Patton et al., 2016). Universities hired personnel specializing in human development to support students, which led to the development of several focal areas including campus residence

living, addressing student misconduct, extra-curricular involvement, mental health supports, orientation and transition services, career services and more (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010). By the 1960s, student development emerged as a new field of study and professional associations for student affairs practitioners formed with a goal of connecting theory and practice.

Throughout the evolution of student development theory, as its own body of knowledge, it remained separate and distinct from academic teaching and learning. Academic study was traditionally concerned with the cognitive dimension (learning information related to a field of study) of the educational experience while professionally trained student affairs practitioners focused on the affective dimensions (social, emotional, and moral development). Early student development theory is rooted in psychology and centred on Erikson's (1956) ideas of identity development as a linear, internally focused, and personal process. Sanford (1967) defined student development as "the organization of increasing complexity" (p. 47), the process of growth in ability to "integrate and act on many different experiences and influences" (as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 6). Miller and Prince (1976) defined student development in terms of the function of those responsible for this part of the educational experience and suggested that it is "the application of human development concepts in a postsecondary setting" (as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 8) with the goal of developing a sense of self and independence. Student development has largely been reported as understood by administration and faculty as the purview of student affairs departments in higher education, who are responsible for development of students beyond the classroom. Although assessment in these departments is relatively new, it is assumed that they aim to achieve outcomes such as critical thinking, interpersonal relationships, independent decision-making, and openness to others' perspectives through campus engagement (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Bloland et al. (1996) articulate the role of student

affairs as focused on “the intangibles of developing the ‘whole person’ to prepare students for the wider goals...for example, to create responsible citizens” that are often referenced in institutional missions (as cited in Sherman, 2011, p. 3).

Perhaps the most relevant definition of student development today is that of a philosophical belief that student affairs is and should be concerned with the development of the whole person – including intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual growth (Patton et al., 2016). No single definition has been adopted, but student affairs theorists agree that student development involves interpersonal and intrapersonal growth of students, contributing to their sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Jones & Abes, 2011).

Perspectives on how learning and development are understood and the relationship between these two concepts have become a prominent source of discussion in the current literature associated with student affairs. Learning in higher education has historically been separated from developmental processes associated with “maturation, development and accidental changes in a person’s capacities” (Saljo, 2009, p. 202). In 1996 The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published the *Student Learning Imperative: Implication for Student Affairs*, which signaled a departure from the dominant theoretical roots in psychology to a constructivist paradigm in which student development is viewed as integral to student learning. The Student Learning Imperative (SLI) put forth an assertion that learning and student development cannot be separated and must be “the primary goal of education” (ACPA, 1996, p. 5). Both the information in an area of study and the processes through which a student makes meaning from it, together, support the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, which is the primary purpose of higher education. Similarly, Sherman argues that a learner is “not only taking in objective information but also simultaneously involved in a process of constructing personal

meaning” (2011, p. 3). The cognitive and affective dimensions of the educational experience are intertwined and equally engaged in learning (King & Baxter Magolda, 1996). King and Baxter Magolda (1996) frame learning as a continuous process of organizing and reorganizing information using cognitive and metacognitive processes. The personal meaning individuals make of new information is both shaped by and shapes that individual’s understanding of who they are now and who they might become.

From the perspective offered by King and Baxter Magolda (1996), the integration of development and learning means that identity is linked to learning. Keeling and Hersh’s (2011) notion of higher learning is “learning that prepares student to think creatively and critically; communicate effectively; and excel in responding to the challenges of life, work and citizenship” (p. 41), which is fundamentally developmental and they characterize development and knowledge acquisition as two interwoven parts of learning. Higher learning is developmental and transformative, contributing to the eventual emergence of a self-sufficient adult. That is not to say that the goal of higher learning is an idealized end point of a fully developed adult. Rather, Keeling and Hersh (2011) make the point that development is continuous throughout the lifespan and that higher learning is a responsibility of institutions for all students, regardless of age. While some theories present learning and development as two parts of the same whole (King & Baxter Magolda, 1996; Keeling, 2006), others view learning and development as two distinct concepts equally important in the higher education experience (Schroeder, 1996). Yet another theoretical view sees a relationship between learning and development where development is an outcome of learning (Rodgers, 1990). Sherman (2011) provides a succinct summary of the varied perspectives in the literature on learning and student development in higher education, noting three distinct possibilities: “student development and learning [are] conceived of as a) the same,

b) different but of equal importance, [or] c) related but differing “depths”, with learning being the more short-term event and development the deeper, longer-term change” (p. 3). Across the landscape, the views of the relationship between the concepts of learning and development vary widely, depending on the distinction made between the two concepts.

Learning is a product and a process, where knowledge is acquired through experiences and interactions with others and integrated with current understanding from past experience. Perhaps it is the imperceptible changes that occur in a given context that are difficult to articulate as learning outcomes that differentiate development from learning. I suggest that the two sides of the house – student affairs and academics – need to come together in a theoretical discussion of the relationship between learning and development and strive to find a common language to bring together all campus faculty and student affairs professionals in a united and holistic educational mission for their campus. In doing so, universities would be well positioned to foster a mindset of lifelong learning for their students.

Residence Living and Learning

Most postsecondary campuses have some residential housing for students. Historically, housing was an integral part of the university experience, where students and faculty lived as one community on campus. North American postsecondary education was established by English and French colonizers in the early 18th century. The collegiate model, where universities were led and managed by faculty, valued a liberal education through which it was intended that students gain knowledge in a broad range of topics and become independent, ethical, and open-minded citizens (Blimling, 2015). The goals of developing well-rounded students with academic and co-curricular involvement were evident in Canadian higher education in the early 20th century (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010). Institutions recognized the need for student services such as

housing, access to recreation, and specialized supports for women, who began to gain admittance to higher education and were thought to have special needs on campus. Faculty roles expanded to include supports for these needs, for example, the creation of a Dean of Students role to oversee students living on campus (Blimling, 2015). Student services began to grow and specialize, requiring dedicated roles for people with skills in specialized areas such as financial advising, academic program placement, and health services. Faculty became less involved in administrative functions and focused more exclusively on academic research and teaching. As mentioned earlier, research in human development, with roots in psychology and sociology, formed the theoretical foundation for specialization in non-academic student affairs and formed a body of literature referred to as student development theory. By the middle of the 20th century the field of student affairs began to professionalize, as associations formed where professionals connected, discussed ideas and challenges, and shared practices related to student affairs. Today, the largest professional association in Canada is the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS), which encompasses dozens of communities of practices for personnel in specialized areas of student affairs: student conduct, housing, career development, accessible learning, health and wellness, equity and diversity, and more. In Canada, no association specific to housing and Residence Life is available; however, many institutions are members of the US based Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I).

Today, most residence operations in Canadian postsecondary institutions are managed by housing (administrative operational functions) and Residence Life (student support and services in residence) departments in the institution (Lane Vetere, 2010). Campus housing operations represent a significant portion of revenue and expenditure for institutions, and as such require a

strong business management model for sustainability. Many campuses have deferred maintenance on residence infrastructure because of decreased funding (Blimling, 2015). Some campuses outsource part or all their housing through a public-private partnership (referred to as the P-3 funding model) (Schuh et al., 2017). P3s can provide a solution to the increasing financial strain by partnering with investors to design, build, and manage new residence buildings that maximize space for a larger number of students and meet the demands of today's students, such as single private suites and more apartment style living options. P-3 arrangements work well where the goal is to generate revenue through leasing to students, but there is a risk of separating the educational opportunities from campus residence living. Aside from convenience, living in residence has consistently shown to be beneficial for students academically, socially and developmentally (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schudde, 2011). Parameswaran and Bowers (2014) insist that the well-documented benefits of living in residence are evidence enough for institutions to accept responsibility for "providing the most intellectually and socially rich environment possible" (p. 58) in the housing they provide for students.

Barriers to a Learning Approach in Residence. Despite the literature that endorses the potential learning and development outcomes of living in residence, not all institutions embrace residences as learning spaces. One barrier to a learning approach in residence is an institutional culture that separates academic learning and social learning, which is discussed in the earlier "Learning and Development" section of this literature review. Leaders of a campus with a culture that fails to recognize the learning potential of living in residence tend to make decisions from a housing (business) perspective which "marginalizes the educational focus of residences...[and] implies that housing units and attendant organizational structures have a neutral impact on intellectual and social development" (Parameswaran & Bowers, 2014, p. 58).

Kerr and Tweedy (2006) note that it takes a whole campus commitment to student learning, not only the academic division, to meet institutional learning goals. The assumption that residence living has a neutral impact not only misses out on the potential benefits to students, but also ignores the potential disadvantages to students who do not identify with the dominant culture (Graham et al., 2018). It is an important consideration for institutions that when student housing is arranged as nothing more than a rental agreement, there is a risk of discrimination by students of the dominant culture engaged in “groupthink” that is harmful to marginalized individuals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Patton et al. (2016) reinforce the responsibility institutions have to provide living and learning conditions for students to flourish:

A failure to understand and acknowledge the institutional responsibility to cultivate the conditions for *all* students to thrive is particularly detrimental for populations that have been historically marginalized by postsecondary institutions but comprise an increasingly larger proportion of students on today’s campuses. (p. 238)

Residence living for students from historically marginalized communities can be difficult and even harmful if universities understand residence as simply a roof over students’ heads. As campus administrators grapple with unstable funding and increased demands for access to not only higher education but also supports for the increasingly diverse needs of students, it is apparent that Residence Life is an integral part of the educational experience and should be a strategic focus of student affairs departments.

Residence Life professionals, a team within student affairs that is concentrated on the residence environment, have the most direct relationship with students, facilitating 24-hour support and response to a variety of problems from homesickness and noise complaints to medical emergencies and assaults (Lane Vetere, 2010). Residence Life professionals are the first

to see changes in students and are well positioned to assess and respond to their needs quickly. Blimling (2015) points out that housing and Residence Life professionals have a dual role in that they provide educational experiences and programs and enforce policies that maintain order and safety for students in the buildings, and they manage the capital investment of the physical buildings, long-term planning, and marketing of housing. Effective housing and Residence Life programs on campus have a staff who possess a balance of business and education skills, Blimling (2015) argues, but more importantly an awareness of the dominant philosophical orientation that drives decision making about prioritization of student residence facilities, support services, and program goals. Further, this balanced approach must extend across to other campus stakeholders and senior administrators. Shushok et al. (2011) discuss three common paradigms of residences on campuses: the sleep-and-eat model, market model, and learning model. The sleep-and-eat model is a paradigm in which the institution is little more than a landlord, providing a place to eat and sleep while students earn a degree on campus. The market model views residences as a business catering to students as consumers, outsourcing residential living to private companies in the housing market. In contrast to the sleep-and-eat and market models, which separate academic and student affairs, the learning model embraces the entanglement of learning and development and adopts an educational philosophy in Residence Life (Shushok et al., 2011).

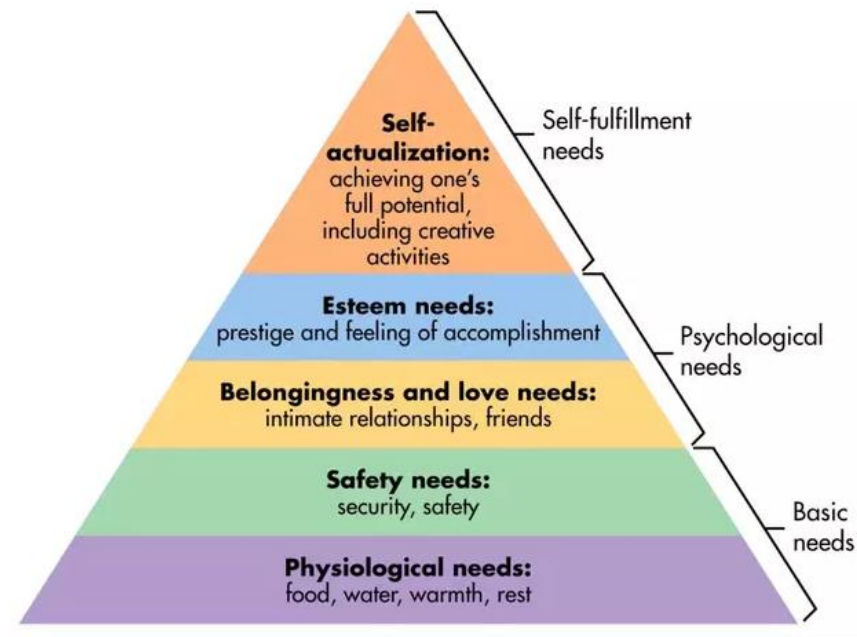
Another barrier to a learning approach in campus residences may be a lack of capacity in Residence Life teams to develop a learning approach in their residence program. Many residence programs offer educational programming in which students can choose to participate, such as diversity awareness, sexual health education, and substance harm reduction strategies as a few tangible examples. However, the measure of success of these educational experiences is often

judged by the number of participants, which assumes that exposure equals learning (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). John Newman, one of the most well-known proponents of the collegial model of liberal education in the early 20th century, believed that by simply placing students together in a residence, learning would occur. However, when institutions are intentional about the residence experience as educational, the opportunities for learning increase (Shushok et al., 2011). There is substantial support and rationale for a learning model approach to residences on campus (e.g.; ACPA, 1996; Baumann, 2020; Schroeder, 1996). Given the significant support for a learning approach, what is needed is a theoretical framework that incorporates the philosophical foundations of Residence Life and informs day-to-day practices of residence staff.

Philosophical Influences on Residence Life Programs. Humanist psychology heavily influences Residence Life philosophies, with the basic assumptions that people are inherently good and have a natural drive to better themselves and the world (McLeod, 2020). However, when a person must spend most of or all their time and energy focusing on basic needs such as access to adequate housing, food, and healthcare, these needs become the priority, leaving little time and energy for bettering themselves as a person or *bildung*, which Mollenhauer (1983/2014) argues should be the purpose of education. Students with a lower level of academic engagement than what is needed to progress and persist through the degree requirements may be struggling with finances, health issues, or personal relationships. Barriers such as these can become preoccupations that prevent growth and achievement. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, shown in Figure 2, is a well-known humanist theory that illustrates how basic needs must be met before a person can attend to higher psychological and self-fulfillment.

Figure 2

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model



Note: source (McLeod, 2020)

Maslow (1943) proposed that human needs are hierarchical and environmental factors contribute to or hinder a person's achievement of growth and development by meeting (or not) the levels of need in order from the bottom of the pyramid. Humanism argues that behavioural issues arise because of a person's unmet needs. In my professional experience, a common axiom in Residence Life is "judge the behaviour, not the person." The underlying belief in this philosophy is that all students are inherently good and when there are behavioural challenges, we must consider what the student needs to grow and develop. The influence of Maslow's and other humanists' work is evident in the kinds of programs prominent often found in Residence Life today. Most traditional on-campus residence living contracts include a mandatory meal plan, ensuring access to healthy food options. Policies such as codes of conduct describe expectations, such as guest policies, harassment and discrimination policies, fire safety regulations, and programs promoting personal safety (e.g., safe ride/walk home) that meet the safety needs of

students. Community building is a major component of Residence Life programming, aimed at fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating personal connection with other students and the institution. Blimling (2015) suggests that humanism is a good philosophical foundation for student affairs departments' approaches to responding to student needs but does not provide "a theoretical base that define[s] work with students and a clear connection to the academic mission of universities" (p. 14). SLI published in 1996 by the ACPA (1996) was the outcome of a large collaborative project that involved several student affairs leaders in the United States. The SLI advocates for student affairs professionals (which encompasses Residence Life departments) to recognize their role in the overall education of students and the institutional learning mission. The five characteristics put forth in the SLI describe the practices and skills of learning-oriented student affairs divisions:

1. The student affairs division mission complements the institution's mission, with the enhancement of student learning and personal development being the primary goal of student affairs programs and services.
2. Resources are allocated to encourage student learning and personal development.
3. Student affairs professionals collaborate with other institutional agents and agencies to promote student learning and personal development.
4. The division of student affairs includes staff who are experts on students, their environments, and teaching and learning processes.
5. Student affairs policies and programs are based on promising practices from the research on student learning and institution-specific assessment data. (ACPA, 1996, pp. 2-4)

Student affairs professionals who strive to adopt these characteristics see themselves as educators, contributing to the institutional mission. In fact, often in practice, many student affairs professionals refer to themselves as educators to promote the narrative that student programming contributes to learning and must be guided by learning principles. Residence Life educators, a subset of student affairs educators, are faced with the challenge of engaging with students in a way that connects “personal passion areas to the institutional mission and undergraduate learning goals and outcomes” (Baumann, 2020, Conversations section). Residence Life educators must understand the experiential and interactive nature of learning and create opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences on campus and articulate their own learning and development from those experiences. ACUHO-I sets and regularly updates a collection of professional standards for housing and Residence Life professionals. The ACUHO-I Standards and Ethical Principles states that “the formal education of students, consisting of the curricular and the co-curricular, must promote student learning and development, contributing to students’ realization of their potential, and prepare students for life after college” (ACUHO-I Professional Standards Committee, 2020, p. 10). This commitment from the largest international association for residence professionals underscores the belief that Residence Life programs must align with the institutional learning goals and adopt a learning focus for the residence experience (Shushok et al., 2011; Parameswaran & Bowers, 2014; Sriram et al., 2017). Two theoretical frameworks with a learning focus that are prevalent in Canadian postsecondary institutions are a curricular approach and a learning-communities approach.

Curricular Approach to Residence Learning. A curricular approach is a model in which specific learning outcomes are defined and structured educational programming activities support student learning related to the outcomes. Residence Life professionals are co-educators

with faculty, creating a “synergy between the learning that occurs in and out of the classroom” (Sriram et al., 2017, p. 14), aligning institutional learning goals that often go beyond the acquisition of knowledge in a subject area. Acknowledgment that learning is more complex and takes place in all contexts on campus is a feature of what Parameswaran and Bowers (2014) referred to as “second-generation pedagogies” (p. 59) of residence programs. Whereas first-generation pedagogies emphasized social development to complement academic development, second-generation pedagogies emphasize holistic and integrated campus-wide learning goals. Kerr and Tweedy (2006) note that a desired outcome frequently cited in institutional goals is citizenship. At the University of Delaware, where these authors hold senior student affairs leadership roles, citizenship is the overall goal of the residential curriculum, which was determined after examining the educational goals of their respective institution (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). They define citizenship development as “an exploration of self, community, and connections,” which are further expanded into learning competencies explained in the framework for citizenship education – the residential curriculum. By referring to the residence program as a curriculum and aligning it with the institutional educational goals, it demonstrates a commitment to a truly holistic learning experience that “blurs the lines between learning in the classroom and learning in the residential environment” (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006, p. 12).

Defining learning outcomes that are supported by theory and aligned with institutional learning goals is a task most Residence Life teams would likely be able to do. However, a curricular approach also requires a well-defined process for assessment of learning that measures the success of the program (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006). Discussed previously, there is much evidence that suggests that there are benefits to living in residence versus off campus. But the evidence presented demonstrates the benefits measured as higher academic average, greater retention from

first to second year, and a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These are important indicators of institutional success, but not necessarily of the learning and personal development achieved by students as an outcome of living in residence. Kerr and Tweedy (2006) share their experience of redefining success indicators by achievement in the competencies of the residence curriculum that first required a departmental shift in thinking away from program statistics such as student attendance. Assessment of success in terms of this curricular approach relies on self-reflection, surveys, interviews, and focus groups that engage students in reflective activities. At the time of publication of their article, Kerr and Tweedy (2006) were exploring a form of assessment that involves observing behavioural characteristics that staff could record when noted.

Living Learning Communities Approach. Another framework for a residence-learning approach is living learning communities (LLC), also called living learning programs, residence learning communities, or simply learning communities. An LLC is an intentionally designed residence community, that places students together on a floor or building based on a common interest or area of study, with co-curricular programming that integrates academic and living contexts of students (Wahl, 2013). LLCs may be based on course registration, where students taking the same courses live together and faculty are involved in some residence-based programming. Alternatively, they may be based on multi-disciplinary studies, where students are taking courses from different disciplines that bring different perspectives to a social problem that the LLC is focused on; a social justice LLC would be an example. Multidisciplinary LLCs involve a collaboration across academic disciplines and Residence Life. They may also be based on cultural or lifestyle interests and have little faculty involvement but are engaged with campus advising or community partners. Although the research on the effectiveness and structures of

LLCs is almost entirely data from American institutions, Hobbins et al. (2018) studied a Canadian institution with several LLC options and had similar findings as the American research indicates. Students living in LLCs have higher first year grades and are engaged in community events and activities more often than non-LLC students. Interestingly, the authors note that higher academic averages in first year were an outcome regardless of whether they lived in an academic themed LLC or interest-based LLC.

Astin (1993) developed a student involvement theory that is based on the belief that active engagement in the learning and/or living environment facilitates development (Patton et al., 2016). The findings by Hobbins et al. (2018) suggest that increasing opportunities for meaningful engagement promote student success as measured by first year grades and retention to second year. Wagner (2018–2019) conducted a literature review of best practices in LLCs and shared a model that was developed by Inkelas et al. (2012). The best practices building blocks model is a pyramid with elements in four levels, starting with a foundation of best practices related to infrastructure. The next two layers are best practices related to the academic environment, then the co-curricular environment. The pyramid is topped by the “icing,” the intentional integration of academic and co-curricular experiences for a common learning outcome. The elements in each of the layers reinforce the “all-in” level of commitment needed from academic and Residence Life departments to create an integrated living learning experience that is socially and academically supportive to students and informed by evidence through a formal assessment plan (Wagner, 2018–2019).

As noted above, formal assessment of residence learning tends to measure outcomes such as retention and participation rates. Regardless of the chosen framework, it is evident that assessment of defined learning outcomes is a requisite element to a true residence learning

environment (Kerr & Tweedy, 2006; Wagner, 2018–2019). However, as Kerr and Tweedy (2006) note, true assessment of learning means finding a way to measure the gains in development of competencies described in learning outcomes, which are accessible through reflective activities such as surveys, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observable behaviour. These facilitated reflection activities encourage students to become aware of their learning in the water table below the surface (Alexander et al., 2009). Facilitated reflection also accesses the meaning making process by which students make sense of their experiences (Fried & Associates, 1995). Residence Life educators who engage students in meaningful reflective practices are not only able to assess the effectiveness of activities with respect to specific learning outcomes, but also to engage in a facilitative teaching style, as Knight (2008) suggests is important for educators.

Whether through a curricular approach, designed living learning communities or both, the key is to create space and facilitate opportunities for meaningful engagement between peers, with faculty, and with Residence Life staff. To create residence that are learning spaces, it is critical for postsecondary institutions to acknowledge the “fundamental responsibility to design and deliver specific and intentional educational interventions to guide and optimize student learning in the residential environment” (Shushok et al., 2011, p. 13) endorsed by the institutional educational goals. Parameswaran and Bowers (2014) note that the literature consistently demonstrates that living in residence has a significant impact on student engagement in their postsecondary experiences. Parameswaran and Bowers (2014) further state, classroom engagement, social interactions, and co-curricular involvement activities “may be transformative in terms of developing a world view, inculcating an attitude to lifelong learning and enriching self-identity” (p. 61). Collaborative learning experiences in academic and social contexts foster

the kind of transformative learning for which Parameswaran and Bowers (2014) encourage educators to strive.

Identity Formation

Early student development theorists in the 1980s and 90s examined identity in several disciplines including anthropology, humanities, sociology, psychology, and biology (Patton, et al., 2016). Identity is embedded in every aspect of our internal and external worlds. It can and has been examined and theorized from a plethora of viewpoints in quantitative and qualitative endeavors. Identity in sociological and ecological terms, often refers to a collective of people who share a characteristic or set of characteristics such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation. While these are salient aspects of an individual's identity, individuals are not defined only by the categories to which they belong. The risk with taking a narrow view of identity is that there is an "inadvertent tendency to conflate identities with what can often slide into fixed 'essentialist' (pre-political) singular categories" (Somers, 1994, p. 605). These social identities are complex, intersectional, and ascribed to individuals by dominant society, as opposed to formed by the individual. Nevertheless, there is value to including social identities when considering identity development. Social identity theories include a range of social context perspectives. Racial theories include Black identity theories (e.g., Cross, 1995; Helms & Cook, 1999), ethnic identity theories (e.g., Phinney, 1990), Asian American Identity theories (e.g., Kim J. , 2012), Latino/a identity development theories (e.g., Ruiz, 1990), and Aboriginal identity in Canada (e.g., Frideres, 2008). Other socially situated identity theories include gender and sexual orientation theories (e.g., Gilbert, 2009; Gilligan, 1982).

A large set of theories related to social identities emerged from criticism of early identity theories, discussed in this section, which focus on the psychological and cognitive aspects of

identity and failed to consider the social context. Torres et al. (2009) articulated this critique and its relevance to student affairs: “one’s sense of self and beliefs about one’s own social group as well [as] others are constructed through interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations” (p. 577). Theories of social identities help to examine the context in which an individual is figuring out who they are, developing their autonomy while balancing the need for connection to community (Arnett et al., 2001). The dominant poststructuralist paradigm in more recent student development literature privileges the value of multiplicity of ways to understand identity (Patton et al., 2016). Somers (1994) suggests one way to reconceptualize identity is through narrativity and relationality. Narrativity, the exchange of stories, as a teller and a listener, is how we learn about, make sense of, form, and express who we are. Relationality refers to the setting or context, who we are in relation to the people and social groups. With this critique in mind, acknowledging that social identities contribute to an individual’s identity, this section will discuss narrative identity, psychosocial identity development, emerging adulthood, and digital identity.

Narrative Identity

Identity is ever evolving depending on the context (Somers, 1994). Humans convey to ourselves and others’ narratives about experiences that reveal something about who we are and what we value. Somers (1994) first introduced the concept that identity is more complex than a categorical representation based on social constructs, like many social identity theories mentioned earlier in this section. Identity is not simply the substance of the answer to the question “who am I?” Trying to articulate one’s identity at a given point is like looking at a single frame of an entire video – what happens next changes the story and perhaps even the meaning of that single frame (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). A narrative is a form of knowledge created

through sharing stories about experiences (Kim, 2016). Narratives do more than project to others what is known by an individual, an outward expression of something known internally. Through narratives, involving the process of sharing and dialogue with others, and applying language to an experience, meaning is discovered and created (Sherman, 2011). According to Sherman (2011), identity is narratively constituted: “it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (as cited in Somers, 1994, p. 606).

Dunpath (2000) explains that identity is a “social project” in which people are actively engaged in the ongoing remaking of themselves. Narratives are shaped and reshaped, integrating new experiences and meanings about experiences and oneself. Identity then is formed through narrativity. “It is not that the self is measured by assessing stories, but rather the self *is* a story” (McLean & Pratt, 2006, p. 715). The co-constructive meaning-making process, rather than the story itself, is key to narrative identity. Somers (1994) reframed the role of narratives from the misperception that they are factual and historical forms of knowledge, to clarify that narratives are the mode by which meaning is articulated about an experience. Clandinin et al. (2007) reinforces the notion that dimensions of time, place, and relationality influence the narrative meaning-making process: “narratives are the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time” (p. 40). Experiences grow from and lead to other experiences. Stories are shared in context and may hold different meaning years later, or when sharing the story with a supervisor at work or later with a fourth-grade classroom. The activity of constructing narratives about experiences, more than the experience itself, is what creates self-understanding (Dunpath, 2000).

Narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013), the story we tell ourselves and others about who we are, is continuously evolving as we tell, receive feedback, and retell events and episodes in our lives and what they mean. Narrative identity is our internalized and evolving life story and provides a kind of storyboard of past, present and future pointing to who we are and may become (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Social processing of narratives—that is the process of sharing and evaluating feedback of stories—develops a broader and more integrated identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The contextual influences of social status, our physical and cultural environment, and our new experiences build our narrative identities over time. On the one hand, who we are is different in every context and meaning from a particular episode can change through time, space and relationality. On the other hand, narrative identity provides a sense of continuity of self. Our narrative identity is a cohesive story that shows “how the self of yesterday has become the self of today, the very same self that hopes or expects to become a certain kind of (different but still similar) self in the future” (McAdams, 1992, p. 364). The notion that identity is both shaped by experience and holds continuity over time aligns with the ontological concept of continuity featured in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experience is the foundation of narrativity, building on past experiences and leading to future experience (Clandinin, 2006). Nelson (2001) and McAdams (1992) argue that in modern industrialized society it is critically important to healthy narrative identity development that young people could tell their stories. Young people have more diverse geographic and cultural experiences today, hence, telling stories serves to provide continuity and coherence of self over time (Fivush et al., 2011).

The turn towards narrative identity is relatively recent, only emerging in the literature in the last two decades as a theoretical view. In the next section I will share the key theories and

models of identity development that evolved and led to a narrative understanding of identity formation and expression.

Psychosocial Identity Development

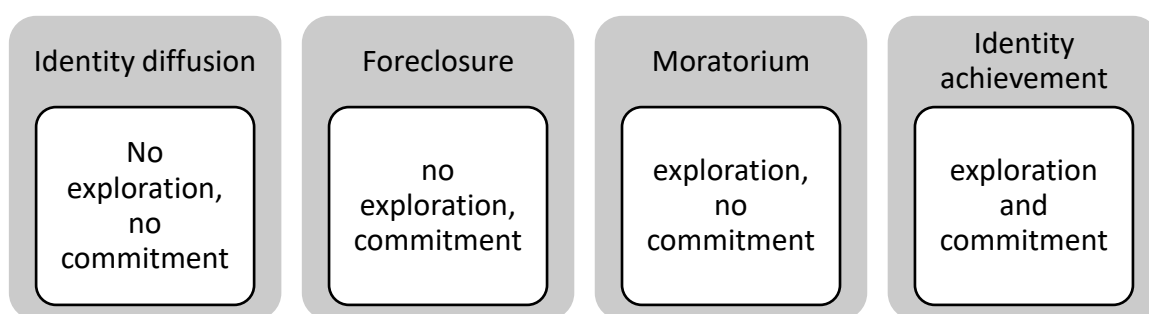
One would be hard pressed to find a piece of literature about identity development without a reference to the work of Erikson (1956), who first theorized that adolescents go through a psychosocial crisis as they transition to adulthood, during which they develop an ego identity. Ego identity was a term derived from Freud's (1953) notion of the id, ego, and superego, which are thought to be psychological functions in the development of awareness of self. Ego identity, as Erikson (1956) described it, is one's current reality of oneself, where self-images exist and are constantly revised as they are tested against social reality and synthesized with new awareness of the environment. Adolescence marks a significant period in which we become independent, question who we are, and start to take responsibility for ourselves, rather than only conforming to parental ideals. Erikson (1968) thought of identity during adolescence as non-static, always changing as we interact with others and shift our perspectives. As adolescents start to question who they are and consider the values and ideologies their parents imposed, they experience what he termed role confusion. Erikson (1968) theorized that role confusion prompts exploration and experimentation with other potential values and ideologies until the adolescent discovers their identity. Erikson (1968) states, parents are to be encouraged to allow adolescents to explore and experiment with who they are (or might become) during this crisis period because it leads to healthy identity achievement. Erikson's (1968) work on identity mainly focused on the psychosocial development during adolescence, within the lifespan of a person. While he posited that ego identity during adolescence is ever-changing, he implied that by the time adulthood is reached, identity is relatively stable. Other works by Erikson in psychosocial development over

the lifespan, such as *Adulthood: Essays* (Erikson, 1978), describe other stages at which individuals meet a kind of crisis and grapple with resolving or accepting some aspect about themselves as individuals and their role in society at that stage of life. Although it is not a central theme in Erikson's (1978) adulthood stages, it could be argued that the resolutions or acceptances adults arrive at are identity forming through each stage of life. This crisis period, when adolescents begin to discover themselves as individuals, is well recognized in psychosocial development and endures as a foundational premise of identity research today.

Marcia (1966) further explored Erikson's (1956) ego identity development and proposed that the adolescent crisis period is better understood as a continuum with four identity statuses: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement. Marcia (1966) developed a model for measuring commitments in areas of occupation, religion, and political ideology, to determine if the adolescent was in crisis or commitment in each of these areas. Figure 3 shows the four identity statuses of the model.

Figure 3

Identity Status Model (Marcia, 1966)



Identity diffusion is the least developed, least mature state, where the adolescent has not experienced a crisis period and shows no interest in making commitments or exploring options. They may have preferences but give the impression that the preferences could easily be

abandoned. In foreclosure status, the adolescent may or may not have experienced a crisis period yet has made commitments, typically accepting and adopting parental goals and cultural ideologies without question. They are not open to considering other viewpoints or recognizing that they can decide for themselves who they are and what they value. Moratorium is a point on the continuum at which the adolescent is actively considering who they are and experimenting with options but is not yet making any commitments. Finally, in identity achievement, the person has experienced a crisis period and has made commitments in the variable areas (occupation, political ideology, and religion).

The identity status model is a helpful model for understanding the developmental experiences of emerging adults, although it is somewhat incongruous with narrative identity which contends that identity is not a destination arrived at in adulthood that remains stable thereafter. McLean and Pratt (2006) discuss how identity status theory aligns with narrative identity in that it involves an active process of reflecting on experiences and making choices about how to live. In their view, the value of the status model of identity lies in the assumption that “a key component to healthy identity development is thinking about and reflecting on one’s experiences and options in life” (McLean & Pratt, 2006, p. 715). Events that involve a lot of conflict, tension, or emotion tend to generate more meaning and life lessons than simple everyday experiences (McLean & Pratt, 2006). McLean and Pratt (2006) termed these events “turning points” (p. 714) because they tend to prompt questioning about the meaning of these significant experiences – how such events change what they believe about the world and themselves. Thus, turning points could cause one to reconsider their values or what is important in relationships to them, in other words, shift out of identity achievement status. Turning points became a relevant concept in my research where participants experienced significant changes as

they moved away from home and into residence. It may be useful to think of statuses as fluid, meaning one can move between identity statuses as they experience significant events or changes at any point in their lifetime. Turning point events, for example, may be so significant that they cause a reconsideration of identity such that the person moves to a lower status on the continuum, restarting the identity forming process.

McLean and Pratt (2006) studied the connection between statuses and the style of autobiographical narratives in a longitudinal study with emerging adults (ages between 17 and 23). They found a relational connection between status and the level and sophistication in the written narratives; the more fully that meaning is represented in narratives, the further on the continuum in status the individual is. Sophistication was measured by the level of complexity of the meaning articulated in the narrative; for example, where no meaning was expressed the coding score was zero, versus a narrative with a coding score of three in which the narrative included insights and expression of new understanding of themselves and the world from the experience. They also observed that more meaning is found in narratives about relationships and loss than events of achievements, such as graduation or recreational activities. This is an important finding as it suggests that how young people deal with difficult events is important to their healthy identity development. These are useful insights for educators working with students through this period in their development, particularly when students are living away from home and relying on supports immediately available on campus. Facilitated reflection, for example, could be a tool for educators to encourage processing of challenges to help students reconcile difficult experiences or events, and what they learn about themselves as a result. In today's context in particular, where opportunities to connect to others and explore diverse geographic and cultural experiences are instantly available online, creating space for young people to share

their narratives can promote healthy narrative identity development (Nelson, 2001; McAdams, 1992). In the next section, I introduce emerging adulthood theory, which examines and explains the impact of industrialization and modernization on the transition from adolescence to adulthood and how identity research has evolved with the dramatic societal changes in the last half of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

Emerging Adulthood

Erikson's (1956) and Marcia's (1966; 1987) work continue to inform the theoretical foundation for research into the developmental tasks of people transitioning to adulthood in relevant research areas in the second decade of the 21st century. Exploring options before committing to careers, relationships, and worldviews continues to be a key characteristic of this age group. What has changed since the foundational research on identity development is the length of time spent on the identity achievement continuum, particularly around moratorium. In the last half century, most industrialized countries have experienced dramatic increases in enrollment in postsecondary education after high school. In Canada, enrollment in postsecondary by 2016 was 69% higher than in 2000, just six years earlier (Usher, 2019). Additionally, the average age at which long term personal commitments such as marriage and children are made has been delayed. In 1971, the average age to marry in Canada was 23 (Statistics Canada, 2002). By 2020, the average age climbed to 34.8 (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Arnett (2000) noted the impact of these shifts on the development of young people as they transition to adulthood. Arnett (2000) proposed a new theory of development for the period of transition that he noted to occur between ages 18 and 25 (although he also noted that the top of the range is flexible), known as *emerging adulthood*. According to emerging adulthood theory, several characteristics distinguish emerging adults from the way theorists, prior to Arnett,

described adolescents or young adults. As noted above, emerging adults in the 21st century are delaying marriage by more than 10 years compared to their parents. Another distinct feature of emerging adulthood is a higher frequency of residential change compared to other stages of life, attributed mainly to going away to attend college or university and moving back home several times before graduation (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2023) noted that nine in 10 Americans expect go into some kind of post-secondary education because they believe that a good job requires a post-secondary degree or specialization of some kind beyond high school.

Since it was first proposed by Arnett, emerging adulthood theory is now a well-established field of research and have evolved in some ways (Arnett, 2023). Perhaps the most notable distinction between the 20th and 21st century is the tendency for emerging adults to identify themselves as no longer adolescents, but not yet fully adult (Arnett, 2000). Arnett's work contributed a key insight to the field of psychosocial development: when asked what it takes to be fully adult, emerging adults rank personal characteristics, such as deciding on values and beliefs, over transitional milestones, such as graduation or marriage. This suggests that the key developmental task of establishing identity (Erikson, 1956) is actively and consciously attended to at this stage of life. Specifically, Arnett (2000) found that emerging adults often have an extended period of exploration and experimentation to give them a broad sample of options before settling on personal preferences in love, work and worldviews. The life stage from 18 to anywhere between 25 and 29 years old is distinct; however, it is more subjective than other life stages that tend to have more universal characteristics, for example adolescence (Arnett, 2023) How emerging adults move through and experience this phase depends on their access to what Nelson (2021) called *affordances*. The features of emerging adulthood – identity exploration, instability in love, work, and residence, self-focus, feeling in-between adolescence and

adulthood, and possibilities and optimism – are still relevant today, but Nelson (2021) urged us to “think less about what emerging adulthood *is* and more about what it *affords* young people” (p. 180). To understand the experiences of emerging adults and how educators might support them, it may be valuable, as Nelson (2021) suggested, to pay attention to what affordances are available to “*indulge* the self or to *prepare* the self” (p. 182) and what impact they could have on young people, good or bad. Considered through the lens of affordances rather than characteristics, emerging adulthood is a useful theoretical perspective that allows for recognition that not all emerging adults have equal affordances and opportunities available to them.

While not all emerging adults have the same opportunities and options, the vast and diverse choices afforded to them today could make it more difficult to decide what is right for them. Considering Marcia’s (1966) identity status model, the options to be explored are so vast that they could have an impact on how and when young people advance to identity achievement status. Emerging adults spend more time in the moratorium status, exploring options before committing to an ideological view, which is “a key part of emerging adults’ views of what it means to make the transition to adulthood” (Arnett et al., 2001, p. 76). Emerging adulthood theory is another way to consider the experiences of young people in the moratorium status of Marcia’s model. Although Nelson (2021) does not disagree that emerging adults are considering all the options without commitment, he cautioned against assuming that the opportunity to explore and experiment leads to positive development and pointed out that complete autonomy and a lack of structure may “afford many less optimal paths” with enduring consequences into adulthood (p. 182). From his perspective:

We need to be fully aware of not just what makes emerging adulthood distinct but what those distinctions afford – for good and ill – so that young people can be informed and

parents, educators, policy makers, and clinicians can support them better. (Nelson, 2021, p. 183)

Educators who understand the affordances and the potential long-term impacts of those, may be better equipped to truly support healthy development, through guidance, education, and programming that offers positive outcomes and teaches personal responsibility.

Emerging adults today can have digital membership in multiple communities, globally and locally; thus, they are able to explore ideologies more broadly than generations before the advent of the internet. Reflecting on experiences and what they learned about themselves in this extended period of exploration can bring young people closer to commitment to a set of ideologies that are stable in adulthood. The internet also provides a platform for expression, reflection and exchange of personal stories. Social media allows people to create and project themselves to others, while instantly interacting and negotiating new social norms with other personas in digital media. This is a new aspect of identity that was not available to prior generations. Given the prevalence of use of social media, digital community interaction is arguably as important to identity development as the physical community. Granic et al. (2020) point out that social media sites are “fundamentally platforms for the expression of identity in narrative form” (p. 209) that invite feedback on a much larger scale than in the physical world.

Chapter Summary

Researchers have attempted to find a common language to bring together academic and non-academic educators in higher education (see Saljo, 2009; Alexander et al., 2009). The outdated insistence on the distinction between academic learning and student development is problematic and points to a cultural divide that prevents universities from achieving such institutional goals as creating responsible citizens (Sherman, 2011). However, there is hope. The

current theoretical perspectives on learning agree that there is more to learning than acquiring knowledge (Knight, 2008). Literature that explores the cognitive and relational processes involved in learning suggest that both these processes are integral to what is often referred to in higher education as development. The main developmental task during emerging adulthood is formation of identity. For this extended period of exploration of identity (Arnett, 2000), when many emerging adults are in postsecondary studies, an essential aspect of students' learning is finding out who they are and who they want to become. Educators (both faculty and student affairs) should have an appreciation for the complexity of learning and development and their relationship with identity formation if institutions are to have a truly holistic approach to education.

Narrative identity, the stories we tell ourselves and others about who we are and who we want to become, is one approach to studying the complexities of learning and identity in emerging adults (or other populations). Through sharing and exchanging narratives we make meaning of experiences. Educators who understand the kinds of experiences that support healthy identity development, and the learning processes that facilitate meaning making, are well positioned to build theoretically informed and intentional approaches in their work with students that supports their healthy identity formation. In the next chapter, I present the methodology, methods and overall research design which aimed to explore narratives of emerging adults to consider how student affairs educators could adapt an intentional approach to support health identity development in the students with whom they work.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore how senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. In the following sections, I present the methodology and methods used in this narrative inquiry. I discuss the supporting theoretical and methodological paradigms for the narrative inquiry as it relates to the aim of the research and my own positionality. I also describe in detail the research design, including participant selection criteria, data collection methods, data analysis process, and ethical considerations.

Experience, Knowledge, Reality, and Narratives: A Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Humans are natural storytellers. We use stories to express our knowledge to others and share what we want them to know about who we are. Stories allow the listener to experience events and emotions that we might not otherwise be able to appreciate. Narratives are accounts of events, whereas stories organize narratives into a fuller and structured order for a purpose (Kim, 2016), although the terms tend to be used interchangeably. In a social constructivist paradigm, the exchange and interpretation of narratives is where knowledge is created and recreated. Knowledge, in this sense, is not a static and unchanging universal truth, but “an indication of how the world might be” (Adams, 2006, p. 246). A social constructivist paradigm aligns with my epistemological and ontological beliefs, acknowledging and appreciating that there are multiple truths, and an openness to a variety of perspectives enriching our understanding.

Narrative inquiry, as a qualitative research methodology, is rooted in a social constructivist ontology and epistemology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is situated as a more interpretivist paradigm than some of the other qualitative methodologies, for

example, grounded theory. Whereas grounded theory looks to create theory grounded in connections between concepts and themes by comparing data across participants, narrative inquiry tends to be more case-centred (Riesman, 2008) and attempts to retell participants' stories to illuminate relevant meaning that may not have been readily apparent.

An assumption underlying all qualitative research is that reality is multi-dimensional and non-static (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is multi-dimensional in that experience spans corporeal (physical body), spatial (space), temporal, (time), and relational dimensions (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Reality does not exist independent from people, waiting to be discovered and understood. Reality is created between people, by people, and is expressed in storied form. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) describe the storied nature of experience: "People share their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories" (p. 477). Narrative inquiry is "the study of experience as story...a way of thinking about experience" (p. 477). Narrative inquiry is situated in qualitative research as an approach to the study of human experience as story and how people make sense of their experiences at a point in time and within personal, social, cultural, and place contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In narrative research, lived experience refers to the personal and subjective experiences of individuals as they engage with, make sense of, and interpret their world. Central to narrative inquiry is a pragmatic ontology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) rooted in Dewey's (1997) theory of experience, which contributed significantly to the theoretical foundations of narrative methodology (Kim, 2016).

There are two principles of Dewey's (1997) theory of experience – continuity and interaction. Kim (2016) explains that continuity assumes that each experience builds upon past experiences building knowledge, and modifies the way we interpret, respond, evaluate, and make

judgements in the future. We learn something about ourselves and the world with each experience. Interaction, connected to continuity, assumes all experience is interactional and social. Experience does not just exist within us but can be between us, meaning experience is not just an individual, internal phenomenon, but something that can be shaped and defined through our interactions with others and the world around us. The way these interactions influence our attitudes and position changes over time (continuity). Although we perceive of experience as a continuum of past, present, and future, narrative researchers must think of experience in a “rhizomatic” way (Kim, 2016), meaning any experience influences how we interpret all other experiences, both in our past and future. How we understand something that happened in our childhood as an adult is likely different from how we understood it at the time, which emphasizes the notion of continuity. Continuity conceives of experiences as continuously woven together by the relations between a person and their environment past, present, and future, growing from one experience to another. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) use the metaphor of a “changing stream that is characterized by continuous interactions of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (p. 38) to illustrate the Deweyan understanding of experience as shaped through interaction and meaning making, influencing future experiences and new understandings, and so on.

The second principle of Dewey’s (1997) theory of experience is interaction which asserts that experiences do not hold meaning on their own; meaning is attributed to an experience through social interaction. How we make sense of experiences is fluid and evolving, influenced by sociocultural, political, environmental, and developmental contexts. Bruner (1984) contended that a narrative mode of constructing reality is a human cognitive function that approaches the question of the meaning of experience (Clandinin, 2007). The values and intentions of an

individual are part of the context of an event and influence how the individual behaves in that context. The individual both lives through and shapes experience. Rabinow and Sullivan (1979/1987) express reality as a “web of meaning” and note that “social life then appears as an ongoing conversation in many voices about current reality, a process of interpretation” (as cited in Clandinin, 2006, p. 611). Narratives are processes of both interpreting and composing reality. The co-construction of reality through the inquiry process does not and cannot exclude the researcher. Explicit consideration and discussion of the relationship between the researcher and participant is a key epistemological distinction of narrative inquiry within qualitative research.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) identified the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry – temporality, sociality, and place, clarifying the distinction between narrative inquiry and other qualitative methodologies. The first commonplace, temporality, builds on Dewey’s notion of continuity. Temporality is the understanding that “people, places, and events [are] in process, always in transition” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 23). Experiences unfold over time, each with a past, present and implied future and we only come to know the significance of the experience through stories. Meaning evolves as new experiences shed a different light on past experiences. How we make sense of something as it is occurring is inevitably reshaped over time as we reflect and retell the story through new experiences. Extending the Deweyan view of knowledge, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) summarized this temporal knowledge generation in this way: “our representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation” (p. 39). In other words, what we make of an experience, an interaction with people and our environment, will evolve as we tell and retell the story over time.

The second commonplace is sociality, which holds that the personal and social conditions are part of the experience and cannot be separated from the meaning making process. Personal

conditions include values, beliefs, hopes, feelings, and aesthetic preferences of the participant and the researcher in the interactions (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Social conditions refer to the surrounding environment and relationships and especially the relationship between participant and inquirer. The sociality commonplace builds on Dewey's notion of interaction, "that people are always in interaction with their situations in any experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 69). The environments are not static waiting for someone to step into them and experience them; rather, this is a person's interaction with the environment that creates the experience. In this way, each experience is unique to the person in that environment at that point in time.

The third commonplace is place, which is the physical concrete boundaries in which the inquiry takes place. The location(s) of inquiry have an impact on the experience. Basso (1996) considered the relationship between people and places and why some places hold meaning for people. Places become meaningful "when places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination" (p. 107). The inquirer must pay attention to the places of the inquiry and the relationship of both participant and inquirer to the place.

Claiming Identity Through Narratives

Narrative identity is a notion that evolved from the concept of life story which was first introduced by McAdams (1985). Narrative identity is our internalized and evolving life story that provides a continuous integrated sense of self past, present, and future (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The notion that identity is continually adapting in new contexts is aligned with the first commonplace of narrative inquiry, temporality (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The events and experiences in our past hold meaning in the present and will influence our actions in the future.

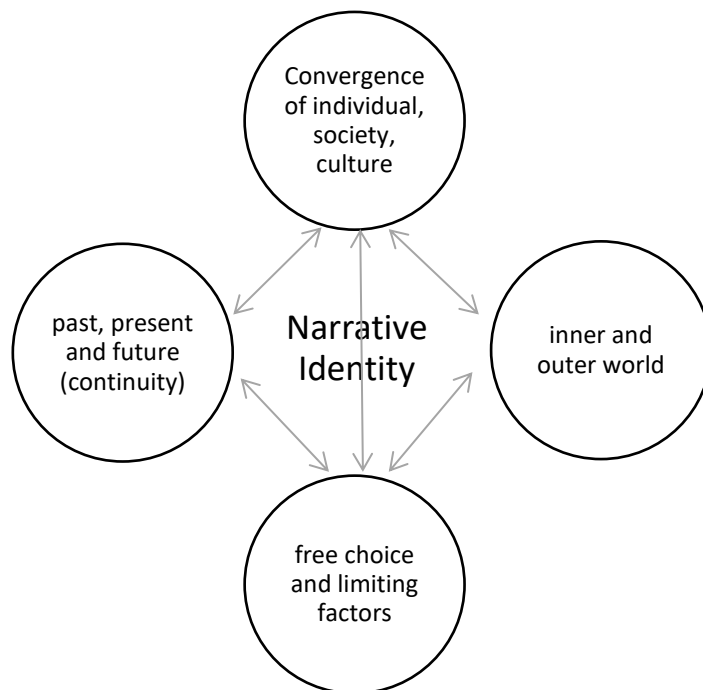
The process of sharing narratives and their meaning, receiving reactions and feedback from the listener, and reinterpreting experience constantly influences our internal sense of self and our interactions with others. It brings together the internalized sense of self, an integrated understanding of who we are from our past experiences and values, and our social identities defined by societal norms and shared characteristics with groups of others. Building on notions of narrativity and relationality, narrative identity emphasizes that identity is fluid: “the self and the purposes of self are constructed and reconstructed in the context of internal and external relations of time and place and power that are constantly in flux” (Somers, 1994, p. 621). Social processing of narratives, that is the process of sharing and evaluating feedback of stories, develops a broader and more integrated identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In this way, narrative identity is contextual and co-constructed.

In my career, I have observed that students in their senior year reflect on their first-year selves and share stories of challenge, mistakes, exploration, and experimentation in their new social world. These stories are often framed in terms of their growth and development through these challenges to shape who they are now and who they will become. In terms of identity development, the factual accuracy of these stories is not what matters; rather, narrative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I am interested in how students make sense of their residence experiences over time and the meaning they attribute to these experiences in terms of their sense of identity. Each person’s reality is defined not by the accuracy of the facts presented, but by the expression of the meaning made of the experiences. Narrative inquiry allowed me to approach the aim of the research – to explore and understand how an undergraduate student’s understanding and expression of their experiences shapes who they are.

Identity cannot be discussed without attention to the relationships between the factors that influence our internal sense of self. Chadwick (2017) argues that narrative research is entangled with intersectionality and that by focusing on multivocality researchers can frame issues of power, agency, and sociocultural context. What Chadwick (2017) is suggesting is that the rigor of a narrative research project is strengthened when multiple theoretical perspectives are presented in conversation with each other, something I have endeavoured to do in the later chapters of this dissertation. The narratives we choose to share represent the identities we are claiming and are influenced by a web of factors from our inner world of memories, emotions, cognitive process, and the outer world of power, culture, and social setting (Spector-Mersel, 2011). Figure 4 offers a way to conceptualize the “web of influences” that have a role in how we construct our identities.

Figure 4

Narrative Web of Influences (Adapted from Spector-Mersel, 2011, p. 173)



Bringing the concepts of narrative identity and intersectionality together strengthens my research design by embracing the complexity and mutual relationship between stories and identity. The web of influences aligns with the second commonplace of narrative inquiry, sociality, in that it provides a framework to explore the personal and social contexts in a narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Theory and Practice

Kim (2016) invites researchers joining the field of narrative studies to think of the relationship of theory and practice as more than a simple dichotomy. Instead, the relationship is described as a continuum that values theory over practice at one end, and practice over theory at the other. There is a centrifugal force, moving from theory to practice, for theory interprets and informs practice, and practice feeds and reinforces theory (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977). The catalyst for movement between theory and practice is experience, which changes how we understand a phenomenon (theory) and how we act in the future (practice). Methodology in any research project should draw from and be supported by theoretical perspectives. The researcher must also have a clear purpose for the study – what learning, insights, and value the study will invoke that will strengthen, improve, inform practice in a particular field. An important focus for my research is that the methodology is informed by theory and aligns with the intended practical implications from the study. If theory describes the “what,” practice is the “so what?” of the project. For example, the findings in my study have led to a discussion of several implications related to international student welcome program at StFX and transition and the role of student leaders in our residence program. Next, I discuss narrative identity – a key theoretical construction which provides insight for both theory and practice in student affairs.

Narrative Identity in Student Affairs

Narrative identity highlights the complexity of the developmental tasks students (and other people) face, both the internal cognitive and psychological processes and the external social and relational contexts. A student's social interactions and experiences on campus contribute to the student's narrative identity development. This theoretical perspective suggests that both the quality of the experiences and the way students make sense of these experiences can affect their narrative identity development. Some research on practical applications has suggested that healthy identity development can be supported with intentional approaches. For example, developmental psychologists have studied how the conversational style of parents has an impact on how children develop their storytelling skills (see Fivush et al., 2011). Narrative identity theory has been used in therapeutic settings where patients learn to narrate traumatic events with positive meaning as a way to heal (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Other studies have shown that elaborate storytelling is associated with higher identity maturity (see McLean & Pratt, 2006). These studies demonstrate that the role of the engaged listener, encouraging the story teller to elaborate and express the meaning they make of their experience, can promote healthy development. Narrative methodology can be applicable in more than theoretical explorations of the meaning of human experience; it can also be employed in practical learning contexts that aim to develop positive mindset, build resilience, and maturation. By engaging with students to tell their stories, they may become "more aware of the social and ideological roots of their self-understanding [and they can] alter, reject, or make more secure their tentative views of the world" (Dunpath, 2000, p. 544). An approach to student development that centers on narrative identity engages students in active reflection about their exploration and experimentation with different views of the world (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1956). The developmental and internal cognitive and psychosocial processes is only part of narrative identity.

Funds of Identity

Funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2012) is another useful theoretical concept with a distinct perspective of narrative identity. Aligned with the theories of Chadwick (2017) and Spector-Mersel (2011), Esteban-Guitart (2012) stresses the co-construction of identity that occurs through interaction: “narratives of identity are cultural products, inseparable from the social, institutional, geographic and cultural forces” (p. 173). These different social contexts are categories or funds of identity a person develops in time and through lived experiences. Esteban-Guitart (2012) describes several funds of identity, including geographical (region or feature of the land), cultural (religious or national symbols), practical (interests or work related skills), institutional (social institutions, church, marriage), and social (significant people in one’s life). These funds of identity are internalized and mediate behaviour. As a person interacts with their environment, they learn about the norms, expectations, and their limits within the particular social contexts that surround them. They learn to recognize and adapt to their environment as they experience others’ responses to the way they act, speak, and present themselves. Each time they experience something new, they expand on their funds of identity, which in turn influences their behaviour the next time they are in a similar context. Funds of identity is a helpful theoretical lens through which I considered individual participants’ identity making in Chapter Four.

Research Methods

Narrative methodology aligns with the aim of this research, in which I explored how senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. Narrative inquiry studies experience through telling and retelling of stories. Kim (2016) points out that a narrative is knowledge that

involves both telling and knowing. The act of telling a narrative is also a process of creating meaning about the events and experiences in the narrative. Just as lives are storied, so is identity (Somers, 1994). At a period in life where identity is a primary developmental task, the experiences and events living in university residence away from home, many for the first time, are significant to their identity making. The narrative inquiry methods I used in this research explored the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place and opened a window to the past, present and possible future of each participant's continuing story of who they are.

I used multiple methods designed to invite stories from senior undergraduate participants as they retold first-year Residence Life experiences meaningful to their sense of self. The following section outlines the participant selection, research methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations in my research.

Participants

Before beginning this research, I have observed and mentored students in residence for more than 10 years. Consistently, senior undergraduate students who had challenges in their first year, reflect on that time and tell their story as though they were a different person. Students make meaning of experiences by sharing stories with others, including peers, family, faculty, and student affairs educators. The growth and maturity that occurs in those few years is significant and gives the student enough perspective to be able to reflect and recognize some the influencing contextual factors in their decisions at the time. As senior-year students approach the end of their undergraduate journey, they are facing another transition from student to graduate and beyond. The social expectation to be an independent adult pushes them to think about who they are and will be. Often, this means reflecting on challenges they faced and overcame, which resulted in

learning something about themselves. I recruited senior students because this phase of the student journey was ideal for the aim of my research.

For ease of travel and to allow for more time with each participant, I conducted this research at a university in the Maritime region that is primarily undergraduate and rurally based. Rural schools tend to have a higher residential population. Because of their small-town setting, the campus and residences tend to be the hub of social activity. Student communities are tight and localized, with shared experiences simply because there are few other options. My professional role at StFX created a conflict of interest for me as the researcher; therefore, it was not included in consideration of a location.

With research ethics board approval in the Fall of 2022, I arranged to spend a week at the institution to recruit and have the first meeting with participants. In a high traffic building on the campus, I set up a booth where I talked with students, provided information about the study, and handed out post cards with information about the study. This introductory phase provided the context and purpose of the research to potential participants. It also gave participants a chance to begin to get to know me in a no pressure setting before deciding to journey with me in the project. From there, participants were invited to contact me if they were interested in taking part in the project. Using Office 365 Forms, potential participants were asked to provide their name, contact information, age, gender, program of study, where they lived before residence (i.e., hometown), and which residence they lived in during their first year. I then reached out by email with the invitation to participate letter and availability to meet to go on a tour of their first-year residence (See Appendix A).

Because a narrative inquiry involves a relatively small number of participants to enable an in-depth focus on each one, I had predetermined a limit of 10 participants and hoped to have a

diverse representation that included a variety of academic disciplines, genders, ages, residence houses, and from different geographic locations. Despite the following efforts, I was able to recruit only five participants. The Residence Life office agreed to send an email to students who had lived in residence, which included some information about the research, the QR code to the form, and an invitation to meet me at the information booth. During the week I had arranged to be on campus, nine potential participants submitted the form and three had agreed to participate. I met with the three for the residence tour while I was on campus. After this week, to get more participation, I added a small incentive of a \$25 gift card of the participant's choice and continued to promote the study using social media and email through the Residence Life office. In the following weeks, I corresponded with a few more students. Two more participants agreed to take part, and I travelled to the campus to meet with them. In total, there were five participants involved in the project. The other four who submitted the form did not respond to any further correspondence. The following chart provides a summary of the participants.

Figure 5

Summary of Research Participants

Participant (pseudonym)	Age during this study	Gender	Home (before university)	First year residence description
Marley	21	Woman	Nova Scotia	single room, all-female/non-binary
Sandra	22	Woman	Ontario	double room, co-ed
Amid	22	Man	United Arab Emirates	single room, co-ed

Kahlid	22	Man	United Arab Emirates	double room, co-ed, high number of international students
Alex	22	Non- binary	United States	double room, co-ed, high number of international students

Three of the five participants were international students, three worked as Residence Assistants in later years on campus, and one was a student leader with the students' union on campus at the time of the interviews. The perspectives of the student leaders provided insights related to the role of the Residence Life department. The international students provided a rich account of their experiences coming to this university from a different culture and climate. Also of note is that all the participants lived in residence at the time of the pandemic. These circumstances and perspectives will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

Data Collection and Analysis

The following sections outline the specific methods, analytic frameworks, ethical considerations in the data collection, and analysis of this study. Data collection involved three methods: a residence tour, a digital introduction to their social media presence by each participant, and a semi-structured narrative interview. Analysis took place alongside the data collection, with touch points and interactions between the participants and me over email and zoom.

Data Collection: Residence Tour, Digital Introduction and Narrative Interview

The data collection was influenced by the phased interview approach, recommended by Kim (2016). Kim suggests using two phases, narration phase and conversation phase. In the narration phase, the narrator tells their stories with little interjection from the researcher. No questions are asked. The listener's (researcher's) role is to simply listen and use cues to show

interest and encourage them to say more. For this research, the narration phase included the residence tour and the digital introduction. The conversation phase included in-depth questions to explore the narratives. The conversation phase, as the name suggests, is a dialogue between the narrator and the listener (researcher) through which they co-construct meaning (Gemignani, 2014; Kim, 2016). The conversation phase consisted of the narrative interview in this research.

Narration Phase: Residence Tour and Digital Introduction

The first phase began with a tour. I asked each participant to take me on a tour of their first-year residence. I kept field notes and a research journal throughout the data collection, and in addition the residence tour was recorded using the voice recorder application on my phone. As discussed earlier, experience, like identity, spans dimensions of time, space, and body. Being in the space evoked memories at a strong emotional level and brought me, as the researcher, closer to their experiences. Basso (1996) beautifully articulates the significance physical space holds in an individual's experience: "When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind" (as cited in Clandinin, 2006, p. 70). I let the participant lead the tour and encouraged them to share what came to mind and what feelings arose as they entered their old residence. As we walked through, they each shared stories from their first year, pointing out spaces such as their old room, a lounge they spent time in, a friend's room, and where events occurred. On some occasions, the tour included stories of the outdoor spaces near the residence building or the view from a window where they spent time looking out.

After the tour, I followed up with participants with an email thanking them for the tour and sharing their stories and gave instructions for a digital introduction. To learn more about their digital identities (Brown, 2016), I asked participants to share examples from their social media and comment on about the way they choose to represent themselves in their online

profiles. Given the prevalence of use of social media, digital community interaction is arguably as important to identity development as the physical community. Granic et al. (2020) point out that social media sites are “fundamentally platforms for the expression of identity in narrative form” (p. 209) that invite feedback on a much larger scale than in the physical world.

Researchers and educators today must consider the digital world and how students represent themselves and interact through digital technologies to fully understand the complexity these aspects add to developmental processes. The digital introduction was created using a Google app called Jamboard, participants could post screenshots, quotes, photos, text, or images from any platform to build an individual board, like a collage, which was private and seen only by me. Each participant was invited to be as creative as they wanted with their Jamboard and were simply asked to share posts from their social media from any time during their undergraduate years and tell me a bit about why they chose what they did to share with me. When the Jamboard was ready, they shared access with me, where we could both view and comment on what the participant posted to the board. The participant was able to see my comments and questions and respond to those on the board. I noted what they chose to share, how they presented the board, and if they made any comments about why they chose a specific post. I also noted if there were similarities or connections to what was shared during the residence tour.

Three of the participants created and shared a Jamboard; the other two did not complete one. The digital introduction was not as generative as I had hoped it would be in learning about how stories are told and how identity is expressed online specifically. I did find that, for those who completed the Jamboard, they used it to emphasize stories they already shared in the residence tour or in the narrative interview. In two cases, the interview occurred before the Jamboard was completed, which may have lessened participants’ motivation to make the

Jamboard. With three separate methods, it was challenging to keep participants engaged all the way through the process. While having three methods strengthens the trustworthiness of the research, I now observe there is a risk of ending up with only partial data for some participants who are less engaged.

Following each residence tour, I immediately began reviewing the audio and transcripts, making notes in the margins of the transcript where I noticed an emerging theme or curiosity about a topic to explore in the narrative interview. I also reflected on the digital introductions for each participant and journaled thoughts and questions for further exploration in the narrative interview.

Conversation Phase: Narrative Interview

A few weeks after the tour and digital introduction, participants were invited to meet again for an individual semi-structured interview. Kim (2016) notes that the conversation phase requires narrative interview skills on the part of the researcher. Generally, open-ended questions allow for more descriptive and free narratives to emerge. I used a two-sentence technique introduced by Morrissey (1987), which consists of a statement and a question. Kim (2016) summarizes the value of the two-sentence technique, drawing from Morrissey's (1987) work:

- The two-sentence format provides an interviewer with an opportunity to involve the interviewee in the co-creation of the document resulting from their interaction.
- It reaffirms the interviewee's attentiveness and pursuit of detailed recollections.
- It contributes to the relationship between interviewer and interviewee as co-creators of life story or oral history.
- It vitalizes two basic interview qualities, rapport and collaboration.

- It transforms the interviewee's silence into a narrative opportunity by having explained the rationale for the question (in the first sentence) and then having asked it (in the second sentence) (p. 171).

To prepare for the narrative interview, I created guiding questions using the two-sentence technique to further explore the stories shared during the narration phase (residence tour and digital introduction). The actual questions were similar with some specific to each participant, drawing from their individual stories. The questions guided the conversation and were flexible enough to be responsive to what the participant said. I wanted to enter the conversation open-minded and prepared to explore unexpected paths. Kim (2016) encourages narrative researchers to be flexible and open-minded for two reasons: “not only will unexpected data emerge but [it] can also contribute to developing good rapport and trust” (p. 164). The guiding questions for this conversation were as follows:

1. Most undergraduate students are living without parental supervision for the first time when they go into residence. What was it like for you in your first year?
2. I have noticed that students can change a lot from their first year to their final year and often reflect back on how different they were back then. How do you think you have changed since your first year?
3. You shared a story about... Why did you choose that story to share?
4. Residence Life usually puts on programs and events that aim to build a sense of community in the residences. What events, rituals and social norms defined your residence community?

5. They say time makes us wiser; we see things more clearly when we are looking back at them. If you could go back in time and have a chat with your first-year self, what would you say?
6. I think that when we reflect on our experiences and share them with others it shapes who we are and helps us understand who we strive to be. Are there experiences from your time in residence that shaped who you are today and who you want to become?
7. In Residence Life, when we are hiring for the student leadership positions, we often ask why they are interested in the role. The most common answer is that they had a student leader who helped them transition and now they want to be that person to a new student. Was there a staff member (student or professional) that made an impact on you in your first year? If so, what did that staff member do that was memorable/important for you?

As stated above, four of the five participants completed the narrative interview. Figure 6 shows the data specific to each participant that was collected, and the partial data is included in the analysis and discussions in the following chapters.

Figure 6

Data Collection Methods Completed by Participants

Marley	Residence Tour	Jamboard	Interview
Sandra	Residence Tour	Jamboard	Interview
Amid	Residence Tour	Jamboard	Interview
Kahlid	Residence Tour	-	Interview
Alex	Residence Tour	-	-

Analysis

Following the narrative interviews, with all the data collected and transcribed, I began a deeper analysis of the data, for each participant. In this initial early analysis, I noticed that there were some emerging themes unique to each participant and some themes that were consistent between participants. A more structured analysis began once all the texts were collected and transcribed. A key task as I approached this stage, was to return to the primary purpose of the research overall (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) – to explore how senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. The process of early reflection and review of the field texts throughout the data collection helped to map out the next steps in analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that analysis begin with the first set of data, whether that is field notes, an interview or artifact. Analysis and data collection occurring in parallel is beneficial for two reasons. First, the entire set of data in a qualitative project can be huge even with a small number of participants. To ensure accuracy, I used a transcription application to create a transcript in Word, then listened to the audio while reading the transcript, correcting any mistakes in the document. I then listened several times again, noting pauses, intonation, and gestures I noted from our interaction. I began with open coding, which is a process of making notations about early insights in the data that might be useful further into analysis, at the first interview and throughout collection.

The second benefit of interpreting data as it is collected is that the researcher can begin to see potential themes and insights in the first experience with participants. Spector-Mersel (2011) suggests that to fully appreciate and evaluate the context of a narrative, the researcher must consider the macro context of the broader society (social, political, and economic), the micro context of current life events and personal circumstances of the narrator, and the immediate

context or setting, such as the question that triggered the narrative and the audience. A holistic strategy for analysis in narrative inquiry is necessary to understand the “web of influences” (Spector-Mersel, 2011, p. 173), the contextual factors that were present at the time the story is shared. My approach to analysis was to maintain a narrative epistemology that honours a holistic perspective of these influencing factors through analysis. For example, in preparation for the conversational phase of the narrative interview, I identified aspects of the macro, micro, and immediate contexts from each participant’s stories using an open coding approach to the field texts already available. These aspects became topics of a deeper exploration with participants during the conversational phase.

As mentioned previously, focusing on multivocality in analysis brings to light issues of intersectionality related to power, agency, and social/cultural context. Chadwick (2017) argues that categorical perspectives of identity are valuable only when taken together and not assumed. Categories (i.e., race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality) are analyzed by the relationships across them, rather than within them, and should focus on “the process by which categories are (re)produced and experienced in everyday realities” (Chadwick, 2017, p. 8). It was important to pay special attention to the categorical perspectives of identity participants expressed and to represent these perspectives in the analysis.

Once all the data was collected and open coding was completed, I used three analytical tools to consider all the field texts from different theoretical perspectives, allowing for multiple insights and possible understandings to emerge. The three analytical tools used are: 1) poetic transcription, 2) secret, sacred, and cover stories, and 3) mechanisms of selection and end-point analysis – are described below and provided multiple perspectives from which to answer the research questions.

Poetic Transcription

The audio transcripts of the residence tour and narrative interview, the visual images of the Jamboard, along with my own journal notes together constitute all the data, the field texts for this research project. Poetic transcription is a creative method whereby the researcher presents the participant's words in the form of a found poem. This method privileges participants' words rather than the researcher's interpretation, bringing the researcher and the reader closer to understanding the participants' experiences. In the creation of the poems, I set some rules to guide the process (Glesne, 1997):

1. Each poem would be exclusive to one participant.
2. The words and phrases were only the participant's, taken from anywhere in the transcripts or Jamboard.
3. A line in the poem could contain words and phrases from multiple places in the texts.
4. Verb tense changes or grammatical adjustments to improve clarity were permitted.

Poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) was the first structured analysis I did following the open coding. Each participant is introduced in Chapter 4 with the presentation of a found poem (Butler-Kisber, 2002) followed by a discussion that unpacks each poem.

The process was one of diving deep into the texts related to each individual participant one at a time. This provided a rich foundation upon which to continue exploration and analysis using other methods. I began by highlighting words and phrases that I found to be significant to the central meaning of the narratives. These could be words or phrases that the participant used more than once, analogies used to convey the meaning or significance of an experience, or words or phrases that referenced a theme identified for that participant. Prendergast (2009) described this process as "intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, passages that synthesize

meaning from the prose” (Prendergast, 2009, p. 136). Assembling and arranging the words and phrases into poetic form was a reflexive practice for me, in that as I played with the arrangements, it evoked emotions and feelings that brought me back to the moments with the participant when they first expressed them. I noticed that as I re-read the transcripts and re-listened to the audio, the words and phrases expressed had a deeper meaning than when I first heard them. I had the advantage of a fuller context, having spent more time with the participants getting to know them.

Secret, Sacred, and Cover Stories

Another analytical tool I used was the concept of sacred, secret, and cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996), borrowed from the field of research exploring the landscape of teachers’ professional knowledge in the context of their lived experiences. Lived experience is the knowledge teachers have gained through direct involvement in their classrooms and schools. In university student affairs, educators have a subset of theory-based practical knowledge from sources including associations such as the Canadian Association of University and College Student Services (CACUSS) and the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I), government funding agreements, and university strategic plans. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) characterized these broadly understood (but rarely challenged) stories as sacred stories – in this research, sacred stories of university and Residence Life for first-year students and Residence Life staff. The way students live, socialize, and navigate university life is not always visible to university administration or parents. In the same vein, stories are often quietly shared among residence student leaders and professional staff about their experiences within the residences, responding to and supporting students. These stories are called secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996), lived in secret spaces free from academic or

parental evaluation. And finally, students and staff who are marginalized, or who do not buy into the norms of the secret stories of their peers, may portray themselves and their practices as students in a way that allows them to be accepted while maintaining their practices in secret. The stories they tell their peers are cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Considering the possible sacred, secret, and cover stories being lived and told can make visible issues of privilege and social power at play in the participants' contexts (Kalmbach Phillips, 2001).

To uncover the secret, sacred, and cover stories of each participant, I reviewed the transcripts with the audio recordings of the interviews, paying attention to the way participants portrayed themselves in relation to their social context. I looked for similarities across participants in how the residence environment and university life in general were described. These similarities provided clues to potential sacred stories. These stories serve to illustrate “the complexities of personal idealism with multiple expectations” (Kalmbach Phillips, 2001, p. 262) and pressure to conform from others. I then considered the narratives in which participants describe how they align with or deviate from the sacred story. My professional experience placed me as an insider during this research as I am familiar with the kinds of experiences students have in post-secondary residences. During this phase of analysis, I reflected often on my role as an insider and the sacred, secret and cover stories that are evident in my work and in conversations with colleagues in the professional-knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). My reflections helped me to ponder how I characterize the professional and student leadership roles in residence, the expectations and duties of those roles, and the structure of support (or lack thereof) for the people who take on those roles. This provided another lens through which to consider the participants' stories, to the extent that they agreed with or challenged my personally

held assumptions about the residence experience for first-year students and for the staff and student leaders.

Mechanisms of Selection and End Point Recognition

The third form of analysis I used looked at the process and construction of storytelling beyond the narratives themselves. Using this analysis, I asked questions such as: What was selected to share and why? What was omitted? What did the narrator choose to emphasize or minimize? What meaning is expressed by the participant in the story, particularly in terms of identity? What is the participant claiming about their identity through the story? Spector-Mersel (2011) identified six mechanisms of selection: inclusion, sharpening, appropriate meaning attribution, omission, silencing, and flattening. Using the questions above, I analyzed the narratives to identify and interpret the possible mechanisms used by the participant. Considered together, the mechanisms used expose a possible “end point” of the narratives, which is the main point the participant wants to express. It is, essentially, the point of the story. As Spector-Mersel (2011) indicates, the end point depends on the type of narrative and which contexts are emphasized. A short simple narrative could be about one aspect of the narrator’s sense of identity at a point in time (“I am a successful student”). A longer story incorporating several narrative events could build an end point that is more complex (“I value individualism but also want to fit in”). The process of recognizing the end point and identifying the mechanisms of selection are intertwined, rather than sequential. Through identifying and questioning certain mechanisms, within the holistic context analysis (Spector-Mersel, 2011), the endpoints of participants’ narratives became clearer.

A Change in my Analysis Plans

In my theoretical framework, I introduced the theory of *bildung* (Taylor, 2017), the process and goal of striving to be the best version of oneself; it is the journey to self-awareness. In my analysis of what participants were expressing about who they are, *bildung* was a useful theoretical lens through which to consider the identities they were shaping in their stories. Building on this theory is a literary genre called *Bildungsroman*, a German term that means a story of becoming. These stories are a biographical story about personal growth and follow a specific format, usually about transitioning to adulthood or “coming of age” (Kim, 2016). In a *bildungsroman*, the protagonist faces an emotional or moral struggle and through this challenge they discover things about themselves. The story is about triumph through challenge and the life lessons that are learned through the experience. Kim (2016) suggests that *bildungsroman* is also form of biographical narrative inquiry. I had originally planned to use *bildungsroman* as a tool for analysis. Once I had generated the field texts, however, I found that poetic transcription fit better for the kinds of stories that were shared. Although two of the participants had stories of triumph through challenge, for the most part, I had the sense that they were continuing to make meaning of their undergraduate journey, learning about themselves through reflection but also looking ahead to where they are going next. Poetic transcription allowed the participants’ own words and phrases to express their thoughts and emotions as they entered another transition in their lives, not quite yet in adulthood.

These methods of analysis – 1) poetic transcription, 2) secret, sacred, and cover stories, and 3) mechanisms of selection and endpoint recognition – led to the development of three chapters of findings in which I present insights and themes about how participants understand and express who they are, the narratives about living in residence and university life, and the contextual influences that were evident in the stories.

Trustworthiness: Qualitative Research Standards

This is a qualitative study and adheres to qualitative research standards. Qualitative research standards differ from quantitative notions of validity and reliability because the epistemological and ontological positionings in each research approach are fundamentally different (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers accept that true objectivity is not possible. The goal of qualitative research is not to discover and prove a truth or law, but rather to understand people and our subjective experiences. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) differentiated qualitative and quantitative goals of “producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 209) by introducing new terminology. They proposed that trustworthiness is the qualitative standard equivalent to the quantitative standard of rigor, and further, that criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are useful in assessing the trustworthiness of the research. Although some qualitative researchers argue for a return to the quantitative terminology (Morse, 2015), the standards put forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) have been widely adopted by qualitative researchers. Credibility is the extent to which the findings articulate and represent the participant’s experience. Transferability is how well the findings in one context can be applied in another context. Dependability in qualitative research is the extent to which the findings are consistent with the data collected – others would draw the same results from the same data. Finally, confirmability can be assessed by how clearly and fully the researcher provides an audit trail enabling readers to see that the findings represent the participants’ stories as they were experienced, rather than through the potential bias of the researcher, for example where the researcher sees what they anticipate rather than what is there (Morse, 2015).

The participant selection and data collection process I have described in this chapter is designed so that participants had the opportunity to meet me in-person and/or through email before deciding to commit to participate. Throughout the data collection, I engaged with each participant multiple times and in different ways (in-person, video call, email, and online). Each interaction help build credibility and built on the depth and richness of the descriptions of the narratives, adding to the overall trustworthiness of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Lincoln et al. (2011) suggest that researchers should ask the question “can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human interpretation?” (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 239). The key word is “trusted” in this assessment, meaning we as researchers must demonstrate trustworthiness in our relationship with participants, the process of analysis and interpretation, and our articulation of how we are part of the construction. The researcher is a person sharing an experience with participants. In narrative inquiry, the relational aspect is a unique feature, in which both the researcher and the participant grow and learn through the shared experience (Kim, 2016). As referenced by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the written outcome of the research process is a collaborative a “co-constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant” (as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 99). The narratives of the participants, specifically my interpretation of them, had to ring true for the participants. A common strategy for ensuring the narrative is represented as true to the participant is to use member checks. Morse (2015) recommends that member checks involve more than simply providing a transcript back to the participant for feedback. Member checks may also be done between participants, although not directly or using identifying information to maintain confidentiality, where there are similar experiences shared. For example, “other people tell me *[thus and so]*. Is this how it is for you?” (Morse, 2015, p. 1218). By doing some analysis

as the data was collected, I was able to use this form of member checking, which is woven into the analysis discussions in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

Considering the design of the inquiry involved multiple methods which provided multiple sources of data from each participant, triangulation, or a process of cross-checking findings across data (i.e., multiple interviews) for consistency, is a strategy used to build credibility. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note that crystallization is perhaps a better term for considering multiple perspectives of an experience, because it rightly acknowledges that there are many angles and dimension from which to view that experience, and like a crystal, there are external and internal refractions that create different patterns. Through comparison of data from the stories shared by a participant during the residence tour, images and comments from the digital introduction, and my own observations through our interactions, I can highlight patterns across the data for a single participant. At the same time, it was important to fold my own experience must be into the emerging findings, to “keep the researcher’s voice and stories of the collaborators alive and vibrant simultaneously” (Kim, 2016, p. 99). Credibility and confirmability can be strengthened through authenticity and self-reflexivity, which I strove for throughout this research. Tracy (2010) names “sincerity” as one of eight universal hallmarks of excellent qualitative methods. Tracy (2010) equates sincerity with genuineness and authenticity, and suggests that “sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research” (p. 841). Self-reflexivity is a key aspect of relational ethics, which is discussed further in the following section.

Relational Ethics in Narrative Inquiry

The personal accounts of participants were a primary source of information in the study. The sensitivity of some of the stories, particularly about challenges faced in their first year, required me to exercise a moral and ethical judgement beyond what is covered by a research ethics board. Kim (2016) calls for a “narrative ethics in practice” specific to narrative research that begins with an ethical stance centred on the relationship with the participant. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) refer to this ethical stance as relational ethics, which is at the core of all narrative inquiry. Reflexivity, Kim offers, is a tool for practicing relational ethics and for developing “*phronesis*” (a Greek term for ethical judgement). Reflexivity involves not only reflecting on the ethical issues that arise in specific situations, but also reflecting on the reflection by “tak[ing] stock of [the researcher’s] actions based on *phronesis* and their role in the research process” (Kim, 2016, p. 105). The richness of the researcher’s reflexive narrative alongside presentation of the participant’s narrative positions the researcher to address not only what they know but how they know it and how they are being ethical. Narrative inquiry requires an ontological commitment to “a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant’s life” (Josselson, 2007, as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 103).

My insider familiarity helped me be prepared to hear some potentially difficult and sensitive stories about bullying, hazing, substance abuse, sexual violence, and mental illness. As the researcher, I was part of the research and not simply observing and recording data. My insider perspective was implicit in my own meaning making of the data. However, just as in my professional practice, I prepared to create the conditions for participants to feel safe and supported and for them to understand and appreciate that their experiences are valuable and meaningful. As an insider, these kinds of interactions where students share emotionally difficult

stories are familiar; however, the role of researcher is different than the role of student affairs educator. The boundaries of the relationship must be clear. I familiarized myself with the student support resources available to the students at their campus to refer students as needed throughout the project.

I was mindful that throughout the data collection and simultaneous analysis, my insider perspective shaped how I interpreted the narratives. To bring sincerity, as Tracy (2010) suggests, to the findings, I practiced self-reflexivity and discussed the values, potential biases, and reflective insights throughout the project using a reflexive journal throughout the process. The journaling practice helped me to process and articulate my learnings and experiences beyond the words in the transcripts, be transparent with participants, and be vigilant about how I was part of the research and of my own narrative identity, forming and reforming through each engagement.

Chapter Summary

Understanding of identity formation and the internal processes and external influences that contribute to this critical task during the typical undergraduate years is vital for educators to appreciate. I believe that narrative identity development should be the focus of the work of university student affairs departments which are tasked, as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note, with the development of students outside the classroom. Through the narrative inquiry described in this chapter, I engaged with students at a point in their development when they were able to use their participation in this inquiry to reflect on how they have processed and continue to make sense of the experiences as they transitioned to post-secondary campus life. The narratives they chose to share, the ones they chose not to share, and the meanings they emphasized told stories of who they have been, are now, and hope to become. In Chapter 7, I describe how the process

and techniques used in this inquiry can provide insights for educators to apply a similar approach to facilitate healthy narrative identity development.

The philosophical underpinning and researcher positionality are the starting point for research design (Kim, 2016). As a social constructivist, the methodological paradigm, narrative inquiry, aligns with my own epistemological and ontological beliefs. The methods used to collect and analyze the data have been thoughtfully considered to support the aim of the research and strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness. Multiple methods, including phased interviews, a residence tour, and participant digital introduction echo the concept of multivocality by presenting multiple perspectives of each participants experiences. The theoretical framework for analysis was built into the phased interview, with a holistic intention to examine the narratives and the web of influences (Spector-Mersel, 2011) and contexts from which they were crafted and expressed.

At the heart of any narrative inquiry is a relational approach with participants guided by moral and ethical responsibility. As the researcher, I gained knowledge and insights that led to the completion of a dissertation, and ultimately a PhD. But if that is the only outcome of the project, I will have done a disservice to the participants. I hope that through sharing their stories and engaging in a process by which they interpret meaning from them, they have learned something about themselves and further developed their sense of identity. With my positionality situated, a discussion of the relevant literature, and the description of the methods and methodology in the design of the inquiry, I will next introduce the participants with the found poems created from their own words and shift into the analysis of the findings for this study.

Chapter 4: Identity Making in Their Own Words

In this chapter, I introduce each participant in their own section, with a description of the data generating sessions we shared. I then present a found poem I created using the participant's own words. The poems are a retelling, an artful portrayal (Butler-Kisber, 2002) of the participant's story that honours the participants' own words. Poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) is both a way to represent the participants' stories for the reader and an approach to analysis that allowed meanings and insights to emerge. I then present a discussion with an analysis of each participant's texts and how they tell, retell, and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making. In the discussion that follows the poems, words and phrases used in the found poems are in *italics*. I use the concept of funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), explained in the Chapter 3 section called *Claiming Identities through Narratives* (see p. 68), as the organizing concept to demonstrate insights and possible understandings of the participants' words, phrases, and narratives to the aim of the research.

Sandra: Authentic Friendships

Sandra came to Nova Scotia for university from Ontario following a gap year after high school. She lived in a traditional style residence (single and double rooms with shared washrooms, kitchen, and lounges) with a roommate for the first term of her first year but moved to a single room in the second term. At 22 years old, she was a senior halfway through her final year studying Community Development when we met in October of 2022 when she took me on a tour of her first-year residence. Sandra held a prominent leadership role with the student government on campus and seemed to be a bit of a local celebrity, known to many people we encountered when we were together. As we walked about the campus, she greeted everyone we met along the way, often by name, and they returned the greetings.

A few weeks later, in November of 2022, when we met for the narrative interview, Sandra suggested we meet at her favourite little coffee shop in town, about a 10-minute walk from campus. When I walked into the coffee shop, I could tell she felt right at home there. Sitting at a table by the front window, deep in conversation with her old swim coach, Sandra waved and introduced me to her coach. She said goodbye to her coach, we each got a coffee, then found a table at the back where we could talk. Sandra mentioned the coffee shop often, noting that she comes here almost every day, and the servers automatically know her order. Being from out of town, it was not as familiar to me, but Sandra seemed right at home. When we started to get into the interview, I noticed that she seemed a bit nervous. In that moment, I was acutely aware of the dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship. Sandra seemed to become more relaxed after a few minutes of casual conversation. Reflecting on the awkward start of our conversation that day, I thought of the role that place, one of the narrative inquiry commonplaces, can have in mediating sociality in some contexts. Place can heighten a power imbalance or, as in this example, act as a neutralizer to power imbalance, at least to some extent. I wondered if she had chosen this place because it was familiar and comfortable for her.

During the interview Sandra used the words “expressive and authentic” to describe herself in fourth year compared to “shy and timid” in first year. The stories she shared about life in her first-year residence were framed in terms of how she managed and valued her relationships. She described the impact a few close friendships had on her confidence and comfort to be more expressive and authentic. In the following found poem, which I called *Authentic Friendships*, I highlight the way Sandra reflected on some of her relationships and the process of discovering what it means to have true friendships and how her understanding of what friendship is changed over her university years.

Authentic Friendships

*In high school I didn't value friendships enough
I have always been independent.*

*In first year I didn't want to stand out.
I was trying to fit in with the masses.
You could have your alone time in residence
but I wasn't alone that often; I think I expected it to be a lot worse.*

*Swimming was a big part of my identity growing up and in first year
I had a small group of friends who weren't swimmers
People in my residence I really cared about – the guys.
We just talked and ran around scaring each other,
like we were five and on the playground again.*

*The more you become comfortable with yourself,
you are going to find others who accept you for who you are
Just hanging out, feeling comfortable, they accepted who I am
I wanted to hold these friendships and build on them.*

*That ignited the realization that friendship takes work.
The people that accept me for who I am are the friendships I value*

*Now I am more expressive and authentic.
I have agency over my own life.
The more comfortable you become with people knowing who you are,
the more comfortable you become with yourself.
This is me and people can like me or not.*

*I work on my communication to maintain those relationships that I value.
Navigating the ebbs and flows of not seeing each other for a while but still checking in.
I am willing to put the effort into nurturing them.
It's worth it.*

They bring me joy.

I'm definitely carrying that away from my university experience.

Continuity: Holding on to Myself

A year before coming to Nova Scotia, Sandra had started at a large university in Ontario, or cement city as she called it, and left two and a half weeks in. She decided it was not the right

time or place for her to go to university. Instead, she stayed home for a year and worked three jobs. Because of this, she felt that she was more mature and independent than her peers who were coming straight from high school. Even though she lived at home during her gap year, Sandra managed her own schedule and didn't see her family very much because of the hours she worked. She attributed her easy transition to university to her year of semi-independence. Sandra was ready to manage her own schedule and take care of herself, but there were two ways she maintained some continuity and connection to home. The first was through social media. On her Jamboard, Sandra included a post she made on Instagram shortly after starting first year. In the post is a picture of her with one of her little brothers when they were young children. The caption added on the Jamboard says "I remember posting this because I was EXTREMELY homesick. You wouldn't be able to tell this though based on the picture/caption." You wouldn't be able to tell this though based on the picture/caption."

Figure 7

Part of Sandra's Jamboard



Sandra's post suggests that social media may play a fascinating role in the interplay between the temporal and sociality commonplaces of narrative inquiry. As the social context changed suddenly as she began university, she connected to her home life on Instagram, softening the effects of the temporal changes in her life. Posting about home, connecting to

familiar comfortable social context, was one way she could mitigate their feelings of vulnerability and feel some sense of control while experiencing so many new things.

The second way Sandra maintained some continuity was with her schedule as a competitive swimmer. She decided to continue with swimming on the varsity team for the university, drawing on her practical funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) as a competitive swimmer as a way to bridge the familiarity of her high school experience and the unknown and anticipated university experience. It was something familiar that Sandra wanted to maintain through the unknowns of transitioning to a new place: “having that consistency transitioning from high school gap year into university...just holding on to myself and not really changing much of my routine.” Drawing on this practical aspect of Sandra’s funds of identity gave her a familiarity, a safety net while she navigated her first year. This example illustrates a desire for continuity, which is an observation I have made often in my professional life. Continuity, a key concept that underpins all narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), connects one’s familiar beliefs, values and lived experiences from the past to current and future interactions and experiences. Students in their first year have the ability and often desire to try new things and experiment. At the same time, I have noticed that students often need to maintain something of their sense of self. Continuity of experience, the notion that something of our past experiences is carried forward into new experiences (Dewey, 1997), is not a conscious action; however, I wondered if Sandra’s deliberate choice to maintain her swimming practice might have been a social and temporal element of her narrative identity development. Her words “holding onto myself” speak to an awareness that she was going through a significant change that would redefine her sense of self. Evidence of her process of *bildung*, Sandra was seeking to find her purpose, her sense of self within her new university environment. The question I still have is if

she was aware of the significance when she decided to stay in swimming, or was it in the retelling, prompted by the inquiry into how students reflect on their first year in terms of identity, that she came to understand her decision. As the researcher, I am also aware that the very questions I asked influence the way Sandra (and all participants) reflected on their experiences.

The Value of Authentic Friendships

Sandra talked about the dynamics at home, being the oldest sibling with two little brothers. Reflecting on the transition to residence from living at home, Sandra noted that the change in sociality and having to manage new relationships was the most significant transition for her. She recognized that it was a different dynamic living in residence than at home, where she could be herself and know that her family would love her unconditionally: “having a roommate or having...friends in your residence, it’s a different culture that you’re dealing with and you have to be a bit more, like, fragile and think more about what you’re saying with people.” Unconditional love and acceptance from her family became part of her social funds of identity, setting her standard of how family relationships are. Sandra did not experience close relationships with peers before living in residence. She shared a story about high school when she switched schools in grade 12 because she had enough of the friends she had known since grade seven: “I was like I just don’t want to be friends with these people anymore...*throughout high school I didn’t value my friends enough* to really communicate through the struggles, so I decided I am just going to change schools.” This story of changing schools rather than working through struggles in her friendships illustrates how Sandra delineated family relationships (characterized by unconditional acceptance) and peer relationships. Sandra’s reflection on how she valued friendships more in university than she did in grade 12 is evidence to the shaping of her *bildung* through her “mutual engagement of self and others in the world” (Friesen, 2021, p.

281). Sandra compared the way she managed those high school friendships to the new friendships she developed in residence, demonstrating her openness to criticism from self and others through new challenges, as an element of her *bildung*.

In the interview, she told me she *was always fairly independent*. I wondered if her independence was a default or rationale for her lack of interest in or avoidance of any development of close friendships. In the beginning of her first year, her independence, or shyness, shaped the way Sandra engaged with her new social group in residence. She had a roommate during the first term, which she shared was challenging because they had different schedules. Rather than try to work out a plan to share the space and respect each other's sleep schedules, Sandra requested to move to a single room for the second term. I understood the connection Sandra drew to her high school experience, where she left the school to avoid dealing with interpersonal challenges. Sandra also talked about residence as a place where you could have many friends quickly: "the social piece of just feeling included and like you could just walk up to anyone's door and be like 'hey how's it going', you know?" While Sandra described herself as shy and timid or independent, she recalled her time in residence as a very social place. Sandra's social funds of identity changed over time from being independent to having many friends because she lived in residence. I wondered if she was articulating what she believed the residence experience is or should be – a highly social place where everyone becomes automatic friends. She was hinting at what I have heard from some students who describe their residence community as one big family. In later sections I introduce the other participants, some of whom did not have the same experience as Sandra in their residences.

Later in her first year Sandra said that she got to know a few new friends who she referred to as *the guys* in residence, who made her feel comfortable just hanging out. Sandra

reflected on her first year in residence as a time in which she experienced a change in her social funds of identity that included spending time with a few close friends, expanding her set of relationships. She expressed a recognition that family relationships perhaps take less effort than new friendships. As she expanded her social funds of identity, Sandra demonstrated new practical knowledge of how to manage different kinds of relationships in her life. An example of putting this knowledge to practice was shared when she talked about the effort needed to maintain the friendships after she and her friends moved off campus for their second year:

All of a sudden [the guys] live at the top of the hill...if I am going to make that walk or they're going to walk here, it's like you're putting thought into it, like you really want to see those people, if you are making an effort to go see them off campus.

Sandra's commitment to making the effort was clear in our conversation at the coffee shop when she shared that she was with them the night before our meeting, watching Ultimate Fighting Championships and hanging out.

Simply making the time to be together was an expression of how Sandra makes sense of the "rules of practice" (Pushor, 2015, p. 11) for friendship, illustrating her new practical funds of identity by her commitment to putting in the effort to maintain her friendships. Sandra expressed appreciation for the privilege to be authentic and realized the value of peer relationships based on unconditional acceptance, in which she learned effort needs to be shared between friends both ways. I thought about what it was that was different with the guys than her friends in the past. What was it about that relationship that made Sandra want to maintain it? Perhaps she had not found friends like them in the past who share her sense of playfulness like they did.

Leadership and Advocacy

Sandra's expanded funds of identity, developed through new authentic friendships, enabled her to begin to be more *authentic and expressive* in other aspects of her life. Taking on a leadership role with the student government is one example. She shared that her swim coach, with whom she was talking before our meeting at the coffee shop, commented on how she observed Sandra's shift from "shy and timid and definitely not as willing to step out of my comfort zone or stand out" to fourth year, in a leadership role and "through using your voice to try and impact change or change a narrative that you don't agree with from the student perspective." In her retelling of her conversation with her coach, Sandra reinforced the narrative that she was shy at first and grew to become more outspoken, using her leadership role as evidence of the latter. Again, I thought of her relationships in the past and wondered if she had been outspoken before her university years in a social context where it was not well received. Outspokenness can be a positive characteristic in the context of a student leader advocating to the university administration for student needs. I wondered if Sandra was expressing her definition of leader-as-advocate and voice of the people as an aspect of her expanded funds of identity. I was reminded of Friesen's (2021) characterization of *bildung* as "deeply personal, embedded in culture and often decisively shaped through a relationship" (p. 281). Sandra's coach helped her understand her outspokenness in the cultural context of a leader in the student body advocating for the needs of the student community.

Sandra's Adapted Funds of Identity

Sandra reflected on her first-year experience in residence and retold her story with an emphasis on her expanded understanding of authentic friendships. She recalled at first being an independent person who shied away from being her true expressive self in social settings, except

for time with her family. As she transitioned from home to residence, Sandra held on to parts of her identity, maintaining a connection to her family at home and her swimming routine as points of continuity, highlighting an essential feature of her narrative identity. Sandra reflected on her residence fondly, remembering it as a place where everyone was friends. As she established close friendships with a few people (the guys), Sandra developed new appreciation for peer relationships in which she was respected and appreciated and could express herself authentically. She valued these friendships and recognized that she would need to put effort into maintaining them after living together in residence. Her expanded funds of identity included a commitment to authentic friendships. The success of these relationships in residence, once she opened up, contributed to the confidence to be herself and eventually to take on a student leadership role. She was beginning to define her leadership style and how she could use her voice to advocate for changes she believes in. In her leadership role, the expressive facet of Sandra's identity was an asset. She could articulate on behalf of the student body concerns about university policy and practices that negatively impacted students. In Chapter 5, I will expand on some of the university's decisions Sandra disagreed with, related to the residence experience, and how her vocal response to these decisions reflected her identity as an emerging student leader.

Khalid: Through the Dirt

Khalid was in his fifth and final year of a Geology degree when we first met in October 2022. We met at the Students' Union Building (SUB) on campus and walked to the residence in which he lived first and second year. Khalid was from the UAE and lived in a traditional building which was a popular choice for international students. A few weeks later we met online for the narrative interview. Khalid did not complete the Jamboard portion of the research.

Khalid told me about the hardships he faced in his first year, witnessing and experiencing substance related harms, social rejection, and academic failure. In stark contrast to Sandra, Khalid did not have a positive experience in his first year. Where Sandra learned through positive examples what mattered most to her in her relationships and who she wanted to be, Khalid learned through mistakes and negative experiences who he did not want to be. He shared that he tried to be part of a party crowd and prioritized his social life over academics which led to academic failure. I have seen students go through similar experiences and decide to leave university, often stating that they are just not ready for university. When Khalid retold the story of his first year, he reflected on the challenges as learning moments. He described the process as “going through the dirt and [coming] out understanding.” This was central to Khalid’s stories as I got to know him — finding himself through adversity.

Through the Dirt

*You go through the dirt and then you come out understanding.
If I were to relive this experience, I would want to relive it with the knowledge that I already have
Not understanding what taxes were, how Canadian education system works
I didn't really have an idea of how to deal with money back then*

*I've never been on a hockey rink; I don't know how to wear hockey shoes
I think international students just have this sort of like shyness
So, we just stay within our own bubble*

*First year I got rejected by a girl
I was very depressed at the time
I gained 15 pounds in my first semester because of very unhealthy eating habits
I smoked a lot of weed
I saw someone so drunk that he fell down and broke his neck
I failed my first year, well pretty much, I bombed it
When COVID hit at the end of first year, I had to move five times
I was broke and my dad was like, I'm not gonna give you money
Life was hard.*

*All those emotions and feelings
my parents weren't there to console me and be like it's OK and try harder
No, they were just straight up, you better get the work done
I started moving away from religion, It was no longer second nature
Before, you ask God, God will fix it for you
All you have to do is put in the work, God will help, right?*

*I could probably have used counseling services in first year. Pride. Ego.
Until the end of first year, until I realized what kind of loser...
Why am I not good enough for myself to help myself?
The truth hurts, but there's no better motivation than failure
You go through the dirt and then you come out understanding.*

*It was cautionary tales, witnessing other people and recognizing that doesn't align with
who I am or who I want to be
That made me put myself in my place
I think that's how I learned to change.*

*Second year is when I was like you know what, I gotta pull up my socks, start studying
and that's exactly what I did
It's not a simple procedure you know
like a guidebook on what to avoid to become a good person.*

*It sounds like I had a bad experience
but how you reflect on that and grow from and change from it is what shapes you
You go through the dirt and then you come out understanding
It's quite good in the way I got to experience all this
I think I would still go through it to become the same person that I am today.*

Cautionary Tales and Hard Lessons

Early in our conversations, Khalid made a comment that “*if I were to relive this experience, I would want to relive it with the knowledge I have now.*” He shared a lot about the mistakes he made himself or witnessed in others, especially in his first year. In Khalid’s retelling of what he called “*cautionary tales,*” he learned not only from his mistakes but the mistakes of others. For example, he started using cannabis and after a few months he had a bad experience with cannabis that he believes was laced with something. Khalid told the story of the terrifying ordeal that happened four years ago with specific details so vivid, it was as though it happened yesterday. He never touched cannabis again. He shared that a friend of his was suspended from university for sexual assault. He also told me about a guy who was partying in residence and got so drunk he fell down the stairs and sustained life changing injuries. As he talked about the challenges he faced and how those experiences changed him, he reframed his initial thoughts:

It sounds like not a good story, like I had a bad experience but how you kind of reflect on that and grow from a challenge is what shapes you... .The outcome for me is good because [I learned] how not to be that person... .There is no better motivation than failure. I think it wouldn’t have been possible without, like, going through it...because I would still go through it to become the same person that I am today.

These cautionary tales became catalysts for his own personal choices, for example to quit using cannabis and alcohol. He demonstrated a recognition and appreciation for the learning he gained from the challenges in his first year. He used his expanded social and institutional funds of identity to make sense of his transition to university, especially as an international student; only by going through the experiences would he learn from them. Khalid’s story is resonant with Biesta’s (2002) perspective of *bildung* as a deeply personal experience reconciling freedom to

lead one's life with social, political and cultural expectations. The cautionary tales he shared were evidence of the "reality checks" that shaped his thinking about who he wants to be in the world (Guillemin, 2024, p. 5).

Becoming Independent

Like Sandra, Khalid talked about the independence that comes with leaving home and going to university. Khalid described his arrival in Canada alone with no family support, left to navigate on his own all the experiences of being independent, living in a new country, living in residence, studying in a different school system than he had experienced, and trying out new social activities through the party scene on campus. To him, coming to Canada to study was a milestone, a point in his life when he was expected to become independent. Where Sandra was proud of her independence, Khalid felt independence was thrust upon him by his parents when he was not prepared to manage all the responsibilities. However, there were caveats to the independence his parents expected that Khalid described in his relationship with them.

Khalid described his relationship with his parents as investors in his education. Paying for his education was the extent of support from his parents, in Khalid's perception: "*We pay, you do the work.*" From the time he arrived in Canada, Khalid understood that he was on his own now and anything he had not already learned from his parents he would have to figure it out. Where Sandra held her family relationships as a positive part of her social funds of identity, Khalid's relationship with his family could be understood as an aspect of his institutional funds of identity, meaning family is an institution that serves a purpose – the nature of the parent-child relationship is that parents watch over and provide for their kids until they are old enough to look after themselves. At first, his dad did not trust Khalid to manage the money for tuition and living expenses. It was during the summer between first and second year when he was financially broke

that he learned from a friend how to budget and live within his means, a skill Khalid had never needed until then. He went through the experience of having to budget carefully to live within limited means, which required an expansion of his practical funds of identity, understanding the value of financial responsibility and independence. It was not until after second year, when Khalid proved he was focused academically and making responsible choices that his dad trusted him to manage the tuition money he sent. I wondered, after hearing about his first year on campus, if Khalid reflected on that afterwards and agreed that his dad had good reason not to trust him with the financial responsibility.

Transitioning to Canada

Khalid explained that in his first year he did not take academics seriously enough, which was one reason why he failed his first year. The education system he grew up in was based on the British system. The only evaluation was a test at the end of the course. His belief coming into first year was that “you didn’t really have to work the entire semester, like you could just mess around the entire semester and then just come in the final.” In his first year, Khalid did not participate in the classes or do the assignments, and subsequently failed, “well *pretty much bombed*” his courses. In second year, Khalid committed to “*pulling up [my] socks*” and prioritizing his academics, which meant employing a new aspect of his practical and cultural funds of identity as a successful student, to engage in his studies accepting the Canadian university system.

Another challenge Khalid faced in his first year was the impact on his mental health with the transition from UAE to a rural Nova Scotian post-secondary institution. In addition to substance use, he noted specific struggles with adapting to the changes in daylight hours from those in his home country, especially during the winter when it is dark more hours of the day

than it is light. The geographic and environmental change was considerable for Khalid. His capacity to cope with the changes was also complicated in his new cultural and social context. Now in his fifth year, he reflected on his earlier struggles and acknowledged that he would probably have benefitted from counselling support. He also reflected on why he did not seek it at the time:

I just never had a good outlook on how counselling would be because you know, like I always felt embarrassed or shameful, if I were to access counselling because I was like, *why am I not good enough for myself to help myself?* Like, it's a sort of like a *pride* thing.

Khalid said he believed Canadian institutions could improve how they encourage international students to talk about mental health and foster help-seeking behaviour. He expanded his cultural funds of identity as he learned more about caring for one's mental health and being open to accessing supports.

Khalid also drew a connection between his experiences and the role of religion in his life and the role God could play in dealing with challenges. For Muslims in UAE, religious practices are a shared part of community daily life. If someone is conflicted or struggling with something, Khalid explained that the first approach is to pray and ask God for help. He described it this way: "We have religious values. Not like if you have a problem, *you go and ask God* [to fix it]. You pray and you ask God [to guide you]...*all you have to do is put in the work. God will help.*" As Khalid adapted his cultural funds of identity as he acclimated to Canadian university culture and values, he *moved away from prayer*, not because he didn't value it, but because the lack of Muslim places and people made it less accessible and less meaningful to Khalid. Religion was something that was part of daily life at home, but became something that at best was practiced in private.

No Regrets

When I asked him if he thought things would have been different if he was in a different residence in first year, he analyzed each of the other residences one by one, then concluded that:

I think I would have flunked my year even worse...knowing that first year was more about, you know, going out, socializing, you know, like meeting new people... *Humans are social animals*, so it would be impossible for me to, you know, stay as a hermit in my room all the time because it's not possible. So, I think if I were to live anywhere else, I think it would have a negative effect.

Even though Khalid failed his first year, he felt he would have sought out the same social experiences living in another residence. He made a point to state that it would have been even more of a failure (socially and academically) had he lived in one of the other residences that were considered to be more socially active, compared to the one in which he lived.

Khalid's Appreciation for Failure

Khalid had a very different first year than Sandra, although notably neither regretted their experience. Khalid reframed his experiences as essential for his identity development, growth opportunities and lessons learned, as he retold the stories of challenges he faced in first year. He articulated that the journey, however challenging it was at the time, was necessary to bring him to this point shaping who he is now, illustrating a key aspect of his social funds of identity. Even if given the chance to go back and talk to his first-year self, Khalid felt he needed to go through the failure to become who he is today. He appeared to recall and share these stories not because he wanted sympathy, but because he was proud of where he was despite the challenges and threats to his success he had faced in first year. He experienced his *bildung* through the challenges, failures, and cautionary tales to grow from those experiences. Khalid's expression of

his own growth through adversity is reflective of an education that includes “upbringing from something negative” (Wivestad, 2014, p. 8) and I wondered what conversations Khalid may have had with any student affairs educators, professors, or other adults in his life about his first year challenges. His challenges came from his freedom to make mistakes, in a setting outside the formal educational system, where Biesta (2002) suggests, there may be “other places where *Bildung* happens or might happen” (p. 350). In Khalid’s case, residence was a place where *bildung* happened through making sense of his experiences.

Khalid retold his first-year story of cautionary tales, emphasizing the learning that came from reflecting on his experiences. He seemed to learn many life lessons the hard way, including the dangers of substance misuse, practicing consent and respect for others, and that seeking help for mental health is a normal part of taking care of yourself. Although he was not ready for independence, he learned how to be responsible for his academic success and financial management. As he prepared to graduate, Khalid reflected on his time in university and appreciated the challenges he went through and framed them as necessary to his identity development, understanding who he is and what is important to him.

Marley: One of the Tully Girls

Marley was a fourth year Music student preparing to go into an education degree at the same university. Marley gave me a tour of her first-year residence when we first met in January 2023. Marley had lived in residence all four of her undergraduate years and worked as an RA after her first year. Two weeks later, we met online for the interview. We exchanged a few more emails and she shared her Jamboard in February.

Marley applied to live in the only all-female residence on campus for her first year. In my professional experience, single gender housing has become rare on university campuses. That

uniqueness was central to Marley's residence story and how she recalled her experiences in first year and as an RA in subsequent years. Marley's first-year residence reminded me of my own experience as a first-year undergraduate student; I lived in residence at an all-female university, in a grand old building comparable to Marley's. In the tour of Marley's building, I was struck by the beautiful hardwood mouldings, elegant light fixtures, and tall ceilings. The top floor had sloped ceilings in some places. There was one part on the tour where we had to duck down to avoid hitting our heads as we walked through a passage that connected two hallways; Marley joked that "This was always fun." The lounges had some antique furniture, and one had a beautiful fireplace. There were pictures and artifacts about former residents of Tully, as it was informally known. The intersection of the temporal, social, and place, the commonplaces of narrative inquiry, was a distinct feature of Marley's story. She highlighted a deep connection between the physical space and the community past and present of this residence. She seemed to take pride in her residence, which resonated with my own experience as an undergraduate student. Marley's poem is called Tully, the nickname of her residence.

The Tully Legacy

On the residence tour, Marley told me what she was told about how the residence got its nickname: "Back in the day, there was a girl that lived here, and some guys called her Tully as an insult. So, as a house they all banded together and called themselves the Tully girls." Marley observed that "every year in residence is different in terms of who comes in and what communities are formed." Marley talked about the legacies and the proud history of this "sometimes-underrated" residence community.

Tully

*I like the hardwood
It has a lot of character
All the old pictures of past alumni on the walls talk about the Tully legacy - the Tully girls*

*When I was a little first year I was pretty boring, I didn't really go out and party
You worry how people might think about you or your appearance
But I felt like I didn't worry about that much when I was in Tully
People in other residences thought "oh, it's all female, it's boring"*

*I remember how fun those times were
The little things, silly stuff, like I was a little kid relaxed and feeling free
not having to be tense or stressed about anything*

*I'm in a really solid group of girls from first year and I'm so close to them.
The people you're with, the people around you shape you, no matter if you like them or not
I've learned a lot of stuff from them both good and bad*

*You're gonna have ups and downs in life
Go out and do more things
Be involved as you can
Savour the moment*

*Tully is one of the most underrated residences in terms of community
Sweet, wholesome, nice
some people, that might have not been for them, it was for me*

As I considered Marley's perspective, I thought about the Deweyan (1997) concept of interaction: how the individuals who come together learn through their dialogue and interactions what are the social expectations and norms of the community.

Through interaction, the individuals shape the community. At the same time, there are contextual factors that influence what expectations and norms are valued. In Tully, there are stories (such as how it earned the nickname Tully) and traditions that celebrate and perpetuate community norms. There is an annual social tradition to connect past and present Tully girls. They get together, have tea, and share experiences. The residence itself held importance and

meaning that had become part of Marley's identity now and in the future – a Tully girl. For Marley, being a Tully girl meant belonging without judgement to the community where she could be herself and not worry about conforming to the social norm of first year university student parties:

When I was a little first year, I was pretty boring, I didn't really go out and party. I think they're like, "oh, it's like all female, it's kind of boring" but it's one of the most underrated residences in terms of community.

This is an example of a choice Marley made about what to add to her social and cultural funds of identity. What her peers described as a boring residence, Marley understood as a safe and clean, a calm place for people who are not looking for the excessive party life. There was a community of people (present and past), who valued the same lifestyle and a solidarity with women supporting women. She appreciated that belonging to the Tully community meant she could be herself and not be judged for how she dressed or acted. Like being a little kid doing fun silly things, "*being relaxed and feeling free, not having to be tense or stressed about anything*" because she knew her residence community would accept her without judgement.

Valuing Friendships

Marley shared that she had a strong friend group from first year residence that she continued to be close with, characterized by acceptance, non-judgement, and support, living and practicing the Tully legacy. I wondered about what those friendships meant to Marley in terms of her social funds of identity. What started as a friendship formed in the context of their shared residence continued four years later beyond the residence context. Like Sandra, Marley also added to her funds of identity a definition, including her instructions of what real friendship entails from her experience in first year. Their definition may not be the same, but both Sandra

and Marley reflected on their first-year residence with a clearer appreciation for the friendships they formed in that time.

Marley seemed attuned to the passage of time, and that she was at a point along a journey that was not finished, but about to make another turn as she entered the Bachelor of Education program at the same university. She used phrases such as “time goes by” and “as the years go by” as she reflected on her own growth. She expressed a desire to make the most of her last year with her friends from university and *savour the moment*. These sentiments were also reflected on her Jamboard in Figure 8, where she added text that says “4th Year. Final year in university, trying to savour the moment and do everything I can with my friends!”

Figure 8

A portion of Marley's Jamboard about savouring the moment



When I asked what advice she would give her first-year self, she said she would say to meet new people and “be in the moment because it is fun! My time is almost up, which is crazy...time goes by.”

Leading by Example

Experiencing her Senior Residence Assistant (SRA) in first year, who she described as “a really good role model and set a high example” of what Marley believed was the ideal RA.

Marley recalled the student leaders she looked up to in her first year:

[They] set a high example of what it means to be an RA and create that community and be part of it. For me being an RA, I really admire that kind of creating and being part of another community in different buildings...I think that is one of the best things about the [RA] role.

This example illustrates how Marley adopted a definition of RA and pulled it into her expanding funds of identity and put it into practice when she became an RA. Marley described the role of an RA as a student leader who “got us all engaged in the building...it was a really good dynamic. But they were also like friends, really friendly and good. They were always there to help you.” During the conversation, she often returned to the example of her SRA; “I looked up to her like a big sister kind of role...like a leader, an RA and a person as well.” How Marley talked about the influence her SRA had on her well after her first year in residence reminded me of the peers who influenced me in my first year, encouraging me to take on a residence leadership role. This story of her SRA modelling the community values for the new students became part of Marley’s evolving funds of identity, inspiring her own student leadership journey. Becoming an RA, Marley noted that she met new people, made new friends and tried new things. She offered an example in this story:

A guy who was on my RA team was like the opposite of who I was. He very much went with the flow. He was outdoorsy and did whatever. I was very much like stick by the rules. We became friends. We got to do [different activities] which kind of changed and

opened my eyes to a lot of things. So, I still like to stick by the rules, but I definitely felt a bit more freedom.

Thus, Marley expanded her social funds of identity when she engaged in new activities and realized that she could stick by the rules and try new things. She was no longer the “boring” first year who kept to her small friend group in residence, doing the same things she did in high school.

Leadership as Relational in Marley’s Social Funds of Identity

Marley recalled her first-year residence and spoke of the social interactions and experiences that were contributors to her funds of identity: “*The people who you’re with...the people around you shape you, no matter if you like them or not.*” She did not elaborate on interactions with people she did not like, and I wondered if there were examples like Khalid’s cautionary tales, in which Marley witnessed others behaviour and decided that was not who she was. Marley’s *bildung* was shaped by her experiences living in Tully. Like Sandra, Marley reflected on her first year with fondness. She told stories of her experiences, how they shaped her journey as a friend and leader, and how they influenced who she is as she prepares for the next chapter.

Amid: An Arab Student’s Journey

I met 22-year-old Amid in October 2022, when we went on a tour of his first-year residence. He was eager to tell his story, and our tour lasted twice as long as the other participants. We met again in December 2022 at the SUB on campus for the narrative interview. Between those meetings, Amid worked on his Jamboard and shared it with me.

Amid studied business and in his first year he lived in a traditional- first-year building in a small single room with shared washrooms down the hall and shared lounge space. It was one of

the livelier residences on campus, known as a party place among students, according to Amid. He was a great storyteller; he included details and imagery that helped me imagine the moments as though I was there. Like Khalid, Amid came from the UAE to study in Canada. However, unlike Khalid, Amid's stories had a central theme of what the experience is like as an international student. He often referred to himself as Arab and drew comparisons between living in a desert Arabian country and living in Canada. Amid's family had immigrated to UAE from Iran nine years earlier and, after finishing his degree in Canada, Amid planned to stay in Canada to live and work. His experiences of being an immigrant both in UAE and Canada shaped how Amid understood who he was and what he valued, particularly in this Canadian university community.

A few roadblocks with his study permit led to him arriving two weeks late, after all the orientation activities had taken place. As an international student whose first language was not English, the impact of his late arrival was significant. Even though his university career was somewhat rocky in the beginning, Amid spoke of his journey as a process, a rite of passage that was necessary to learn and become who he is as a young man. Amid appeared to me to be an insightful and optimistic person. He was eager to participate and share his experience with me. He was very open with me right from the beginning about his international student journey and what he hoped the university would learn from it because of my doctoral research.

An Arab International Student's Journey

I was two weeks late. I'm new in this country, it's my first day in this country.
They were like "oh, there are still people coming in" instead of helping me out.
It was like everyone knew what they were doing.

It was really hard for me to communicate.
When your English isn't good you don't want to say things that would make them offended
or say things that make them upset.
In Iran you are saying yes ok you are right, I will do whatever you want me to do.

Find anything that says international - you need to meet people.
International people because they can relate.
Maybe you'll learn something from them. Maybe they will learn something from you.
I sometimes feel like I'm the only one that is going through this, but when I see my friends, I know
everybody is going through the exact same thing I'm feeling.
We know we are not alone.

I began to explore myself. Then I began to ask what do I like? What do I not like?
What is an RA? I could see that there were some people that were extra nice
and then I realized they are RAs.
RAs that do more than what's written in the job description.
I became an RA to have an impact.
I became an ambassador in my 3rd year.
I went out and looked for people that were new.

Interacting with people gave me a lot of confidence.
I won programmer of the year. It's such an amazing experience.
Learning never stops. it's mostly unconscious; you learn it through the process.
But now as a 22-year-old, I speak better English,
I'm more courageous to speak out and say stuff that I want to say,
More social, more confident in classes.
University helped me a lot understanding about life in general.

If I could go back again,
There are some days that you're gonna struggle a lot. It's part of life.
Instead of always worrying about what's going to happen,
let's enjoy the journey.
I'm really glad that I came to Canada.

Late Arrival to Campus

When Amid arrived two weeks after the orientation program for new students, there was nothing organized by the university to help him get oriented. Security issued him a temporary card and dropped him off at the front door of the residence in which he was to live. As he told the story, he used humour, keeping it light, making it clear he was not complaining or looking for my sympathy. He made a joke about his confusion with the two sets of doors to go into the residence building: “I mean back in Dubai we don’t have two doors. What is this like a waiting zone? What am I supposed to do here? It is not that cold there so why do we need two doors here?” He slept in his jacket the first night because he did not have bedsheets yet and did not know he could borrow some from Residence Life. The next day he called his brother who was at university in the United States of America (USA), and asked what he should do. After the call, he went out and, on his brother’s advice, looked for the International office: “*Find anything that says international.*” He was not comfortable with his English which got in the way of asking for help from other students: “*when your English isn’t good you don’t want to say things that would make them offended.*” The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program was starting the next day, so Amid found the International Office where they helped get him oriented to campus and his program. Amid told his story, remembering what it was like before he could confidently speak English, find his way around, and learn about the supports and services available to students on campus. This was a familiar story to me; one I had heard from international students in my work. International students, depending on from where in the world they are travelling, must navigate some complicated immigration rules and processes which often leads to unexpected delays. Rural Nova Scotia, as a final destination, also presents limitations related to travel that can mean that students may not be able to arrive at a time that is convenient for the university’s schedule.

As his arrival story continued to unfold, Amid helped me to understand what it might be like for a new student to arrive to campus outside of the planned orientation timeline. As he told the story, I felt as though he was telling the plot of a comedy show where the protagonist encounters every challenge possible on what should be a much simpler journey. He arrived late, was left to find his way on campus on his own and was given a room with someone else's name on it. A week later, his RA did not know he lived there and accused him of trespassing. Amid navigated all of this with the added challenge of language and cultural differences. Despite the rocky start, Amid eventually got settled and found a community within the EAP group. Amid made sense of his arrival experience by giving it a purpose, comparing and contrasting, back then and now, drawing the temporal connection within his personal and university contexts, which were part of the sociality commonplace for him. He reflected on his arrival and noted all the ways he could have been better supported by the university. He saw a need for change in the social conditions, specifically the university practices with respect to new students who arrive outside of the schedule they create, and decided he had a duty to fill that need for new students arriving after him. In terms of temporality, Amid's arrival experience had a past, how it felt to be abandoned to find his way in the new place. In the present, the meaning Amid made of the experience led to the choice to actively seek out new students once he knew his way around and could empathize with the needs of new students. And for the future, what he hopes will change at the university to support new international students more formally. He could not go back and change his own story, but he could learn from it and contribute to a better arrival experience for others. During our meetings, Amid would go back and refer to these early moments which highlighted the significance of the arrival experience to his choices throughout his undergraduate journey. Improving the international student experience became a passion for Amid. It became an

aspect of his funds of identity, his definition and expression of who Amid is on this campus, a champion and advocate for international students.

Avoidance of the Party Culture

The residence Amid was placed in for his first year was notorious for being a place to party on campus. He was invited to party with them, but he politely declined the offer and just accepted the way it was in that residence:

I am not really a party person. I didn't really party as much. The corner that I used to live in was full of parties and sometimes they'd come and just sit [in the corner hallway]. In the middle of the night, I would go to the bathroom and there would be like 10 people sitting on the floor in the bathroom. I was like, I'm sorry, my bad!... Every weekend a ceiling tile would be down, or security would be here, or something was going on.

Amid spent most of his time in another residence where most of his friends lived. As he described the atmosphere most weekends in his residence, he wondered out loud why he did not ask to transfer residences: "I really wish I was in a different res. I don't know why I didn't transfer. Probably it's like *"when your English isn't good you just go with whatever they give you."* Being an immigrant, a facet of Amid's cultural funds of identity, he did not ask for more than he was given. He shared that *"in Iran you are saying yes ok you are right. I will do whatever you want me to do."* As he reflected on why he did not ask to be moved to another residence, he made the connection to growing up in Iran, where his family lived until he was nine years old. Part of his cultural funds of identity from his early childhood was respect for those in authority, even if you disagree with their decision.

Parental Trust and Reflective Practice

Amid expressed that he had a good relationship with his parents, in which they showed him a lot of trust. When I asked about what it was like to adjust to being away from his parents, Amid shared this:

I mean we always had this trust between me and my parents, and it never broke. And that's why when I came to university they already had trust in me. They already knew "oh, he's going to figure it out. If he has problems, he will probably come to us," because it was always like that.

Knowing that his parents believed in him and would support him no matter what gave him confidence in himself that he could be successful. He reflected on his first year and talked about his logical process for making decisions, something he learned from his parents. Amid recalled times when the adults in his life would, in his words, "play logic" with him to talk through a decision: "Like for example, I have a car now. When I was buying a car [my dad] was like 'OK, why do you need it?' And then I would explain to him that I'm getting a job that is in the city and I need a car." Amid called it playing logic when his parents or teachers would ask him reflective questions to get him to think about an experience or a thought he was expressing. This process of self-reflection was guided by his parents from a young age, an element of his funds of identity Amid had when he started university. As a result, Amid was adept at active reflection, which he demonstrated frequently during our conversations. He experienced these moments of guided reflection, at least from his parents, as an expression of their trust in him:

They really did give me that confidence. I mean my parents never came and told me 'oh, you're free, do whatever you want to do', but you know it was kind of an unconscious behaviour that since the beginning of my childhood, they always had this trust in me. That I would do good, I'll do fine.

The practice of self-reflection continued to be part of Amid's practical knowledge in university. This was a feature of his expanded practical funds of identity that, if he could, Amid said he would pass on to his first-year self: "If I could go back again, I would tell myself to self-study...as soon as I finish the class or I finish a job assignment, I go reflect back to it right after." Academically, his advice for his first-year self was to take time after each class to reflect on the material and what they learned in that class: "as soon as I finish the class or I finish job there, if I have time, I go to reflect back to it right after class. I try to take notes, try to change stuff." One day a week he would go over the week's notes and make sure he understood the concepts. If he was not sure about something, he would seek clarification from his professor or the course material right away instead of leaving it until just before an exam. When he encountered difficulty, he took control and looked for solutions without dwelling on the issue. He had the same approach to reflecting on his arrival experience during his first year. He thought about it in a logical, solution focused way, rather than focusing on the emotional impact of feeling neglected and left to figure things out on his own. Amid's intentional reflective practice echoes the idea of subject-ness, which Biesta described as *how* (not *who*) one is in the world, from the inside-out (Gourlay, 2023). The freedom in university level education to determine how to engage with one's academic learning and social connections is a key element in Biesta's (2022) notion of world-centred education (Gourlay, 2023). Being free to lead his own academic life, daily reflection and notetaking after class is an example *how* Amid chose to be, evidence of beginning to take full responsibility for his own *bildung* (Wivestad, 2014).

International Student Experience

Amid thought about what was missing from his arrival experience and what he could contribute to improve things for new international students. He got involved as a student leader

helping new students become oriented to campus. His leadership as an International Ambassador and later as an RA suggest a *bildung* that arose from how his first-year experiences shaped him. He proudly talked about when he took the initiative to organize holiday celebrations for international students to be together when Canadian students would go home, such as for Thanksgiving and Christmas. It was an alternative to what Amid noticed about celebrations for Canadian students, which tended to be about partying:

As I became more social, I tended to, instead of joining the events, more like hosting the events. There was a lot of food, a lot of our celebrations with international revolves around food, and a lot of Canadian celebration revolves around alcohol and drinking and partying. Maybe when [Canadian students] get older the celebration, for example, Thanksgiving and stuff like that, will revolve more around food.

Amid's friend group was all international students. Most of them lived in the same residence and, as Khalid also noted, that residence became the central hub for international students from other residences as well.

I have witnessed in my professional role how international students tend to find each other and stick together, but Amid's story offered a deeper insight into why that might be and what it means for their experience. On the one hand, international students presumably seek an education abroad to experience a different culture and way of life; if they end up with a group of friends from the same culture there is a risk of missing the experience they desire. On the other hand, feeling a sense of community and connection to others is a key factor in predicting a student's success and progression, especially in the first year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Until Amid found his international community on campus, he felt completely alone, as evidenced by the fact that he called his brother in the USA for advice. When he decided to leave UAE to

study in Canada, Amid knew that he would be on his own, without his parents right there to give advice when he needed it. Amid noted that:

Canadians when they get sick, their parents will come and take care of them. They take them home and they come back when they are healthy. When international students need help, we don't have our parents. My parents couldn't come take care of me. So, the only thing that they can do is to advise me what to do. This is why I feel like we more relate to internationals in general. Even reaching out as a friend. We reach out to each other.

Amid described the very close community that he cherished: *“I sometimes feel like I'm the only one that is going through this, but when I see my friends, I know everybody is going through the exact same thing I'm feeling.”* The international community at the school was a significant part of Amid's social, cultural and practical funds of identity. According to Amid, international students rely on each other as close friends looking out for each other emotionally; The shared holidays and meals and they could relate to each other as a distinct social category of international students. What they could not get from their parents or siblings back home, they could find in each other.

Social Media and In-Person Engagement

Amid did not use social media very much at all compared to his peers. He presented this as a funny fact about himself and I laughed when he told me what his friends said about his lack of social media use: “Friends are like ‘[Amid] you're a weirdo. What are you doing? You're not old!’” As I reflected during analysis on this uniqueness of Amid being part of the 10% of his age group who do not use social media regularly (Schimmele et al., 2021), I thought about the dimension of sociality, the personal and social conditions that influence his experiences. I wondered about why Amid did not have the same compulsion to be online even with pressure

from his friends. What he shared on the Jamboard was limited. He filled in spaces with text explanations for the lack of posts (see Figure 9):

Figure 9

Captions from Amid's Jamboard



Amid made the point that he did not have anything against posting pictures or social media generally. In fact, as he noted in the second quote above, “I really appreciate it when my friends post about certain events which I am in it.” The social funds of identity evident in what Amid shared about his social media use showed that he values real time, face-to-face and phone interactions over online. In our conversations, Amid made comments about the importance of real interactions. For example, when telling me about his experience being an RA, Amid stated that “interacting with people, this gave me a lot of confidence.” In-person connection was important to Amid and contributed to his eventual successful transition: “Having that connection, just to sit down and be like, just talk about random stuff, talk about anything. This is why I reach out to my friends.” Of the five participants I met, Amid was the most enthusiastic and engaged in the process. I suspect this was because the face-to-face conversations and sharing stories are something Amid values highly, perhaps more so than his peers.

Lifelong Learner

The optimism and hope for the future that Amid expressed was inspiring to me. Every challenge he faced in his first year he reframed with a positive message in his story. He was shy

to meet people on campus when his English was not very good but went out anyway because he thought he could learn from them and they from him. He valued learning and appreciated that learning happens through interactions with others. The way Amid came to view learning was that it was the destination, but part of the journey:

Learning never stops...I mean, nobody knows where they will end up, but at least you have a kind of picture of where you want to go and what you like. University helped me a lot, understanding about life in general. One of the things I liked about university is not just the education, it is that you see your peers [and want to know] where are they going? What are they thinking? You need to meet your peers. Maybe you will learn something from them. Maybe they will learn something from you, and it's just a continuous process.

As a consequence of how his funds of identity shaped his narrative identity, Amid understood the social construction of learning, with and from others, beyond academics. In my view, Amid thought of himself as a lifelong learner and appreciated that learning can be formal and informal, and include planned and unanticipated interactions with others, evidence of *bildung*, striving for growth, purpose, and meaning (Mollenhauer, 2013)

Amid was more focused on the future than the other participants. In terms of narrative inquiry, his stories had a broader temporal scope than his peers. He often spoke of his plans beyond undergrad. An example of this prominent feature in Amid's story is how he framed his choice to study abroad and stay in Canada after graduation. He thought of Canada as home, "I'm pretty sure my home is going to be Canada and when I'm down there [in UAE] I say I am going back home to Canada." He pointed out that the options for international students are somewhat limited if they plan to stay in Canada: "For Canadians, if they decide not to work after graduation, it is their country, they can do whatever they want. But, if we [international students]

decide not to do anything they will be like ‘well, go back to your country.’” Perhaps this desire to stay in Canada and get his permanent residency status was why he talked about the future beyond graduation more than the others. His perspective about studying abroad was influenced by how his family viewed “going outside to work and study” as a package deal. The purpose of going to an international postsecondary school is to study and prepare for a career in the new country. Studying abroad as an element of the sociality commonplace is tied to his future in Canada. Amid drew on his funds of identity as an immigrant in Canada as he began his undergraduate journey: “You kind of mentally prepare yourself that after graduation is work.” Not only was he studying in Canada, but he was also immigrating to Canada.

Curious about the interesting temporal feature of Amid’s interview, looking beyond graduation, I wondered about the experience of approaching the completion of his degree. Was it that the other participants were more focused on looking back because that is what I was asking them to do by the nature of my questions? Was it the context of being an international student and the unique challenges and opportunities compared to domestic students that caused Amid to be more aware that his journey continues beyond graduation? In only a few years, students go from one transition to the next, from high school to university then university to “what is next?” Temporally, Amid spoke of where he was in life not as an ending or a beginning, but a winding journey with pitstops but never a final destination. As he talked about his plans for after graduation, he imagined working and still just enjoying the journey:

I’m graduating soon. I’m trying to enjoy my time...instead of always worrying about what’s going to happen. Because even when I met people who were in the middle of their careers, they were still unsure about what’s going on in their careers. And like, if this

being unsure is always going to be there, let's just have it, but have life too, you know.

Just enjoy your life.

I thought about Amid's optimism and how he seemed to never take anything for granted. Every experience, good and bad, became part of his personal knowledge, like collecting souvenirs on the journey.

Amid's Approach to the Journey

Amid identified as an international student who advocated for and actively supported other international students. His late arrival and orientation experience became a catalyst that motivated Amid to be part of the solution to the problem he noticed, the lack of support for new students who arrive late. As he became more comfortable with the English language, Amid adopted a more visible and active leadership role with international students, expanding his funds of identity to include his role as a peer leader. At first his leadership was informal, when he was hosting events during holidays when Canadians went home. Then, in his third year, he became an International Ambassador, a more formal leadership role. Amid adopted many of the lessons given by his parents' example, but he also adopted new ways of being that demonstrated his individuality. The value of the journey as greater than the destination was a theme Amid carried through many of his stories. The physical journey of relocating to a new continent away from family, the social journey of meeting his peers and being open to learning from them, the cognitive journey of becoming proficient at a new language, the cultural journey of finding community and establishing their own rituals and celebrations – Amid reflected on and retold of his experiences like they were stops along the way to where and who he is now and where he continues to journey.

Alex: Culture Bender

Alex, who is gender non-binary, is from Maine, USA. Unfortunately, Alex only participated in the residence tour, so I was not able to do the narrative interview with them, which meant we did not have the chance to further explore Alex's experiences. However, our interaction on the residence tour yielded a glimpse of some of the identity-shaping experiences in residence as a first-year student and as a student leader.

Alex was considered an international student but because they held dual citizenship, they did not have to pay international fees. Alex was 22 when we met to tour their first-year residence in January 2023. They were placed in the residence that had proportionately more international students than the others on campus – the same one Khalid was in and Amid wished he lived in. Despite living with mostly international students, Alex did not have the same international student experience that Amid spoke of so passionately. I recalled Amid's assessment of students from the USA, that it "doesn't count as internationals to us [other international students] because they have such a similar culture to Canadians" and wondered if Alex felt the same. Alex chose to come to Nova Scotia to take advantage of their dual citizenship, perhaps validating Amid's perspective, at least in Alex's case. When I asked if they found Nova Scotia to be much different from Maine, Alex commented that "everyone here is so friendly...everyone always smiles at you on the sidewalk and I am so used to Boston, like, if you make eye-contact you're supposed to intimidate them so that they don't mess with you." Alex's geographical and social funds of identity contributed to what they noticed about the cultural differences between Boston and Nova Scotia.

During the tour, Alex offered that they were a quiet person in first year and did not go out much: "I had friends but they were mostly the ones from my floor." They met during international orientation, which took place about a week before classes started. I wondered about

who Alex had as friends. They were also international students, but from where in the world is a question that is unanswered. Amid had portrayed his friend group as culturally diverse with a large subset of Arab students. Alex did not elaborate on their friend group in first year but did say that they were still friends in their final year. I wondered if their friends had a role in Alex's decision to apply to be an RA in their 4th year. Our conversation during the tour quickly turned to their experiences as an RA, which seemed to be a part of Alex's identity they were eager to share with me.

When we met for the residence tour, Alex showed me their first-year residence, but then was keen to show me the residence in which they were an RA. When Alex asked if I wanted to see the residence they currently lived in, I politely declined, thinking I should stay focused on the research question and their first-year residence experience. As we were walking back to the SUB after the tour, I asked which building they lived in and they answered quickly, followed up with and excited "Do you wanna see it?" Something told me that I should accept the offer to see the building and see where the conversation would go. I am glad I did.

From the earlier meetings I had with other participants, I was beginning to recognize a theme around the relationship between being in a student-leadership role and interpersonal and intrapersonal development, a central focus of student development theory. Most of the stories Alex shared were related to their identity as a student leader. The following found poem entitled "Culture Bending" is about Alex's perspective in the building they were an RA in at the time of the residence tour. The focus of this poem differs from the other participants where there was a deeper exploration their experiences as first-year students in the interview and Jamboard. The conversation with Alex during the residence tour was mostly about their experience as an RA in their fourth year. Alex was an RA in a building that had just reopened and was reimagined in

effort to curb the harmful behaviour that historically characterized the residence. The words in italics and right aligned are the examples of dialogue between the RAs and other students as they pushed against the old culture when it presented itself.

Culture Bending

It had a party reputation
 Furniture is built-in because it was a wild dorm
 People throwing furniture out the windows
 There are no mirrors, no doors on the closets
 It was kind of dangerous so they closed it down

It changed a lot - education themed, with LLCs
 You have to have a special application to get in
 During training other RAs would tell stories about the crazy things they used to do

*You guys gotta stop talking about that –
 we don't want them continuing those traditions.*

Everyone on the team was a little nervous
 We had high hopes
 The first week or two were rough

Oh my God, I heard 'this' from my mom who used to live here.

It was the RAs - we set the tone

I don't know about that. It was before my time.

Zero tolerance for parties
 We have done a good job at culture bending
 It works because we don't have any issues
 I really like it here.

Being a Pioneer RA

Alex had a valuable perspective to offer as an RA in a building that had a reputation for being one of the most notorious for partying and damages on this campus. The building was closed during the pandemic and used only for quarantine, which was a gift for the Residence Life

team. At my own institution, we have buildings that have long-standing “traditions,” both healthy and not healthy, that are passed on year-to-year. In my experience, it is extremely difficult to interrupt unhealthy habits of a residence culture when they are so deeply engrained, unless there is an opportunity to close it completely for at least one year. It provides a break in the involvement of upper year students who used to live in the building and an opportunity to rebrand it with a new purpose and identity. Alex was part of a team of brand-new RAs who were the first to live and work in the newly reopened residence, which contained four living learning communities (LLCs). Students had to apply through a special process to live in an LLC and it was designated as a quieter building. The former “party room” (I was informed that it had a sign on the door that literally named the space the party room) was remodeled into a study lounge. From my view, as a student affairs practitioner, I found Alex’s perspective as a pioneer RA in this newly imagined community to be quite insightful. I had not heard the term “culture bending” before Alex used it to describe what they were doing in the building. I was interested in the way Alex spoke about their role and dedication to defining the new community and transforming the residence from its notorious party place identity. Alex mentioned that all the RAs in the building were new RAs, meaning they had not experienced being a student leader in any residence. The team of new RAs had a lot of creative freedom to decide on their approach. Alex felt that it was the student leaders who decided to take ownership of establishing a new culture rather than the professional staff:

In training they told us “you’re going to be a quiet dorm so you don’t need to go to all the trainings with the party dorm people”...we were under the impression that the RLCs would be helping too, but they didn’t. They just kind of set the stage for us to do it in training. It has been all us. *I think we have done a really good job at culture bending.*

As Alex spoke of the way it was in the residence before the changes (i.e., people throwing furniture *out of windows*), I thought about one of the residences at the institution where I work and how similar it sounded in terms of the destructive behaviour. Often, the discussions about how to curb the behaviour produces a list of reactive and punitive strategies. In my experience, there is a tendency at our institution to think about the culture of a residence, beyond the community of people, existing outside the community dominating its members year-over-year and dictating the norms, rituals, and values before they even arrive on campus. The community has an identity told, and retold, by the people who become part of it. Residences are unique in that, by their nature, they bring people together to live on a campus while they begin university studies. The space they share becomes the common denominator, a part of the identity the people who live there, and sometimes those who used to live there. The intersection of the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry – place, sociality and temporality – is a prominent aspect of university residence culture. When the residence leaders hold an assumption that culture pre-exists and defines a new community, they give in to it, normalize the behaviours of the community – because that is how it has always been in this community – and may unintentionally perpetuate unhealthy cultural norms. In Alex’s story, they adopted the belief that the community of people have a choice and can shape the culture to what is meaningful for them. They recognized that the students of this residence could be enabled to continue to (mis)behave the way others expect, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, or the team could work to bend the culture to something they truly want and of which they can be proud. Alex was pleased with how the RA team took ownership of the new structure in the residence and saw it as an opportunity to establish a new culture. Adding to their funds of identity, Alex gained a broadened definition of the role of being a leader in this community. The experience of being part of a team that led the

way toward a new vision of a healthy and safe residence community, in a place where others expected the traditional destruction and unsafe partying, will be a source of knowledge for Alex in their leadership roles in the future.

Alex did not divulge much about their first-year residence experience, other than to say that they did not go out much from residence, but they made some friends with whom they were still connected in their 4th year. The more significant insights came out of the impromptu tour of the residence where Alex's was an RA at the time of the tour. They had the experience of leading the launch of a completely different community of students in a notoriously rowdy building. Although we did not meet again to explore further this experience or what about their first year may have contributed to the decision to be an RA, Alex's enthusiasm for the new residence gave me the impression that this was a part of their identity that they were proud of and eager to share.

Culture Shaping as Part of Alex's Funds of Identity

Alex's understanding of the influence of past culture and the role individuals have in either perpetuating or bending culture was rare to see in my experience. I wonder about the students living in one of the new LLCs and how they experienced it. What was their experience of the approach of the student leaders? Did they buy into the new culture? How would those students think about how communities are formed and what is valued within them? Much of my work, since 2015, has been focused on trying to change the culture in residences with similar challenges to the one Alex's had before the changes. Change has been slow but positive in my institution. Further insights and ponderings from Alex's story will be discussed in Chapter 7, as they relate to the second and third research questions: In what ways do students perceive Residence Life staff and programming as facilitating or contributing to their narrative identity

development and, what are the implications of this research for reshaping Residence Life programs using a narrative identity development approach?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced each of the participants by presenting a found poem created from the participants words during the data collection phase of the research. Each poem was introduced and followed by a discussion of insights from the field texts and my own experiences. I used the concept of funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2012) to organize the analysis and draw the connections and possible understandings in relation to the research question, how do senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens? I found that each participant had unique stories about first year that shaped their identity making. I also found some similarities between participants in how they reflected on those experiences as senior students. Whether they reflected on and retold positive experiences or negative ones, participants drew on the learnings and their expanded funds of identity to give purpose to and make sense of the experiences, evidence of their active engagement in *bildung*. Through reflecting and retelling narratives of their first-year experiences, participants articulated meaning and purpose of their stories in terms of their growth and striving for self-understanding through their university journey.

Building on the individual story analysis presented in this chapter, I now move into an exploration and discussions of similarities and differences between the participants' stories. In the next chapter, I will present a discussion of the underlying themes and connections that emerged across participants' stories, employing the narrative concepts of secret, sacred and cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The themes in Chapter 5 are related to identity and how residence experiences shaped identity-making for the participants.

Chapter 5: Identity Making in Residence

This chapter focuses on the contexts and participants' narratives of residence living along with the meaning participants made of their experiences and their identity-making in first year and beyond. I discuss five narratives about Residence Life, and life more broadly as a first-year university student that emerged across the field texts. The concepts of sacred, secret, and cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) described in Chapter 3, are often used in educational research to understand teachers' professional knowledge context. Foran and Robinson (2017) note that the pre-service teachers they work with feel something is missing from the educational approach in North America – a relational and humanistic aspect that acknowledges the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Residence Life staff also encounter a tension between the responsibility for managing behaviour and enforcing rules and being an approachable supportive resource for students in the communities they manage. Like the pre-service teachers, they recognize the need for a relational-humanistic approach to their work with university students. Using the lens of secret, sacred, and cover stories helps to reveal how Residence Life staff and students deal with the expectations of the university administration and respond to the needs of students during the transitions and intense social, emotional development that can occur during university.

In this analysis, I discuss how, in the data generated in this research, sacred, secret, and cover stories are employed to reinforce, protect, and challenge the sociocultural norms and professional practices in university Residence Life. There are elements of the residence culture, social standards specific to each residence, that were evident in the analysis of field texts. For the participants, these elements helped to shape the nuances and uniqueness of each of the residences on their campus, creating a distinct culture within each residence community. They also become

part of a secret story about what life is really like in university residences. In the discipline of student affairs, the phrase “residence culture” is part of the nomenclature used to refer to the environment in a residence and the contributing elements influencing the environment. For this discussion, I define residence culture as the values, norms, and rituals that a residence community adopts which dictate what behaviours are accepted and celebrated, or not accepted and shunned, by the community. I will discuss five notable narratives that emerged about the residence cultures the participants experienced that were influential to their identity making. The first is a narrative entitled “ABM: anything but male,” specific to the all-female and non-binary residence where Marley lived. The other four narratives – instant friends, the first-year student experience, the international student experience, and the role of RAs – were broadly evident across the field texts.

ABM: Anything but Male

Introduced in the last chapter, Marley told me about Tully, an all-female and non-binary residence with a legacy of women supporting and standing up for each other against oppression by men. This element of the residence culture of Tully could be understood as a sacred story that members of the residence are expected to uphold without question. When we first met, Marley called it “all-female, but also gender non-binary.” Non-binary is a relatively new term, that refers to an evolved understanding that gender is more complex than the male-female binary terms represent (Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022). Non-binary was not in our language or conceptual understanding of gender when the residence opened more than 100 years ago as an all-female building. I was reminded of a conversation I had with a colleague about the nearly extinct all-female residence opportunities on campus in Canada. My colleague once supervised an all-female residence and explained to me that their definition for eligibility to live in the residence

included any gender except male. She called it “ABM” which stood for “anything but male,” and joked that men were not welcome. It appears the criteria was more exclusionary – male identifying people were excluded from eligibility – than inclusionary. Marley did not explain why non-binary is included in the criteria to be eligible to be in Tully, but as I reflected on our conversations, I noted that expanding the gender limitations to include non-binary aligned with the values of inclusivity and safety that Marley expressed about her first-year building. For Marley, her *bildung* was shaped by the values she learned about and adopted living in Tully. I wondered if those values were truly embedded in the residence culture, creating inclusionary criteria and practices. Looking again at the transcripts from our conversations, I noticed that Marley’s words indirectly expressed assumptions about male students at times. For example, “especially since [the residence] is all female, but also non-binary, it’s quite nice and usually very clean.” Her words implied that if males lived there, it would not be as nice and clean. Another comment was about the people who live there and that “obviously there are no boys...everyone takes care of the building. They know some damages are caused in certain buildings, like punching walls and stuff.” In her words, because there are no boys in the building, it is well-treated and damage-free. I wondered about the relationships Tully residents had with males on campus. Did males visit Tully often? I wondered if males would feel welcomed or if Tully residents visited them in other locations. Did the culture of inclusion and non-judgement extend to male identifying people? Beyond the scope of this research, but an interesting lens on gendered residences, is an exploration of the residence culture of residences like Tully, that are gender specific. Could there be a sacred story that the campus is an inclusive environment, in which Marley’s “anything but male” residence is maintained by a cover story of women supporting women? How has the culture in Tully changed over the years? I thought about

Sandra, who had three males as her close friends since her first year. How might her first year have been different if she were placed in Tully instead? There was nothing in the conversations with Marley that suggested a dislike of male identifying people. She described having male friends as an RA and in her music program. But there was an underlying assumption or generalization about boys being messy and punching holes in walls that Marley expressed as part of the residence culture in the all-female and non-binary residence she experienced. When I first started in my current role, there were male and female houses in two of the buildings on our campus. The male houses were the most challenging residences we had at the time for the damages, substance abuse, and poor-academic performance. In my experience, the assumptions Marley made about the behaviour of boys was valid. They were messier and caused more damage than the girls. But I wondered about the male residences on my campus and if the male students had the same perception of themselves that others had, and if that was an influencing factor behind the behaviour. In conversations with some of them after they had moved off campus in later years, they could reflect on their residence and identified a residence culture they felt they needed to live up to – as strong males who can handle large amounts of alcohol and display their strength by punching holes in the wall. The need for a space that is safe from these elements of the residence culture is understandable, especially if one believes in and upholds the secret story of male instinct to be aggressive and tough.

Instant Friends

Another common theme about residence culture that I have heard often as a professional directly connected to resident life is that residence is a place where students can find instant friends. This narrative is often promoted by student affairs educators to both sell the benefits of living on campus and to encourage residents to get engaged so they experience a connection to

the community. In residence culture is a sacred story that is emphasized during the first week on campus when there are special orientation activities, like the dance contest between residences that Sandra recalled fondly, described in the following paragraph. First suggested by Tinto (1993), it is widely accepted and agreed that retention is directly impacted by the extent to which a student feels connected to the campus community (also see Schuh et al., 2017). Living in residence is the most significant factor in experiencing belonging to a campus community. There is also the added complexity of the developmental needs of young emerging adults who need to feel approval from their peers and that they belong to a group (Erikson, 1968). Student affairs educators put a high priority on building healthy, inclusive, and engaged residence communities for these reasons.

Sandra characterized residence culture this way:

If each residence doesn't have its own culture, then it has nothing to really incentivize students to feel that sense of belonging and like home...that was a big thing for me. Just like the social piece of feeling included and like you could just walk up to anyone's door and be like "hey how's it going," you know?

Sandra recognized the importance for students of feeling like they are part of a distinct community. I asked each of the participants about the events, rituals, or traditions they remember from their first-year residence. Sandra shared one of the traditional events during orientation week, the first week living on campus. It was a big dance competition between residences, in which each community did a flashmob style dance as a whole group. There was a bit of a solo part for which the orientation leaders needed a volunteer with dance experience. Sandra stepped up: "so I was like, I will do it. It was a great way to make friends, you know? And it was so fun!"

She later added that it was intimidating but that she enjoyed it because she had the skills, and her new friends appreciated her for stepping up for the task.

Many schools have orientation week activities that are intended to create space for new students to connect. In Sandra's case, it was effective; they were "breakdancing right beside each other. Little did we know we'd become friends." Perhaps Sandra's decision to take part in the dance solo and other orientation activities was evidence of *bildung*, in that she was striving to be a more active part of her community than she had done in high school. Sandra may have been expressing a *bildung* that arose from reevaluating her beliefs and values about forming and contributing to social relationships in her new cultural context of a university campus environment. I recalled my experience in orientation week. I was shy, but I attended the orientation events. I found large group events, like the dance-off Sandra did, terrifying. The fear of being judged for my lack of dance skill is the feeling that comes up when I think about my orientation experience. Sandra had described herself as shy and timid at first and I wondered if she would say it was out of character for her to volunteer to be the center of focus for a few moments in front of a large crowd. I remember feeling like I needed to show up to the events and participate. I tried to look like I was as comfortable as I perceived everyone else to be so I would be accepted as part of the community. To use Sandra's words, I was "trying to fit in with the masses...and just want everyone to like [me]." I thought about the story Sandra shared about changing high schools to get away from the friends she had. It may be that her characterization of herself as shy and timid was a cover story in the context of a highly social environment. Could it have been that her secret story was that she had difficulty making genuine friends? This is one way to understand how she could have the confidence to volunteer for the dance solo even though it was intimidating for her. Sandra understood that participating was one way to show that

she fit and belonged with the community. Participation in orientation social events (that can be experienced as intimidating and terrifying) could be understood as an element of the residence life sacred story. Sandra learned to embrace the sacred story, even though she was secretly shy and timid, with the goal of securing and fulfilling her role as a university student living in residence.

Alex and Marley did not talk about orientation week at all. That could have been because it was not as significant and memorable as Sandra's experience. Amid missed orientation week because of his late arrival to campus. Khalid mentioned that he and his friends did not participate in orientation at all. He acknowledged that the first few days on campus are an important time when people find their friend group and begin to connect on campus. He described himself as a social person and he had friends in other residences, but in his experience:

I did not find anyone that I could relate to or fit with within [my residence]. I did not take part in events there. My friends also did not take part in their own residence stuff, like when we did the dance-off in the first week, we did not.

Because the orientation activities grouped students by residence, Khalid did not choose to participate because he did not feel he was part of his residence community. Orientation events are a defining aspect of the residence culture, especially when they are organized by grouping students by residence. Khalid stated that he found community with others who accepted him, and together they avoided orientation. He did not buy-in to the sacred story of instant friends through orientation and, consequently, he did not have a sense of connection to his residence community.

Beyond orientation, regular community engagement throughout the year is a common element of residence life that the participants commented on. Part of the instant friends sacred story is that the connection forms quickly in the first days on campus, habits, norms and social

expectations are established early. Everyone is friends with, or at least familiar with, others who live in the building and becomes part of the regular ebb and flow, the rhythm of the day-to-day routine. Khalid, after establishing a friend group with people from other residences, did not participate in events in his residence. He expressed that he felt bad when he later got to know RAs and realized how much they do to engage residents, “like I understand it now but back then I was like who cares? I’m not gonna go.” Amid did not engage with his residence either. He would have preferred to live in the building Khalid lived in, where it was quieter and there were many international students. Amid’s residence culture fit the “fun city” atmosphere that Khalid talked about. Amid shared a story that illustrated the impact of missing orientation when he spoke of his lack of connection to the residence community. A week after his arrival he was unaware of the measures the Residence Life team had in place to control the number of people in the building during homecoming. Residents needed to have special wristbands to show they lived there, which Amid did not have. He shared:

Let me tell you an interesting story about how I got to know about RAs... . The room I stayed in wasn’t actually my room. I found out that the person who was supposed to be in that room left to go to a different residence. So, when I got there the nametag on the door was someone else’s name. I didn’t know what RAs were or that residences had RAs... . A week later it was Hoco [homecoming]. During Hoco you wear bracelets that the RAs sign you up with. That day for [my residence] it was bright red. You wear it and you can come and go whenever you want. And, if you don’t live here, you are not allowed in because of the guest ban. I didn’t know what a guest ban was. I came in and it was very busy. It was [my residence] so it was crowded as usual. I went to go upstairs and [the RAs] were like “where are you going?” I was like “I’m going to my room.” We went back and forth.

They said my name is not on the list. I said, “I don’t care about your list, I live here.” I was not very polite... . His name was Billy. He was the RA in my section. I lived there for over a week, and he never knew I lived there.

Eventually Amid and the RA went to his room together and Amid proved he lived there. The RA apologized and fixed the system so that Amid’s name was there and assigned to his room. His late arrival meant that he missed orientation, was not connected to anyone, including the staff in the building, and was seemingly invisible until there were tight controls on entry to the building. The impact of not going through the “normal” process of arrival, residence move-in, and orientation according to the institution’s set schedule was immense. Amid was not aware of the sacred story, the elements of orientation and community engagement of the residence culture, that would have been made known through the interactions he missed during the first weeks on campus. His secret story included hanging out in other spaces with the other international students through the EAP program, which allowed him to an alternative to his own residence, so he never connected with his residence community.

Marley talked a lot about the events and activities in her first-year residence. She mentioned that there were a lot of crafting events, Christmas tree decorating, snow globe making, a Super Bowl event, and the Tully Tea annual event. She was the only participant that mentioned a “mini house council,” a group of residents who put on activities and events like the ones noted above, of which she was a part. Marley did not talk about orientation other than to point out during the tour where her residence practiced their dance for the dance-off. It was clear to me that Marley was very engaged in her residence and understood the university residence culture as a place to find friends, which may be an expression of her *bildung* as a process of striving to “harmonize individual desires with a collective social interest” (Thompson, 2022, p.

2534) . Socially, Marley found community in her residence: “I made quite a few friends in my first year and I’m still friends with quite a few of those people.” Marley had a positive experience in first year, and credited the student leaders in her building for being “a really good role model...of what it means to be an RA. I was like I really admire that kind of creating and being a part of another community in a different building too.” Marley understood and valued the residence culture that she learned about so much that she wanted to bring it to the next cohort of residents, as an RA, teaching the sacred story to others.

The sacred story about residence as a place where students make friends instantly was easy for Marley and Sandra to abide by. They arrived according to the university’s schedule and participated in the activities designed to help students make social connections. This sacred story was problematic for both Khalid and Amid, who did not learn of this when they arrived. Neither of them made connections in their residence the way Sandra and Marley did. They did not participate in the orientation week activities and faced challenges as they transitioned to living in residence in Canada. I noted that they were both international students from a culturally diverse background, which was an important contextual factor I return to later in this chapter.

Fun City: The First-year Student Experience

One participant characterized the first year as “fun city,” meaning first year students are just looking to have fun which includes drinking and partying often to excess. Khalid enjoyed his first year to the fullest and lived the fun city lifestyle. Being social, being with people was important to Kahlid and often he prioritized that over his academic commitments. So, when that did not go well for him and he failed academically, it was a wakeup call that forced him to take stock of his priorities. Living in the same building the next year, Kahlid saw the social scene in a different way: “Second year there was a bunch of new kids...first years just wanna party, have

fun, you know, fun city.” After only one year of university, he could no longer relate to the first-year students who just wanted to party, an important change that related to *bildung*, arising from his reflection on his experiences and interactions. Khalid applied his characterization of first-year students who just want to party all the time to himself in his first year and observed it in the next cohort to move into residence.

What Khalid assumed and expected of first-year students is a social narrative, a secret story students tell and retell, observed and talked about behind closed doors by my colleagues and I at universities across Canada – that the first year in university is about intense socializing and partying. This secret story that some students live is not the story promoted by university administrators, who want to assure parents that their children will be safe and well as they transition into university. Social media sites like the Instagram pages Canada Party Life and Sendszn (pronounced “send season” which means “party season”), encourage university students to compete for the best party school and serve as virtual spaces for the secret story to be told. Posts shared by unnamed students at universities across Canada on these sites frequently glorify and celebrate the large quantity of alcohol someone consumed or dangerous stunts being performed for a large crowd of party goers. The more extreme the behaviour displayed, the more “likes” the post gets. These sites encourage excessive and dangerous behaviour, comparable to the example Khalid experienced when a student he knew broke his neck when he fell while he was extremely drunk, causing life altering injuries.

I have talked with students in my professional roles, following a night of partying when they ended up in the emergency room for alcohol overconsumption. Once they experience the realities of overconsumption (and sometimes the serious consequences of that) they often express feelings of shame, embarrassment, and fear when they think about the harms and danger they

were in because of their overconsumption. Student affairs educators frequently teach students strategies for reducing the harm, ways for students who recognize the risks, but feel the pressure to appear they are keeping up with what they believe others are drinking. Some students learn to use these strategies as cover stories. One example might be to switch to alcohol-free drinks that look like a mixed drink, to appear that they are drinking more than what others perceive of them.

Marley chose not to engage in the party narrative but noted her perception of it as one in which most of her peers participated: “I was pretty boring as a first year. I didn’t go out and party which a lot of people do.” In her residence, the SRA set the standard when she said in the first house meeting “you can leave and party somewhere else, but you can come back here and it’s going to be quiet. We’re gonna make sure it’s a quiet safe space.” The SRA reinforced the secret story of the first-year fun city lifestyle, even implying with her words that it is loud and unsafe, and defined their residence space as a safe place free from exposure to the parties. She put parameters in place that offered an alternative within their residence. The kinds of activities Marley enjoyed, she and her friends did in secret:

First year I didn’t do the partying. I’d rather have more of like a social, fun, silly...or we did little activities like we made a movie, which was fun, and we went to trivia and all these fun things so that we didn’t have to do like partying with drunk people.

Marley was able to have the social experience she preferred by staying in her residence where she was protected by the alternative story that Tully is not fun city, where parties take place.

Khalid was the only participant who spoke openly about actively partying and using substances in first year, but other participants acknowledged the first-year party narrative in other ways.

Amid shared that he wished he was in a different residence because he “didn’t really like the environment and what was happening in res [residence].” He noted that his residence was known

as a place to party on campus. Amid dealt with it by accepting it as normal and avoiding it when he could:

I didn't really stay in my room because I am not really a party person. The corner that I used to live in was full of parties. Sometimes they'd come and sit in the middle of the night. I would go to the bathroom and there would be like 10 people sitting on the floor in the bathroom. I was like I'm sorry, my bad...I couldn't relate to what they were doing...every weekend it was like ok nice, another one...they invited me, but I was not a party person.

By apologizing to the people in the washroom for interrupting their party to use the washroom for its intended purposes, Amid expressed his tolerance of the party culture in his residence, acknowledging and accommodating the secret story. It can be argued that in other social contexts, socializing on the floor of a public washroom would not be tolerated, yet it is normalized and, in Amid's story, favoured by some students in university residences. The institution where I work has been on the list of the top 10 party schools in Canada, according to Canada Party Life, and I am familiar with the behaviours associated with the "fun city" party lifestyle. From my experience, this party lifestyle is a common narrative of residence cultures that can have a prominent role in the first-year experience and how individuals come to make sense of who they are in their new residence context. The party culture can be understood as a powerful narrative that some students learn to cope with in secret or by creating cover stories to be accepted socially.

International Student Experience

Amid's story indicates that he did not buy-in to the narrative of the first year "fun city" experience that his residence offered. Instead Amid was part of a community of international

students who were like-minded and academically focused, that provided a counter narrative to the fun city experience. I had heard this narrative specific to international students on other campuses, and from some of the participants in this research: international students are not partiers; they are more focused on academics than their Canadian counterparts. Alex, who was from Maine, USA, suggested that Canadian students might seek out information about which residences were party residences before they decided which one to request on their application. They commented that international students are not looking for the party life, but “all the Canadian students tend to know more about [this university’s] reputation, and they know what buildings are party buildings.” Being an international student was a part of Amid’s identity that he was proud of and talked about extensively. To him, “US doesn’t count as international to us because they have such a similar culture to Canadians.” It is true that travel to the USA is more accessible than between UAE and Canada. In the UAE, from where both Amid and Khalid came, there is a very high prevalence, about 7% in 2020 and rising, of students going abroad for a university education compared to other countries (Shukla, 2020). The commitment to go abroad to university in North America is more than just to seek a degree, as Amid pointed out: “you mentally prepare yourself that after graduation is work...you need your PR [permanent resident] you need your passport.” Perhaps this is why many international students do not participate in the party culture. Khalid, however, did not follow this counter narrative. He lived in a residence that housed mostly international students but went to other residences like the one Amid lived in to party, “knowing that first year was more about, you know, go out socialize, meet new people...humans socialize” as Khalid noted. I wondered about why Khalid was drawn to the first-year party narrative rather than the counter narrative many of his international peers might have adopted. One possibility could be that the relationship he described with his parents

(discussed in the last chapter) contributed to a sense of rebellion, wanting to be part of something that was very different from what was allowed and expected at home.

The Role of Residence Assistants

Amid's story of his late arrival to campus, introduced in the previous chapter, reminded me that first-year students may not know what to expect in residence. He moved into residence and was not aware of the RA team at first: "I had never been in a residence before, so I was like 'what is an RA? Who are these people?'" Amid's comment made me think about what message university administrators promote about the role of the RAs, and whether they provide sufficient information about the kinds of supports available to students in residence. How do new students understand who these student leaders are and what their role is? As I pondered how Amid and other participants talked about the role of RAs in residence, I reflected on my own beliefs about RAs. My colleagues and I often talk about the RAs as peer mentors responsible for the student experience in residence. The ideal RA knows everyone in their community, helps everyone feel welcomed and included, and is always available to provide advice and support to students when challenges arise. However, in recent years I have begun to question this belief. In narrative terms, I recognize that there is a sacred story that holds a peer leadership model as the standard in Residence Life programs. Lane Vetere (2010) describes essential elements of a residence program, including response to a range of needs from "immediate crises or to help a student through a particularly rough patch" to educational programs that "are intended to raise awareness, challenge thinking, promote development, address problems" (p. 80). The author then goes on to describe the rationale for what I believe is a cover story about the standard residence staffing model that places students in the frontline immediate support role for their peers:

The Residence Life program also provides exceptional opportunities for students to develop leadership skills. Through the training, advice, and support provided by professional staff in housing, there is a myriad of leadership opportunities for students in Canadian residence halls, as residence assistants or dons, programmers, desk and security staff, elected residence hall executive and council members, as well as in more informal roles. (Lane Vetere, 2010, p. 80)

This description makes the RA job sound very appealing. However, I question how RAs experience the position. In my professional role, I have learned most institutions employ full-time undergraduate students, who are emerging adults themselves, and expect that they will have the experience, training, and capacity to manage and support a community of peers through one of the most challenging transitions they will experience in life. Some of my colleagues and I are beginning to question the student RA model that has been the standard for decades. Given the complex student needs, and the often-sensitive issues that RAs are asked to respond to in residence, should Residence Life professionals really be asking students to assume this level of responsibility? Are student RAs well positioned to be in the role of shaping the *bildung* of first-year students? The difference in age between first year students and RA is often only a year or two. If, as Mollenhauer (2014) argues, it is the responsibility of the older generation to pass on culture to the younger generation, then it would seem that RAs are not well positioned to play a role of educator, responsible in part for their upbringing (Friesen, 2021). Hiring students through a leadership opportunity is much more cost effective than hiring professional staff to do the same work. In my experience, with the financial realities of many public institutions in Canada who are facing a decrease in government funding, student support services including Residence Life management are rarely a priority when it comes to resource allocation. I began to understand that

several cover stories used by professionals (me included) and student leaders enable the sacred story to remain unchallenged. Some of these were evident in the narratives of some of the participants.

Sandra recalled her interactions with RAs positively. When she finished high school, she first went to a larger university in Ontario then left after two-and-a-half weeks. Sandra told a story about a time she was upset and feeling homesick in those two weeks when an RA noticed her crying and stopped to talk with her:

He just sat down with me in the hallway, and we probably talked for like an hour and a half. He just became my friend, you know. We just talked about what was going on and he got to know me, and I felt appreciated, like someone cared for me.

A year later, she came to Nova Scotia to study. She described the RAs there as people who “genuinely supported me a lot through my confusions of being a first-year university student...giving me a feeling like I had a friend.” When her RA was graduating Sandra told her that she was going to miss her and joked about the role she played in Sandra’s life, telling her RA that “you are like a free therapist.” These RAs in Sandra’s early days made an impression on her about the role of an RA for first year students and the difference they can make for a student who is navigating the transition to university. The sacred story of RAs as instant friend, caregiver, and genuine support became the expectation of what Sandra thought an RA should be, “making me feel comforted and like I had someone to go to while I was there.” To demonstrate that the relationship Sandra had with her first year RA was genuine and lasting, she stated that her old RA reached out to congratulate her when she landed her leadership role in her fourth year:

People [RAs] recognize things in you... There are so many people who just have so much faith in you. We need to start saying that to people more often. Validate them, hype them up. My RA was definitely one of those people who did that for me.

Sandra expanded on the relationship between her RA and herself as a first-year student, validating the sacred story that RAs in residence are responsible for ensuring new students feel they have someone they can go to for support as they navigate the social, emotional, cultural, and academic transition to university life – a free therapist – and that role is best facilitated by a peer.

Amid had a completely different experience. During the residence tour, he told the story of when he first arrived on campus later than expected. As we walked through the first set of doors entering the building, Amid talked about the moment he walked through the same doors in his first year after a security officer dropped him off at his residence with his luggage:

So, he dropped me right here, that's where I got dropped with two backpacks. It was at 8 or 9 p.m. It was a Saturday or Sunday. My card was not working. I didn't know how to get inside. I never saw that person again. He left me there and said, "good luck". So where am I supposed to go? How do I get inside this building? Back in Dubai we don't have two doors. What is this like a waiting zone? What am I supposed to do here? ... I was very confused, I was like "where is room 301?" I was searching for it, and I couldn't find the elevator. It was such a hard time... It was such a shock to me that nobody was around to help me out. At least designate somebody to knock on my door and say "hey, I'm here for you. I know you are two weeks late."

Amid was dropped off at the door to what was to be his home for the next eight months with no further guidance. No one was there to help him get or find his room or show him around. Amid expected that someone would come to him to help him get oriented to campus.

Because Amid arrived late, the RA did not realize he had moved in and tried to stop him from entering the building during Homecoming. In his later years, Amid became an RA and talked about going out of his way to meet new people who arrived late and offering to show them around. Reflecting on this experience in his final year, Amid's words indicated that despite his first-year experience he had learned about the role of the RA and understood it as someone who is responsible for knowing every person in their community and helping new students get oriented and feel welcomed. It seemed Amid learned and tried his best to fulfil the sacred story that RAs hold a great deal of responsibility for supporting first year (and other) students in residence.

As described in Chapter 3, three of the participants were RAs after their first year. Marley was inspired by her SRA in first year to be an RA for three years. Marley described how her SRA told the new students in Tully about how things were in their residence. For example, if they wanted to party, they had to go somewhere else, and Tully would remain quiet and clean. The SRA and team of RAs relayed the cultural norms and expectations that were already established, something Marley believed to be part of the RA role. Alex was an RA in a building that was reopened with a brand-new format. Like Marley, Alex believed that the RAs set the tone for the residence, supporting the sacred story that residence culture and development of a healthy social environment is the sole responsibility of the RAs. Alex hinted at the lack of support from the Residence Life Coordinators (RLCs; professional staff) at first, but carefully positioned it as an opportunity for the student leaders to take ownership: "We were under the impression that the RLCs would be helping too, but they didn't. They just kind of set the stage for us to do it in training and it's been all us." In the cases of both Marley and Alex, I wondered about what secret stories the RA team held, how they operated in the privacy of their own communities. At my

institution, we had a residence with problematic behaviour, substance abuse, and vandalism for years. In the training for the RAs, we focused on ways the RAs could influence the culture, making it their responsibility essentially. The feedback from them was that they felt unsupported and helpless against the culture they believed was inevitable. Looking back on it now, the RAs were the victims of an unfair expectation that they alone could disrupt decades of unhealthy cultural norms. In her discussion of being an RA in the residence that was being reopened with a new format, Alex seemed optimistic that they were successful in establishing a new, healthier culture in that building. Perhaps with the structural changes and the strong student leadership team, it was enough to bend the culture, in Alex's words. It was the RAs who set the tone, but there were also systemic changes by the administration in the assignment practices, that changed the standard of the kind of student who was permitted to live there. There was also a period when the residence was closed, which interrupted the connection between residents who knew the experience one way and the new students who would have learned it from them. Did the culture of that residence change in meaningful ways? Only time will tell.

Khalid recalled two RAs in his building during first year who helped him a lot. He was struggling with the climate change and the shorter daylight hours. The meal schedule was different than he was used to, and he was having trouble getting a good sleep. He shared a story about a time he went to one of his favourite RAs to get their advice: "I said to her 'it gets dark too quick here, so people eat dinner at 4:30 p.m. What is this? I normally have dinner by 8 p.m.'"

Her practical advice about adding physical activity into his routine was appreciated by Khalid. On another occasion a different RA helped him with an academic paper. He also fondly recalled how RAs would be out during exams motivating residents with little notes on the doors and handing out candies and chocolate. At the end of the year, one RA gave Khalid her tote bag

because he did not have enough space in his luggage. The RA said he could keep the tote, which was a gesture that meant a lot to Khalid, “It was nice to see a graduating RA, like, give me something of hers, personal, you know, I think it’s a pretty big deal.” Khalid shared that he did not engage much in the residence community events, but he appreciated the RAs for how they lead the community and supported each person to be successful.

I noticed that there was a commonality in the way the participants spoke of their supports, both as new students and as RAs; all of them commented on the role of the RAs in supporting and welcoming new students. None of the participants, except Amid, talked about a connection with professional staff such as a RLC, student conduct administrator, or an advisor of some kind who helped them get oriented as a new student. Amid mentioned the international advisor who he met on his second day when he was looking for anything that says “international.” Marley was an RA and then SRA for three years and never mentioned an RLC or professional advisor. She talked about meeting other peers and getting to know fellow RAs she would not otherwise have met. Alex mentioned the RLCs only to share their opinion that the RA team did not get the support they thought they would have from the RLCs when reopening the reformatted building. Khalid’s story of his difficult first year, introduced in the last chapter, did not include an RLC or any kind of professional advisor or counselor, despite his recognition that, in his first year, he could have used professional support. One possible reason for this lack of any meaningful professional staff connections in the participant’s stories is that the RAs are perceived by students to have an elevated status due to the power and responsibility they are afforded. Sandra, in her student government role, had made the comment about her RA being “like a free therapist,” but then explained that she believes that thinking is problematic:

That is one of the downsides of the residence system, I think, putting so much responsibility on a young person. Even though I've never been in it [the role of RA], I have talked to enough RAs that I felt that's too much on someone who's a young adult navigating their own life, who has no real experience with helping students navigate their own lives.

Sandra spoke of what some of us in the field are starting to wonder about – the sacred story of RAs and the secret and cover stories students and administration use to live with the structure rather than challenge it.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed my analysis of the field texts using the narrative concepts of secret, sacred and cover stories to shine a light on otherwise hidden insights drawn from participants' reflections and retold stories of their first-year experiences. Narratives were shared with me by participants which highlighted sacred, secret and cover stories about residence life and the first year in university. The first narrative discussed was about the female and non-binary residence that Marley lived in her first year. The sacred story of women supporting women is deeply rooted, but gendered residences in universities have become nearly non-existent as the common understanding of gender becomes more fluid. Marley (and her housemates) have had to adapt to reconcile the values of uplifting women and including others subject to oppression, such as those who are gender non-binary. The stories related to this narrative illustrated persistent generalized perceptions about the way male identifying emerging adults behave and live.

The second narrative discussed was the sacred story of residence being a place where students become instant friends, beginning with orientation activities designed to create connections and build community in residence. Sandra and Marley shared stories that supported

the instant friends narrative, while Khalid and Amid's introductions to university life were disrupted because they did not learn to adapt to the sacred story. The narrative of residence as a place to make instant friends is important to university administration to support the claim that students in their first year who live in residence are successful more often than those who live off campus. But it can be problematic for students who do not align themselves with the sacred story by adapting to fit in and make friends. Amid arrived late and missed key events. Khalid did not find the connection he was looking for in his residence and left to hang out in other residences where he had new friends who were interested in the "fun city" first year experience that Khalid sought.

Khalid's notion of "fun city" represented the university party scene that is a common narrative about first-year students who just want to party all the time. This was a narrative that all the participants maintained and normalized through their stories, whether they identified as "a party person" like Khalid did, or "boring" as Marley did. There was a consistent understanding that the participants and I had about the party lifestyle, that it is just part of the university experience. However, of the five participants, Khalid was the only one who spoke about engaging in the party lifestyle. Others acknowledged it but chose an alternative or counter narrative such as Amid, who aligned himself with a group of international students who were focused on academic success.

The international student experience was a counter narrative to the party lifestyle. Amid was direct in his telling of this narrative, that international students are more academically focused because studying abroad is part of a larger plan to immigrate to Canada. That was his plan and brought to light the context within which he viewed his studies. Other participants also understood this view that international students were exempt from the party life social norms

because they were more academically focused. The comparisons Amid made between Canadian students and international students, along with the stories of his residence which was mostly made up of Canadians, highlighted his view of how prominent the party lifestyle was to Canadian students.

Finally, the role of the RA was a narrative that was featured in the field texts from each participant. The sacred story that RAs are the front-line support and crisis response because the peer model is best is becoming more problematic as more complex student needs arise on campuses. Three participants were inspired by an RA who was exceptional and had a positive impact on them. In Amid's case, he learned about the role of the RA later and decided that he would be an RA to make sure new students who did not arrive through the university scheduled orientation were welcomed and included. Sandra's comment to her RA that she was "like a free therapist" summed up the expectations students often have of their RA, in my professional view. The participants supported the story that RAs are responsible for setting the culture of the community. The work of response, mentorship, programming, counselling, and to use Sandra's word, therapy, for a community of peers is understood to be appropriate to the role of a young person who is an RA during their own undergraduate studies. In secret, professionals in the field are starting to question the model, recognizing that it may not be adequate in a system that demands more professional specialized supports to meet the needs of new students, compared to decades past. But these conversations would not be received well in open spaces, because the financial realities of many universities cannot support the resourcing needed to alleviate the high-risk responsibilities of the student leaders.

The findings about how participants made sense of their residence culture and how it was transmitted to a new group of residents each year could have implications for the work of student

affairs educators in residence, both in the design of the residence program and the approach to one-on-one coaching with students and RAs. The discussions in this chapter introduced some important implications for my two secondary research questions: 1) In what ways do students perceive Residence Life staff and programming as facilitating or contributing to their narrative identity development. and 2) what are the implications of this research for reshaping Residence Life programs using a narrative identity development approach? These implications will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6: Claiming Identity Through Contextual Narratives

In this chapter, I consider the participants' narratives and the complex web of influences (Spector-Mersel, 2011) within which identities are claimed. The themes in this chapter arose from deeper conversations as the participants and I got to know each other through the interview and Jamboard. As such, the limited texts from Alex's residence tour were not part of this chapter. Participants selected, emphasized, omitted, and downplayed certain stories that contributed to their self-narrative, both as a construction and as an expression of their sense of identity. Using the mechanisms of selection interpretive model, put forth by Spector-Mersel (2011), I will discuss the endpoint – the point of the stories and possible identities being claimed – and the contextual factors within which identity is constructed and expressed. Emerging adults begin to find their *bildung* as they navigate the transition between youth and adulthood, and encounter experiences that challenge what they have been taught and reveal new ways of understanding the world around them (Arnett, 2000; Mollenhauer, 2013). As they make sense of these new experiences and reconsider the values and ways of being they have known so far in life, they experience significant changes as they grow, mature, and learn about themselves and the world. As the participants shared their stories with me, they often commented on the growth they experienced during their undergraduate years, as they were met with struggles that challenged their morals and values.

The late 18th century German philosophical concept of *bildung*, part of my theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, does not have a clear and consistently agreed on definition, particularly across cultural and philosophical viewpoints. It is often understood as both the goal and the process of becoming a good and moral person (Wahlström, 2010). In the German idealism tradition, this transformational process was thought to be an internal journey of

becoming aware of oneself and consciously striving towards morality and self-understanding (Wahlström, 2010). As cited in Wahlström (2010), Biesta (2002) argued for a postmodern view of *bildung*, that moves away from the inner journey of striving for and discovering one's identity to a process of coming to know oneself only through interactions with others and a "readiness to meet with that which is unknown or different" (Wahlström, 2010, p. 295). My novice view of *bildung* at this moment in time is that it is a reflexive process of questioning one's values and sense of personal and social responsibility to be the best version of oneself, and, given the postmodern views of Biesta (2002), that process takes place within the complex web of influences that constantly introduces different ways of understanding the world and oneself. It is the ever-changing contextual influences in one's life that make it a continuous process of striving to be good and moral, and reflecting on experiences to redefine and reevaluate what it is to be good and moral. This view of *bildung* provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding the stories that were shared by the participants as they relate to identity construction and expression through narratives, within a contextual web of influences.

There were three broad prominent contextual themes that were evident across the field texts: balancing independence and connection to family, the weight of peer influence, and the transformational journey. Each of these themes contained elements of the macro, micro or immediate contexts (Spector-Mersel, 2011) that, although unique to each participant, were evident as an influential element of how each expressed their sense of identity through their narratives. The endpoint each of the participants expressed was confirmed through mechanisms of selection. As a reminder of the mechanisms introduced in Chapter 3, inclusion and sharpening are mechanisms that demonstrate what was important and what the participant emphasized in the narrative. Omission and silencing are about what the participant chose not to include in the

narratives. Flattening is a mechanism of minimizing or downplaying an element of the narrative. Appropriate meaning attribution pertains to the story teller's ability to make meaning of the story to support the endpoint, where that meaning may not have been known at the time of the experience. (Spector-Mersel, 2011). Examples of these mechanisms are included in the discussions in the following sections on each of the three contextual themes.

Balancing Independence and Connection to Family

Moving from living with parents to living in university residence is a big step towards independence for emerging adults. For many, it is an opportunity to explore and experiment with other ways of being, different from what was taught at home. The physical transition of places, from being a dependent living in their parents' home to a space that is theirs (at least for eight months), marked in a tangible corporeal way, the beginning of independence from parental supervision. Some participants talked about the transition and the way their relationship with parents began to change in their first year. The communication with parents and siblings lessened as they established new peer relationships in their first year. Marley, for example, said she was prepared to be without her parents daily when she moved into residence. The campus was close enough that she could go home every weekend, but by second year she went home less and less. Marley described transition to residence as "fairly easy," compared to others she knew who struggled socially. What she missed about her parents was how they kept her on schedule, knocking on her bedroom door to get her up in the morning, for example. Being accountable for herself and managing her own routine was the biggest adjustment, Marley shared. While she was never far from home (less than an hour by car), Marley's journey to independence from her parents was about looking after herself, being accountable for her own schedule.

Similarly, Sandra talked about her independence from parents in terms of looking after her own chores. Sandra seemed to use a flattening mechanism, minimizing the significance of the move away from home, to talk about her transition to residence. When I asked about the transition from parental supervision to a little more independence, she began the story with the statement:

I worked three very different jobs during my gap year, and I think it gave me more experience...I gained a lot of my own agency during my gap year because I was working all the time. I really only saw my parents in the evening, so for me I don't think there was much of a change in terms of parental supervision. I have always been pretty independent. I don't think it affected me that much.

She continued playfully, talking about not knowing how often to wash her sheets because her parents always looked after that for her. Her statement that the transition away from parental supervision did not affect her that much minimized the significance of the move to residence and created space to emphasize the natural independence Sandra claimed. Using the mechanism of sharpening to elaborate on her independence and agency, Sandra expressed an intrinsic, natural independence that had always been part of her identity.

In the story of her short two and a half weeks at an Ontario institution, one year before coming to Nova Scotia, Sandra shared why she did not feel a connection to that institution: "I'm a rural farm girl who went to cement city... It felt like 'oh, you're just a number.'" After she got lost trying to find her residence, Sandra broke down in tears and called her mom. This narrative hints at a need to feel connected while being independent. In the last chapter I discussed Sandra's understanding of the residence community as a place where you can have many friends instantly. There is a plurality of identities (Bamberg et al., 2007) – I am independent, and I need to be

connected to a community – that is expressed in selecting these two contrasting narratives of her first brief university experience and her second one year later. The contextual influences in Sandra's 4th year of university, during which she was a student leader and very involved in the community, played a role in how she made sense of her feelings about the first university she attended. She reflected on that experience and expressed feeling a lack of community, feeling like just a number, while her second experience in residence proved to be the opposite. The inclusion of these two stories in Sandra's narrative gives some insight into how independence is understood by Sandra; independence does not mean being alone. Sandra's story characterized her sense of independence as looking after her own needs and managing her space, schedule, and social engagements. Sandra was striving to be an individual responsible for her own choices and for contributing to a community of peers. Being part of a community meant showing herself without compromising her authenticity to be accepted. Sandra was looking for the right community where she felt appreciated and free to be her unique self. I thought about what Sandra might have said about her first university experience before she arrived in Nova Scotia. Would she have characterized herself as independent back then? Her words about the RAs in both stories demonstrated that she appreciated peer support when she needed guidance or a friend to listen. The support her RAs gave her both at the Ontario university and in Nova Scotia, contributed to the contextual construction of Sandra's narrative identity as an independent person within a community of peers. She no longer needed to feel like she fit in and, with the support of her peers, learned to express herself authentically and accept that others may or may not appreciate her for it.

Amid was the younger of two children in his family. One story he shared was that he felt his parents' attention was focused more on his older brother, who was studying in the USA, than

on Amid: “Most of the focus went on my brother because he was the first one that went [to study abroad]...my brother went to the US through a lot of pressure because the focus was on him to succeed.” He also noted that his parents trusted him and were confident that he would be successful on his own. In Amid’s words, “even when I came to university, they already had trust in me. They already knew...unless there was an actual problem, I wouldn’t contact them” other than to check in occasionally. In choosing to share this story and sharpening or emphasizing his parents’ trust in him, Amid claimed independence from parents as part of his sense of identity and incorporated the validation that his parents were supportive of his independence. Amid included his parents, more often his dad specifically, in several stories. He reflected on his own experiences and expressed his attributed meaning by comparing it to what his dad told him. In one example, Amid explained that his dad walks fast and he always “had this mentality that it’s not about the journey, it’s about the destination.” When he came to Canada, Amid realized that was not how he wanted to be. Amid expanded and sharpened this departure from his dad’s way of thinking with the following rationale:

I feel like it’s a generational difference rather than a personal. I mean my dad is 55 years old and I’m 22. So, we have like 30 years difference, so I’ll never be like, “Dad, you have to change your mentality,” because that’s his...I mean, his generation went through a rough process. They went through war. When he was 22 years old, his country just finished the seventh or eighth year of war. That is much different than what I’m going through.

By sharpening the respect he had for his dad, acknowledging him as a person with his own life story, Amid expressed his independence as part of his own journey and not a separation or disengagement from his parents.

Khalid also expressed his independence from his family but included the caveat of the financial control his dad maintained. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Khalid described his relationship with his parents as transactional: “we pay, you do the work.” He stated that his dad did not trust him with money and sent it either directly to the university or funneled what Khalid needed through his older sister, who was also in Canada. Khalid minimized his sister’s part in his story. He included that she was much older than him and that “she is a whole generation above me. Talking to [her] is like talking to my mom,” flattening the role of his relationship with his sister in his narrative. To me, it seemed there were no strong positive or negative feelings about his sister. Perhaps it was indifference, but regardless of the nature of his relationship with his sister, it was not significant to the identity he was claiming in our conversations. Khalid was claiming a different kind of independence from his family than those which other participants described, one in which he did not feel supported (other than financially) or prepared. He talked of how learning to do things for himself came through observing and interacting with peers who were becoming independent. While Khalid did not explicitly criticize his parents for not preparing him better to be independent, it seemed to me that this was the implication. In contrast to other participants who learned some skills from their parents, he had to figure things out by watching his peers, who seemed better prepared for independence from Khalid’s perspective. Another view could be that other participants were more ready and self-motivated to work towards independence from parents than Khalid, who seemed to expect that his parents should have provided more preparation and support for independence than he received. He shared a story about his experience during the year they were attending classes online during the pandemic. Khalid was not good at managing his money and spent a lot moving around without a

stable housing plan during the pandemic. His dad decided to limit the money, forcing him to budget his limited funds:

during covid I had to move five times with my luggage because life was hard. My dad was like, I'm not gonna give you [more] money so the only thing I could do was live with a friend in Ottawa. That is when I understood from him [the friend]...how to do your taxes, how to shop. I went with him to Walmart and that's when I started learning [about managing money].

By flattening or omitting stories about his relationships with his parents and sister and including stories about how he learned to take care of himself, he claimed as part of his identity an independence in which he no longer needed his parents because he was figuring things out on his own, by learning from peers how to be independent. Khalid was striving to become financially self-sufficient, which he understood as an important part of independence. By sharpening the lack of trust his dad had in Khalid's financial management, Khalid's words demonstrated that he believed financial independence was the only thing left that was holding him back from complete independence from his parents.

Participants reflected on their early experiences with becoming independent from their parents when they moved into residence for the first year of university. As they reflected and told their stories, they each included, omitted, or emphasized parts of the stories, to make their point about who they are claiming to be and what role their relationship with their parents had in preparing them for independence and the role they continue to play in their lives as they move into adulthood and full independence. Each participant made a physical move from their parents' home to residence, marking a milestone in their journey to evaluating the ways they learned from their parents and deciding on who they want to be. The reflexive process, their *bildung*, involved

grappling with the evolving relationship with their parents, as they transitioned from living with them under their supervision and full-time support to living separately and learning to be autonomous.

The Weight of Peer Influence

While parents' roles in participants' lives became less pronounced in their transition to university, peers played a much larger part in the social context for the participants. Peers featured in every participant's story, which underscores the relevance of the sociality commonplace, in that the participant's experiences of observing, interacting with, and judging peers were told in stories with an endpoint about themselves. The identities being claimed were sometimes told in the context of learning something about themselves, who they are and want to be, through interactions with peers. The need for peer approval is a prominent part of psychosocial development in childhood and begins to become less prominent through the transition to adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Sandra's and Khalid's stories indicated a lessening in their need for acceptance by peers from first year to senior year. The stories that Khalid and Sandra included illustrated how each of them dealt with their experiences with peers and the meaning they made of those experiences in terms of their own sense of identity. Each of them talked about needing to be part of a community of peers in their first year of residence.

Khalid had international student friends in his quieter residence on campus, but he wanted to experience the party scene, so he went to other residences that had parties to find the community he thought he wanted. He understood the quintessential first year experience to be about partying and drinking. He tried alcohol and cannabis and immersed himself in the community of partygoers. But, by the end of his first year, Khalid had experiences that he decided did not fit with who he was or wanted to be. After witnessing someone get seriously

injured while drunk, he decided he hated alcohol. He had a bad experience with cannabis and decided never to smoke it again and cut all contact with the people with whom he had smoked. By his senior year, Khalid's perspective of these experiences was that they were meaningful to finding his own sense of identity:

First year I smoked a lot, but I stopped smoking because of a bad trip once. I don't smoke or drink...since then, you know, these friends that I had, they won't last forever...lots of my friends from first year dropped out... . It just doesn't matter about friends, you know, you push yourself and you are going to bear your own fruit. I mean the truth hurts but there's no better motivation than failure. I think it wouldn't have been possible without going through it.

He realized that the relationships with the people he connected with at the parties were not important relationships to him. Acceptance by that community was less important by the end of the first year than when he first arrived. He sharpened the significance of these examples by categorizing the stories as cautionary tales that helped him figure out that he was not willing to compromise his health and safety to be accepted by the party crowd. He did not want to be someone who drank, or used cannabis, and realize how important his postsecondary education was to him. He also did not regret the choices he made because to him they led to important learning about himself. When he stated, "the truth hurts but there's no better motivation than failure," he used the mechanism of appropriate meaning attribution to demonstrate the significance of the mistakes and failures he experienced in his first year which helped him to commit to looking after himself and focusing on his academics. Khalid recognized that he could only appreciate this meaning by looking back and reflecting on his first-year trials, which were

so significant to him that he believed he could not have been successful without having first failed.

Sandra also reflected on wanting to fit in during her first year and discovering what was important to her in a friendship. In the beginning, she recalled just “trying to fit in with the masses” and wanting everyone to like her. Her Jamboard portrayed her posts from first year as less expressive and authentic than her more recent posts, which she expanded on during the narrative interview:

Jacqueline: On your Jamboard you talk about the first pictures from first year and comment that they are not as authentic as you are now in your posts.

Sandra: Yeah, now I think like, I think as I become more comfortable...and my friends play a major factor in how I express myself...the more you become comfortable with yourself and just accepting this is me and people can like me for it or not. You are going to find those friends, the people who do accept you for who you are. Those are the friendships I value a lot more.

Sandra’s reflection and re-telling of how she became less concerned about everyone liking her and beginning to express herself more authentically is a sharpening, emphasizing the quality of authenticity as an element of her identity being claimed.

While Sandra made good friends in her second to fourth year of university, a few friends Sandra met in residence in first year became close friends and remained close throughout the next three years. “The guys,” who were introduced in previous chapters, influenced what Sandra valued in her relationships. They bonded in early September of their first year, during hurricane Dorian which caused a power outage in residence, so everyone was gathered in common areas where there was emergency lighting. She shared that they had a playful, carefree relationship that

was just fun. She described child-like activities, like chasing each other, stealing things and hiding them, or jumping out to scare each other, “like you’re five and on the playground again.” This contrasted with the independent, more mature person Sandra described in a later conversation when talking about the transition moving from home into residence; she described herself as a more mature first-year student because she had taken a gap year and has a birthday early in the calendar year, which made her among the oldest in her class growing up. I thought about Sandra’s story, described in the previous chapter, of her high school group that she decided she no longer wanted to be around. I wondered what her idea of friendship was before university; perhaps, an idealized concept based on what she perceived of others’ relationships. Sandra grew tired of the friends she had in high school. She commented that she “didn’t value those friendships enough to really communicate through those struggles in friendship.” The nature of the relationship with the guys defined for Sandra that friendship does not have to be complicated; she wanted to feel free to be herself without fear of judgement. She included in her story of this relationship that she decided she would be that kind of friend to them. The effort she described putting into maintaining the friendship was about making time to check-in with them and spending time together. Sandra used the flattening mechanism to minimize and condense the relationships with her high school friends but included it because it helped to emphasize her point that she is now a person that will make time for friends and only expects to be appreciated for who she is.

Both Sandra and Khalid spoke of the significance of their peers in their journey. Sandra discovered what she valued in friendships and applied those values to herself. The endpoint in her story, contrasting her high school relationships with residence relationships, was that she was committed to maintaining friendships she valued, in which she could be herself without fear of

judgement. Striving to be a good friend was part of her *bildung*. Khalid made the point that he appreciated what he could learn from his peers. Through diverse experiences as he experimented with new things and different ways of socializing, he compared them to his own developing and evolving definition of the kind of person he wanted to be. A feature of Khalid's *bildung* was appreciation for diverse perspectives in his new social context and being open to other ways of being in the world.

The Transformative Journey

Four of the participants spoke about preparing to graduate as the end of a journey that began with moving into residence in first year. The common endpoint was that, while reaching this goal was important, the journey itself and the experiences along the way were what they cherished most. I wondered about the expectations they had before coming into residence. Did they expect to learn about themselves and the world around them in ways that would define their sense of self? Morgan (2010) discusses the benefit of a transformational mindset, one in which the person sets out expecting to be transformed, and explores the connection between place and transformation, arguing "certain kinds of places (and certain types of activities therein) are more efficacious than others since they are better able to elicit the appropriate mindset" (p. 353). It may be that the participants began the journey with a transformational mindset which allowed them to be open to the value of the journey from the beginning. As participants reflected on the last four or five years since they first arrived and moved into residence, they made sense of the experiences as points along the journey to finishing their degree. This is a salient characteristic of the field texts, underscoring the place and temporal commonplaces of narrative inquiry. Approaching another transition in their lives as they prepared to graduate, deciding on what is next, and participating in this research where they were asked to reflect on their first year, are

circumstances in the micro-context that were common between each participant. How they reflected on and retold stories of their first year was certainly through the lens of the research aim. From this perspective, it seems clear that the experiences as the participants retold them were put together in a temporal narrative, connected by a purpose – to express who they are, to claim identity. The stories are given meaning by the storyteller, understood as contributors to their sense of identity, and offered as evidence to the meaning they ascribe. The identities being claimed were unique to each of the four participants, but the significance of the journey itself was one element each of them expressed clearly.

After a brief time at another university right after high school, Sandra decided it was not the right time or place for her to go to post-secondary. Instead, she stayed home and worked three jobs for the year. This gave her a start to semi-independence, which was a part of Sandra's identity being claimed in her stories. When we talked about the change in pathway Sandra experienced in dropping out of the first university she attended, working that year, and then starting again the following year at another university, she expressed no regrets. Like other participants, she felt the journey is what made her who she is today – she had to go through it to get here: “What advice should I give my first-year self...that was the process, so don't regret the way it turned out.” Sandra demonstrated that part of being independent was managing her own learning process and not to allow fear of failure to be a barrier to trying something new. Sandra reinforced her openness to challenging new experiences through her story of taking a student leadership role in her fourth year,

Khalid described his journey as a series of lessons learned the hard way, either by watching other people make mistakes or by making them himself. As discussed in detail in previous chapters, Khalid described his narrative as a series of cautionary tales, as he participated

fully in the first-year party life. Even in his fifth year, Khalid held to his perspective that the “first year is about going out to socialize, meet new people...humans socialize, that’s how humans work.” Khalid failed his first year, and although he would tell his first-year self to not party so much, when he imagined himself living in another residence in first year, “I think I would have flunked my year even worse.” He could not imagine a first year in which he did not participate in the party culture. He rationalized his choices by saying things like “first year is about socializing” and “humans are social animals. It would be impossible for me to stay a hermit in my room all the time,” as though the choice was between partying and being a hermit. He was sharpening the value of experiencing the party scene, good and bad, to make the point that those experiences were part of the process. When I asked him about how he had changed since his first year, he summarized his journey in positive terms:

I think it’s just growing up and maturing. I know a lot of people who don’t know how to budget, don’t know how to cook still, and depend on their parents for everything still. So, it is quite good in the way that I got to experience all this.

Even though he chose to share the challenges and difficult things he dealt with in his first year, the endpoint Khalid made was that he did not regret going through any of it.

Marley’s sentiments about her journey had a nostalgic quality to them. In a previous chapter, I shared a found poem using Marley’s words and phrases that highlighted the temporal element of Marley’s stories as she thought about approaching the end of her undergraduate years. Whether by omission or because she did not have any, Marley did not tell any stories about challenges or difficulties she experienced. In her words, “I am very grateful for the time I had...I had a positive experience and [my friends and I] had our own fun” in residence. Marley spoke a lot of her time as an RA and SRA and the transformational growth from those experiences. She

expressed that as an RA she was placed in a different environment, exposed to people she would not have otherwise met. Marley shared that these new experiences, people and residences were significant to her own growth. The new environments (different residences) and people she met as an RA “changed me and matured me. I’ve learned a lot of stuff from them...every year in residence is different in terms of who comes in and what communities are formed.” In my professional experience, student affairs educators often talk about the transformative growth and learning students can gain from being an RA when we are recruiting for the role and in their training. It may be that Marley was drawn to a transformational experience when she applied to and continued each year in the RA role. I wondered if there was something about Residence Life that “elicit[s] the appropriate mind-set” (Morgan, 2010, p. 253) – the physical space, habits and rituals unique to communal living with peers, the culture of the place – that creates the conditions for transformational growth. Now, at the end of this journey, Marley was preparing to start an education degree and moving off campus for the first time. In her final months, Marley noted that she is “savouring the moments” she has left with her friends before graduating. On her Jamboard, Marley had a collection of photos from her social media of herself and her friends at various events and gatherings. In Chapter 4, Figure 8 shows a portion of the Jamboard in which a post-it note added to the collage says: “4th year: Final year in university, trying to savour the moment and do everything I can with my friends!” Marley appreciated her journey and, in the final months was conscious of the fact that this journey was coming to an end.

Amid told stories of the challenges he faced during the first several weeks of his arrival. Like Khalid, he reflected on the challenges and assigned appropriate meaning to them by expanding on and sharpening the purpose those experiences served. For example, the lack of support he felt because of his late arrival outside of the university’s scheduled arrival and

orientation led to Amid deciding to become an International Ambassador in his third year and then an RA by his fourth year. He included stories about helping new students in the way he wished he had been helped. Despite the difficult transition Amid had, he expressed to me his appreciation for having been through the challenges: “Although I didn’t have a good experience coming into [university], that led to different stuff and to how I perceive stuff.” He also shared his thoughts about being at the end of the journey, about to transition to a career with trepidation. In Amid’s words, he thought “Oh God, I’m graduating. I’m getting out of my comfort zone” as he had begun thinking about what is next. But as he expressed these thoughts, he also stated that he wanted to remember to appreciate the journey as he lived it. He had learned from his dad that the destination is what matters – get there quickly so you can enjoy it. But Amid asserted that this was a point of departure from what he had learned at home. In contrast to his father’s approach, Amid decided to slow down and reflect on his university experience. He was almost at the destination (graduation) and looking back, Amid wanted to soak in the last part of the journey rather than worrying about what is next. He understood that “being unsure is always going to be there. Let’s just have it but have life too and enjoy it.” Like Khalid, Amid did not regret his university experiences because of how they motivated him to become a student leader and what they allowed him to discover about himself.

Each of the participants reflected on their undergraduate journey that began with moving into campus residence four or five years ago. Khalid and Amid shared how they lacked support and had a rocky start in their first year, while Marley and Sandra characterized their first year as positive and enjoyable. Each had their own unique journey and chose stories to express something about who they are because of the experiences they had along the way. As they retold their stories, they articulated the value of the journey. The sense they made of their experiences,

positive or negative, was consistently posed to me (the listener) as a necessary part of the journey to this point. Whether they came to university with a transformational mindset or discovered the transformational nature of the journey as they reflected on it, Sandra, Khalid, Marley, and Amid understood that they were transformed through the process of striving to become the best version of themselves. Sandra appreciated that trying new things meant accepting the risk that comes with the unknown. Reflecting on the journey as a student leader, Sandra connected her transformation with being vulnerable and taking initiative to try new things knowing it might not turn out as expected. She valued the process itself as transformational. Khalid understood that the mistakes he made were valuable learning experiences. An aspect of Khalid's *bildung* embraced humility to be open to understanding the learning from failure. Marley sought a transformational experience when she was an RA for three years. Seeking experiences that exposed her to diverse people, places, and social interactions illustrates an element of Marley's *bildung* – always being open to and seeking to learn from others. Amid revealed a sense of duty to help the next generation by being part of the solution to the challenges he encountered in his journey. He expressed his sense of social responsibility as a quality of his *bildung*, always striving to make the world a better place for others.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented a discussion of the field texts and participants' stories they chose to include, emphasizing and minimizing using mechanisms of selection to express an endpoint about their identity (Spector-Mersel, 2011), and a growth in their *bildung*. By including and sharpening specific narratives, each participant actively expressed an aspect of their identity that they felt they now claimed or were striving towards, as an outcome of their reflection on the experiences they had along their journey. The discussion was organized by three contextual

themes that were evident across the narratives: balancing independence and connection to family, the weight of peer influence, and the transformational journey. While participants made different endpoints through the narratives they chose to share, these themes were present for each of them, providing different perspectives on the role of parents and family, the influence peers have, and the extent to which the participant felt they experienced growth and transformation and their “readiness to meet with that which is unknown or different” (Wahlström, 2010, p. 295). The process of telling stories of their experiences and claiming identities through those stories resulted in each participant discovering more about their identity, coming to know themselves better through retelling of interactions with others (Wahlström, 2010). That is, they were actively reflecting on their experiences and what they meant or taught them about who they want to be, always set within a contextual web of influences (Spector-Mersel, 2011).

I observed participants as experiencing growth in their *bildung* through narratives they voiced. This discussion provides a helpful starting point for further discussion on the aim of the research, to understand how senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on their first-year residence experiences and how those experiences shaped their identity making, which will be a focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Learning from the Inquiry

I began this journey with a scholarly and professional interest in understanding how student affairs educators in Residence Life can actively and thoughtfully play a role in helping undergraduate emerging adults through the developmental tasks, specifically developing their sense of identity, as they navigate living away from home and encounter new people, places, and experiences. A narrative inquiry methodology aligned well with my own philosophical stance as a non-traditional educator in higher education. I believe that student development and academic learning are bound together and should be approached by academic and student affairs educators with a shared educational mission. Part of that mission should include the teaching of learning related skills (Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005) with an acknowledgement that these skills improve a student's capacity to listen to and make sense of new knowledge, appreciating the importance of lifelong learning. Regardless of age, humans come to understand about themselves and their environment through social interaction, taking in new information within constantly shifting contexts that shape and reshape how we make sense of who we are, have been, and hope to be. Our interactions are storied, applying language and meaning to knowledge and experiences through our telling and retelling, integrating new meaning each time. This co-constructive meaning making process unfolds our narrative identity, the expression of our sense of self to ourselves and to others. It is through this process I hoped to garner insights into ways student affairs educators can support healthy and positive narrative identity. In this chapter, I discuss the insights I gained and the ideas this work has provided me with, focusing on the second and third sub-questions which guided my research.

Five senior student participants embarked on the narrative inquiry research journey with me. The aim was to explore how senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their

first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I presented discussions in which I considered the field texts from different theoretical viewpoints. This multivocal approach to analysis allowed for a deeper consideration of the intersectional and contextual aspects in the participants' lives that shaped their stories. Insights from the narrative analysis of the participants' stories and our conversations brought to light some important implications that can inform the philosophy and practice in higher education.

How did Senior Students Reflect on their First Year?

The research question “how do senior undergraduate students retell and reflect on how their first-year residence experiences shaped their identity making through a narrative lens” was explored in earlier analysis chapters. From a high-level viewpoint, this inquiry demonstrated that the senior students I met with, when prompted with questions that caused them to reflect on their first year in residence and tell their stories, looked back on their whole undergraduate journey as a process through which they had arrived at the finish line. The stories they selected to share and the details they emphasized or minimized hinted at the way they understood who they were in their first year as well as at the time of the storytelling in senior year and the transformation between the two points in time. Whether the journey was easy or challenging, all the participants were positive about having gone on the journey. I believe this is because they believed they needed the undergraduate experiences to have felt purposeful in their lives, shaping their *bildung*, the person they are, graduating with a university degree, and emerging into adulthood.

Learning and Development in Higher Education

In Chapter 2 I made the statement that to align with a learning approach to student affairs work, “what is needed is a theoretical framework that incorporates the philosophical foundations

of Residence Life and informs day-to-day practices of residence staff.” In the literature discussed in that section, there was an overall agreement that there is more to higher education than the academic learning about a field of study and that educators at the post-secondary level need to adopt a more holistic paradigm of learning, similar to what is common in K-12 educational research (See Alexander et al., 2009; Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005; Sherman , 2011). The narrative inquiry process, hearing the participants’ stories and how they reflected on their first year, reinforced for me the crucial role Residence Life departments can play in the overall learning and development of emerging adults living on campus. I was reminded of the ideal characteristics of learning-oriented student affairs division put forth in the SLI nearly 30 years ago:

1. The student affairs division mission complements the institution’s mission, with the enhancement of student learning and personal development being the primary goal of student affairs programs and services.
2. Resources are allocated to encourage student learning and personal development.
3. Student affairs professionals collaborate with other institutional agents and agencies to promote student learning and personal development.
4. The division of student affairs includes staff who are experts on students, their environments, and teaching and learning processes.
5. Student affairs policies and programs are based on promising practices from the research on student learning and institution-specific assessment data (ACPA, 1996, pp. 2–4).

Higher learning is the term Keeling and Hersh (2011) use to refer to an approach to personal development in universities that involves “a different kind of learning” (p. 7). They go on to explain that higher learning is not only about learning new material related to a subject, but also

a process of making sense of new knowledge in relation to past and current experiences, knowledge, and social situations. This view of personal development echoes the suggestion that *bildung* is the central purpose of education (Friesen, 2021; Guillemin, 2024) by moving beyond the notion of acquiring a list of skills such as communication, conflict management, and critical thinking, and conceptualizes personal development as interactive, reflective, and continuous. Personal development is experiential; higher learning is an intentional approach to personal development that Keeling and Hersh (2011) argue university educators need to adopt. Opportunities for higher learning exist in the highly social context of residences on campus, as was the case for my participants.

The stories the participants shared, and more importantly how they made sense of their experiences as they retold their stories from their past, showed evidence of personal development and perhaps higher learning. Notably, four of the five participants had a student leadership role after their first year. Marley, for example, talked about her SRA's influence on her leadership style when she later joined the residence staff team, providing one answer to the second research question of the ways students perceive residence life staff and programming as facilitating or contributing to their narrative identity development. The SRA's example of effective communication shaped Marley's practices as an RA, developing her communication skills. Marley also talked about getting to know people she would not have otherwise interacted with and learning from them. Amid shared that he was motivated to become an International Student Ambassador when he reflected on his arrival experience and decided he wanted to improve the experience for new students after him.

Sandra and Khalid demonstrated personal development in their stories. Sandra made sense of her new friendships in residence through reflecting on who she was in past friendships

and learned about what she values about herself and the role friends have in her life. Khalid's retelling of his journey as going through the dirt to come out with a better understanding of himself is a beautiful example of personal development.

Returning to the characteristics of a learning-oriented student affairs divisions, the learning from my research underscores the importance of adopting these characteristics and situating narrative identity development as the central approach to the work of student affairs educators. University administrators and educators on both sides of the house (academic and non-academic) could collaborate and adopt these characteristics to support a more holistic educational mission and vision for which both faculty and student affairs educators are responsible.

Clarifying the Role of Student Leaders

The second research question specifically focused on the perceptions students have of the residence life staff and programming. As I have mentioned before in this dissertation, I have thought a lot about the role of the student leaders in residence and how much responsibility should be assigned to the RA role. In answer to the second research question, what emerged from the participants' stories, and the way they understood the RA role, is that RAs are stewards of the residence culture, setting the norms and expectations in their community. They are also responsible for welcoming new people in the community, both through planned orientation activities and being aware of and ready to welcome anyone who arrives outside the scheduled move-in time. They are expected to engage students in the community by hosting social events and to be role models for their peers, modeling safer substance use, respectful behaviour, academic focus, healthy lifestyle, and help-seeking behaviour by knowing, engaging in, and encouraging engagement with the supports and resources available. Additionally, RAs respond to

incidents and crises in their residence after hours in many institutions, although with the increasingly complex needs of students, some institutions are beginning to consider a change in the professional staffing model to shift the response to more serious incidents away from student staff (Melartin & Lopez, 2023).

Beyond the scope of this research, but important to flag for future research, is to reconsider how critical incidents, such as mental- physical- health- emergencies or violence, are responded to and consider a model that removes this kind of responsibility from the student staff role. This would focus the role of RAs in residence on community building and engagement; the perception of the RA position held by the participants in this research was that these latter two are the main activities of the RA.

Sandra and Marley described their RA as a mentor-like figure who would be available anytime they needed help. Sandra equated her RA to a therapist. Sandra's comment stood out for me, and I have thought about it often since that conversation. In my work, we have put a lot of energy into building the student leaders' boundary setting skills and ensuring that they have access to support for themselves, given the sometimes-difficult stories they hear and their involvement in supporting students through some challenging experiences. RAs are in a unique job where they live with peers who they are likely to form friendships with and must balance that with being a leader in the same community. It is a difficult balance that is not easy to understand other than in hindsight. A key implication of the insights from this research and my own professional experience is that whatever the role of the RA, it must be clearly communicated to the RA, and to the students living in residence, by the Residence Life leadership. RAs need to have clear descriptions and practical examples of what their day-to-day role is and what their relationship with residents should entail. Equally important is clear communication of the limits

of their role – for example, RAs are not therapists – and what to do when the limit is reached. This is the aspect of the role that I have found RAs struggle with the most. Providing training with pathways to the appropriate resources and practical tools for how to refer students to those resources, setting and maintaining a boundary in the relationship, would be beneficial for the student who needs those supports and for the RA. I suggest that this should be part of the core RA training before the start of term and revisited during the year to normalize boundary setting and address any gaps in knowledge or access to professional resources.

At the same time, I believe the university needs to communicate well with new students about who their resources are in residence, with an emphasis on the role of their peer leaders (specifically RAs) as community builders and connectors to resources. Professional staff must have good communication of well-developed key points for new students before they arrive and during the first weeks on campus. Student leaders should also introduce themselves and their roles to students with the same key points and a consistent message about who the RA is and what they will do to support students. Discussing these key points with the RAs during their training also reinforces their support structure in the professional staff. Finally, it creates a framework for the supervising staff and student leaders to refer to when an RA is having difficulty with boundaries.

Arrival and Welcome to University Living

The third research question asked, “what are the implications of this research are for reshaping residence life programs using a narrative identity development approach?” The implications that emerged were not limited to residence life, and were relevant to student affairs departments more broadly. Each of the participants spoke about moving into residence and the significance of the first few days and weeks to their transition. Two of them, Khalid and Amid,

talked about the impact to their first year after not engaging in the institution's planned orientation, whether by choice or because they arrived late. It is important to note that both were international students coming from a different culture and climate. The adjustment to a new place and new crowd of peers is considerable, even more so when the differences between the home and university contexts is increased, as is often the case for international students.

Students who must travel by air to get to their university of choice are limited to the flight schedules and availability of transportation options between the airport and campus. Depending on where they are coming from, they may also face additional hurdles related to their citizenship as they seek to enter Canada on a study permit. As a result, they can have little control over when they finally arrive to campus. As in Amid's case, if they miss some planned orientation activities designed to facilitate connections to peers and the institution, the student can become isolated, falling through the cracks. Amid was fortunate that he was able to eventually find where he needed to be, but it took courage to follow his brother's advice to "go find anything that says international." Too often, in my experience, students from different cultural contexts who do not feel supported do not have a successful transition and leave the university at some point before progressing to second year. There are three important implications and considerations for student affairs educators related to the arrival and welcome process for new residents such as Amid and Khalid.

Preparing for Arrival

The first consideration is to for the RLC and RAs to be aware of the travel and arrival plans of students from far away, especially international students who are coming to Canada on a study permit. Raising awareness of this issue is something I can begin in my context, using my research to support my stance. Once universities are aware of the importance of this issue, they

should develop protocols to welcome students living in residence who arrive later than the set move-in date and for after-hours arrivals, when the campus supports are limited. This level of planning will involve a collaborative effort across teams including student affairs, safety and security, and even external partnerships with organizations that assist international students in coming to Canada. EduNova, for example, is an association of educational institutions that supports international students coming to study in Nova Scotia.

Awareness and Support of Students from Diverse Cultures

Another consideration for student affairs educators is to be aware that some students face additional social barriers beyond those of students who are transitioning from places with similar cultures and climate. Students asking for help and speaking up about what they need is normal and expected in Canadian culture, but in those arriving from other cultures it may not be considered appropriate to be critical of the support that is offered even if it is not meeting their needs. Amid provided an illustration of this when he talked about his experience as an immigrant from Iran: “in Iran you are saying yes okay you are right. I will do whatever you tell me to do.” Khalid shared the challenges he faced with living in a different climate. Fewer daylight hours during Canadian winter months from what he was used to affected his mental health and disrupted his eating and sleeping schedule. Student affairs educators, and the student leaders who live and work in residence, would be better positioned to support their transition throughout the first year by knowing something about the contexts of the students living in their residences and where they are coming from to be able to ask the right questions to support their needs. This suggestion comes with a caveat: not all students arriving from outside Canada have the same needs, as the next section underlines.

Understanding Individual Needs

A third consideration coming from arrival and welcome is a caution to avoid assumptions about students' needs based on their status as international or domestic. Often orientation activities include targeted programs for international students, lumping everyone who is not from Canada together. At institutions where I have worked, international orientation includes some focus on Canadian laws and cultural norms. This is certainly important for students from other countries to feel better prepared for their new context. Alex was considered an international student but found the context to be like that which she experienced living in Maine, USA. Amid talked about international students sticking together because they are going through similar things but qualified his statement noting that students from the USA did not count because they are so similar in culture to Canadians. His point is a valid one, that what many (but not all) international students have in common is that when they arrive, they will be immersed in a different culture than they had at home. Sandra was a domestic student who experienced two very different university settings. She was not prepared for the culture shift she experienced when she first went to a large Ontario institution with an urban aesthetic which she called "cement city." Sandra experienced a different kind of cultural change coming from a rural small-town setting to a large urban university. I recall my own transition from Ontario to Nova Scotia when I moved provinces for work, and how different the lifestyle was between the two provinces. Similarly, students I have met from African Nova Scotian or Mi'kmaw communities within Nova Scotia have shared having very different lived experiences in elementary and high school from that of their settler-descendant peers in the same province. The implication of this for universities is that supporting transition to their campuses must consider a more nuanced approach for students, rather than assuming all international or domestic students have the same needs. Reflective of Mollenhauer's (2013) view of the role of educators, a nuanced approach

would require student affairs educators to be aware of how they present and re-present the campus, community and cultural ways of life, and to be mindful of the challenges students encounter as opportunities for their personal growth and *bildung*.

These three implications and considerations related to arrival and welcome for new students are relevant to Residence Life programs and how they can be designed intentionally and thoughtfully to help facilitate positive narrative identity development. Residence educators and student leaders must be aware that students have had their own lived experience on their journey before they arrive on campus, anticipating that the social context from which they are transitioning may be (and likely is) different. By applying that lens to all students, not just international students, we acknowledge and include those parts of their identity, honouring their stories that began well before we met them and demonstrating that we are interested in their individual stories. This aligns with a narrative identity development approach in that it facilitates continuity and cohesion of self over time (McAdams, 1992). Sandra spoke about holding on to part of herself when she moved into residence, underscoring the almost visceral need for continuity of self. One method to foster narrative identity development might be to create ways for students to introduce themselves before they arrive to peers and to educators. Through storytelling, students would begin to make the connections that create continuity and coherence of their sense of self within their new environment (Fivush et al., 2011). Social media is a daily presence in the lives of most adolescents and emerging adults. I have observed how new students use social media to connect with other new students in the summer months, as they prepare to move into residence in September. Granic et al. (2020) explored identity development in the digital world of social media and argued that social media is “fundamentally [a platform] for the expression of identity in narrative form” (p. 209). There is an opportunity to engage new students

and create virtual spaces that foster positive interactions and storytelling, to set up early positive connections to the community before they arrive.

Connecting with Residents Before and at Arrival

The theme of importance of knowing every resident and being prepared to welcome everyone when they arrive was evident from the participants' stories. Given that one of the most significant factors contributing to successful transition is that the student feels a sense of connection to peers and the university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it makes sense that RAs are well positioned to foster the social environment that enables those connections to flourish. Amid's experience, shared previously, with arriving late and finding another person's name on the door to his room, and later with his RA not knowing who he was or that he lived there, underscores how something as simple as having an accurate room assignment list could have prevented both of those awkward and unwelcoming encounters. Had the RA known when Amid arrived and which room he was assigned to, they could have put his name tag on the door before he arrived and met him at the door to help him find his room and get him settled. It may also have helped Amid feel more connected to his residence community, or at least his RA. The implication here is for the Residence Life team to appreciate the impact of having good communication with students about when and how they are arriving, accurate and accessible information about students moving into residence for the RAs, and a process for communicating changes to the RAs as they arise.

Another implication is to consider what kinds of information for Residence Life managers to share with RAs about their incoming students. Managers of Residence Life departments must ensure that accurate information about the students in the community is provided to the RAs. I have encountered barriers where there is concern that sharing information

with RAs may infringe on students' right to privacy. Of course, protection of privacy is a responsibility of the management team as holders of student information, but the privacy laws do not limit the sharing of information with other staff (including RAs) where, I argue, it is required to complete their work. I suggest that RAs would be most effective at building connections and welcoming students if they had at minimum the incoming students' preferred names, pronouns, where they are from, program of study, age and birthdate, dietary preferences, and any disclosed accommodation needs or allergies. RAs should continue to get to know students beyond this basic information, but with these details, they can plan community building activities that are inclusive of everyone in the community. It may also signal them to pay attention to those who might not fit in right away because of age or cultural differences, for example. These students may need extra support from the RA to facilitate connections and ensure their needs are met. During the year students will for various reasons leave residence, move to another residence or just another room in the same residence. As these changes occur, it is important that the RAs involved are well informed so that they can properly support these residence transitions and help the community adapt. If the role of the RA is to build and maintain a healthy community, having accurate information about students before they arrive can help the RA support students to form social connections and facilitate activities that promote inclusive community engagement. As discussed in Chapter 2, Patton et al. (2016) argue that institutions are responsible for meeting the diverse needs of students in residences and to "create the conditions for *all* students to thrive" (p. 238). The planned and unplanned social connections made in the first weeks of living on campus become the foundation of a narrative identity theoretical framework that I suggest is a novel approach student affairs educators could have to residence learning. How these connections factor into narrative identity development at an individual level is presented next.

Building a Community of Individuals

I have made the argument that student affairs educators working in Residence Life could employ a narrative identity development approach to working with emerging adults living on campus, which would align with the developmental tasks they are grappling with during their undergraduate years (Arnett, 2000). Considering the role of the RA in such an approach, in which they are focused on building a sense of community and connection among the residents living in the building, a question that arises is: how does community factor into a student's narrative identity? Narrative identity is co-constructed through the community interactions, which means that the relationships in the residence community, the social norms and expectations, are a significant factor in how a student undertakes their narrative identity development within the community. A regular element of the training for student leaders teaches the characteristics of a health community and tools for building a strong community. The approaches tend to center on the whole community with little guidance on how to support individuals within, especially when those individuals do not or cannot conform to the community norms. Individuals who present challenging behaviour that is disruptive or harmful to a community often become left out and socially isolated unless there is intervention by a professional staff member, such as their RLC. At most institutions, this kind of intervention is prescribed in a student code of conduct that defines the rules and the procedures for responding to violations of the rules. Amid and Khalid are examples of individuals who may not fit the community norms but also do not present challenging behaviour that requires a meeting with their RLC. These students fall through the cracks when there is no system or approach that draws attention to their unmet needs. My suggestion of an individualized approach, that purposefully seeks to understand individual needs within a community, might have helped the staff to be

aware of the challenges Amid and Khalid encountered at the time so that they could better support each of them in a timely manner. If Amid had been asked about why he stayed in his girlfriend's residence more than his own, he might have been given the opportunity to transfer to another community that he enjoyed. Khalid told me about his struggles with his mental health during his first year and expressed how his lack of awareness and knowledge of mental wellness and the supports available were detrimental to his success. He could have benefitted from early intervention and connection with a professional staff member, such as his RLC, who would be trained to recognize that he was struggling and could facilitate reflective conversations with him and refer him to appropriate supports.

At my institution, we have developed an approach that is built on restorative principles (Karp, 2015). A restorative model values the health of the community and appreciates every individual's place in the community. It is both a proactive approach to community and individual growth and development and a responsive approach when harm is caused. Proactively, a restorative approach aims to instill the same values in the residence community, through the practice of and creation of space for intentional and meaningful interactions aimed at empowering individual students to take ownership of learning from their shared experiences. In this approach led by the example of the residence leaders, the community adopts a relational philosophy based on restorative values, emphasizing active reflection and learning from experiences and interactions within the community. An example of a proactive restorative approach is a residence floor meeting facilitated as a talking circle to develop a community agreement about sharing common areas, like the lounges. Another example would be to host community celebrations of culturally important traditions represented by individuals in the

community. Activities like these examples promote a sense of responsibility to others and an openness to learning from peers.

When there is harm caused by an individual in the community, the responsive approach always begins with seeking first to understand all perspectives and the harm caused. A student affairs educator leads a facilitated reflection on the harms caused, the choices that led to the harm, and how to move forward from the incident, emphasizing the learning and growth for all the individuals involved, not only the person who caused the harm. It encourages development of the restorative values of mutual respect, empowerment, collaboration, valuing others, integrity, honesty, openness, trust, and tolerance (Hopkins, 1999). A relational approach prioritizes relationships, both interpersonal (between individuals) and among the community, by valuing everyone in celebrating diversity of the community and including the community in addressing issues (Karp, 2015). A relational approach, as I have described it, would provide conditions for students to actively reflect on and express their sense of self through the telling and retelling of their experiences, which supports narrative identity development. Students like Amid, for example, could feel like an equal member of the community and develop the skills and confidence to advocate for their needs, rather than quietly put up with disruptive behaviour, further isolating themselves from the community.

Limitations of the Research

Narrative inquiry produces rich data about the lived experiences of individuals. Because of the time it takes, and the amount of data generated from narrative interviews, one of the limitations is that there is a small number of participants. In this study, I attempted to recruit up to 10 people and ended up with five participants. The stories were rich and provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of each participant. Future inquiries into the experiences of

students in residence in other universities would deepen our understanding of how students reflect on and retell their first-year residence experiences and how these experiences have shaped their identity making.

Another limitation is related to the diversity of participants. Of the five, three were international students, two of whom were from the Middle East. The cultural and environmental differences the international participants experienced added to the breadth of diverse experiences. It also brought to light several areas for future research related to the experiences of international students seeking permanent residency in Canada, students from primarily Muslim cultures, students who attend university far from their home, and students for whom English is not their first language. Future research to learn about the residence living experiences of Indigenous and African Nova Scotian students and how these experiences shaped their narrative identity development would be valuable, especially as universities work through the calls to action in education outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation report.

The methods I chose presented a limitation in terms of keeping participants engaged through all three parts (residence tour, Jamboard, and narrative interview). Three out of five participants completed all three parts, leaving two with partial data. The Jamboard activity was intended to learn about participants' digital identities, through their online profiles and what they chose to share about themselves. Although it did not yield what I had hoped, it did help to identify key aspects of the identities being claimed in the overall narratives. Digital identity is a significant part of emerging adults' narrative identity development; as such, this is an area that deserves further inquiry.

How can Residence Life Educators and Programs Contribute to Narrative Identity Development?

The discussions in this chapter have led me to offer several recommendations for Residence Life teams to move towards a narrative identity approach in their work with students living in residence communities on campus. The following is a summary of the recommendations I wish to put forth:

1. Residence Life teams that understand their role as educators contributing to the overall mission of the institution foster a holistic view of higher education that appreciates the developmental learning through interactions with peers and educators on campus. To this end, I recommend that universities better resource training for professional staff like the RLCs who work directly with students and student leaders in residence, specifically to develop their understanding of *bildung*, of narrative identity, and their capacity for supportive and reflective conversations.
2. Given the increasingly complex needs of students today, university administrators are under pressure to have effective after-hours supports and crisis response mechanisms. I advocate for a strong professional resourcing model that protects student leaders who have a role supporting and responding to incidents after hours. I recommend that as administrators consider the level of professional resourcing, they consider the role of RAs (or RA-like student leaders who work in residence) and ways to clearly communicate with both the RA and the students in residence, respecting the functions and the limitations of the RA role.
3. How and when students arrive to live and learn on campus cannot always be expected to follow a schedule that is convenient for the university, especially when students are

- travelling from other countries or from a distance within the country. Having accurate information about the students who are arriving, as well as a way to have contact with these students, so that they can be aware of changes in travel plans is important for Residence Life educators. I recommend that Residence Life teams collaborate and prepare together with other relevant departments on campus, including safety and security and student advisors who specialize in the needs of underrepresented students (e.g. international, Indigenous) to meet students when they arrive. I suggest that this involves ensuring a process is in place to respond quickly when students arrive outside of the planned time and when their arrival is unexpected.
4. Increased recognition that students come from social and cultural contexts that may be quite different from the campus culture, regardless of how far away home is or whether they are considered international or domestic, will benefit all students. I recommend that all student affairs educators have cultural competency training to be aware that they have their own assumptions and biases that factor into how they help students before and during transition. With this awareness, the team can develop a community approach to supporting transition that is open to and anticipates the potential needs but also seeks to understand individual student needs. In residence, the staff should be trained to ask the right questions about what a student needs rather than assuming or leaving it to the student to ask for help. For example, someone travelling by plane has not likely packed bedding for their room and might not know that they can ask to borrow some. Being offered bedding to borrow until they can purchase their own could go a long way to helping a student feel welcomed and included on the first night.

5. Related to having information about travel and arrival plans of residence students, RAs as the community builders should be provided some information about the students in their community and given support from staff on ensuring everyone in the community feels welcomed and connected in the first few days. An appropriate task for RAs is to pay close attention to and intentionally connect with each resident in their community face-to-face frequently in the first week, and to relay concerns to the professional staff as needed.
6. I encourage student affairs educators and especially the Residence Life team to adopt a narrative identity approach through a restorative and relational framework. Establishing and building a healthy community based on restorative values will lay a foundation both for supporting individual narrative identity development and for maintaining the community when issues arise and repairing harm to the community in an inclusive way. A restorative and relational model aligns with positive narrative identity development and centers student learning and development, towards the educational mission.

The recommendations I have shared came from the insights of this inquiry with five generous participants who shared their stories. Residence Life teams who want to develop their own learning-oriented framework with a narrative identity development approach may find these recommendations valuable and will likely recognize other steps relevant to their context and additional tasks that may be needed as they further develop their own approach. Underlying all these recommendations is a philosophical stance that we in student affairs are educators who contribute to the educational mission of the university and have a responsibility to support students to navigate the transition to adult life.

Concluding Thoughts

The insights from this inquiry were not only valuable to the academic aim of the research project overall, but also for me personally and professionally. I hope to continue to elevate the role of student affairs educators as part of the educational mission in higher education. I am grateful to the participants for giving their time and stories and humbled by their trust and vulnerability with me. Narrative inquiry is a deeply relational methodology. I continue to reflect on my own experiences, learning, and feelings through the project, but I know that it is a methodology in which I would like to continue to develop my competence. Meeting the students and talking with them about experiences I have familiarity with, and now have had the opportunity to explore from a different perspective, was an incredible professional and personal development experience. I hope that my first experience will encourage other novice researchers to be open to narrative inquiry to explore how people tell and retell their lived experiences and the ways our stories are intertwined.

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Appendix A – Tour and Interview Question Guide

Residence Tour Question Guide

1. What is it like to be back in your residence?
2. What was life like for you in residence?
3. Tell me about the day to day life here for you.
4. When you hung out with friends, where did you hang out? What did you do when you hung out?

Narrative Interview Guide

1. Most undergraduate students are living without parental supervision for the first time when they go into residence. What was it like for you in your first year?
2. I have noticed that students can change a lot from their first year to their final year and often reflect back on how different they were back then. How do you think you have changed since your first year?
3. You shared a story about... Why did you choose that story to share?
4. Residence Life usually puts on programs and events that aim to build a sense of community in the residences. What events, rituals and social norms defined your residence community?
5. They say time makes us wiser; we see things more clearly when we are looking back at them. If you could go back in time and have a chat with your first-year self, what would you say?
6. I think that when we reflect on our experiences and share them with others it shapes who we are and helps us understand who we strive to be. Are there experiences from your time in residence that shaped who you are today and who you want to become?

7. In Residence Life, when we are hiring for the student leadership positions, we often ask why they are interested in the role. The most common answer is that they had a student leader who helped them transition and now they want to be that person to a new student. Was there a staff member (student or professional) that made an impact on you in your first year? If so, what did that staff member do that was memorable/important for you?

Appendix B – Invitation to Participate

Title of Research: Senior Undergraduate Students' Reflections of First Year Residence Experiences

Name of Researcher(s): Jacqueline De Leebeeck, St. Francis Xavier University, Graduate Student

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in this research project. This letter describes the research and what is involved in participating. To indicate your agreement to participate, please sign and return the appended consent form to the investigator, Jacqueline De Leebeeck, by attachment to an email or contact me to meet in person.

Purpose and Description of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore how senior undergraduate students reflect on and retell stories about their experiences living in residence in their first year. Students go through many changes as they transition from their first year of university to being seniors. Living in residence, students are exposed to diverse people and worldviews as they explore their own identity. In this study, participants will revisit experiences from Residence Life in first year and how those experiences may have had an impact on who they are today.

This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for a PhD in Educational Studies at St. Francis Xavier University, in Antigonish, N.S.

What Will be Required of Participants, Including the Time Commitment

You will be asked to commit to in-person and online engagements over an estimated four to five week period. The total time commitment over the entire period will be approximately 3 hours. The data collection will begin in mid to late October 2022 and must be completed no later than December 2nd, 2022. Current COVID protocols, as outlined by Acadia and StFX health guidelines, will be followed for all in-person events.

In the first phase, you will be asked to take me on a tour of your first-year residence building. During the tour, you will be encouraged to point out your room, lounges or common areas you spent time in, and describe what life was like for you in residence.

You will then be invited to share an artifact from residence. Examples could be a jersey, poster, doortag, something from orientation, anything that holds meaning for you. Artifacts can also be intangible items, such as a popular song from that year or a house cheer. The tour is estimated to take 30 minutes.

In the two weeks following the tour, I will invite you by email to create a collage using Jamboard, a Google app, of screen shots of posts, profiles, photos, etc. from your social media that represent how you present yourself to others online. You will be asked to share your Jamboard with me directly, through the app. Building the board is estimated to take 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how much and how detailed you choose to make the collage.

The next phase is an individual narrative interview with me. The narrative interview can be done in person or on a video call over Zoom. A waiting room and password will be used to protect your confidentiality if Zoom is used. The narrative interview will explore the stories from the tour, the artifacts, and the digital introduction in more depth. It will be a semi-structured interview with guiding open-ended questions. The interview will be no more than 60 minutes.

After all the data is collected, the investigator will draft a story from the analysis that will represent the findings in the final dissertation. The draft story will be shared by email for you to give feedback and make edits as you wish. You will be offered a Zoom meeting to discuss the story and the analysis used to

create it. If preferred, you may give feedback by email. All names in the stories and in the dissertation will be pseudonyms.

Participation is Voluntary; Right to Withdraw Without Negative Consequences

You have the right to refuse to participate at any time, even after consent is signed. You may withdraw at any point in the study without negative consequence. At each phase of the study, I will remind you that participation is voluntary. You can indicate your withdrawal verbally or by email to me or my supervisor. If you choose to withdraw, any data gathered up to the point of withdrawal will be destroyed and will not be included in the study.

You have the right for the recording to be stopped at any point upon request.

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions without having to terminate involvement in the research project.

Permission of Other Bodies

Permission has been granted by the Research Ethic Boards of St. Francis Xavier University and Acadia University.

With Respect to Potential Benefits and Potential Harms

You may gain an increased understanding of your development through the meaning you attribute to experiences from your first year and how those experiences have come to shape who you are and who you strive to be. You may become more aware of the factors and experiences that have influenced what you value, how you view the world, and that others are shaped by their own experiences as well. You may have an enhanced understanding of the social contexts you move through and how those influence who you are and how you engaged differently in different contexts.

There are potential emotional or psychological harms as the inquiry may elicit stories of traumatic or harmful experiences that occurred while you were living in residence. You will not be asked specifically to share stories of traumatic events; however, you decide what stories to share with me during this study. I will have a list of resources and supports available to you as a student at Acadia, should you need support as a result of revisiting difficult events.

I am the Director, Student Life at St. Francis Xavier University. Although I have no professional affiliation with Acadia University, there is a small risk that the professional role may cause discomfort or feelings of intimidation. There is no connection between this research and your status as a student at Acadia. I will do my best to help you feel comfortable and will ensure that your participation and stories are kept confidential.

The study requires no more than 3 hours of your time spread over four to five weeks, which may be disruptive to your normal routine. The timing of each engagement is somewhat flexible and will be arranged at a mutually agreed upon time.

Your participation or non-participation will be kept in confidence. There are limits to confidentiality during the residence tour phase of the data collect as others who are aware of the study may recognize me as the researcher and/or you during the tour. The risk of recognition of me as the researcher is quite low given that I am not known at Acadia. The transcriber of the recordings will be bound by the principle of confidentiality. No identifying information will be included in any document resulting from this study. The collage created on Jamboard will be kept confidential. The board will only be visible to you and me. You can stop sharing the Jamboard at any time and it will no longer be visible to me. Pseudonyms will be used for participants, residences, and locations in all writing arising from this study.

Miscellaneous

The residence tour and narrative interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recording and transcript will be stored on an external hard drive that will be stored in a locked drawer only

accessible by the researcher. The recordings and transcripts will be kept for two years following completion of the research, after which time they will be destroyed.

Appendix C - Consent Form

I have received a copy of the Invitation to Participate for the research project titled **Senior Undergraduate Students' Reflections of First Year Residence Experiences**, have had an opportunity to read the information provided or it has been explained to me, and have had all questions that I may have had answered.

I agree to participate in this research project, understanding that I am doing so voluntarily, that confidentiality will be maintained, and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point using the means outlined in the Invitation to Participate.

I would like a copy of the final dissertation and other publications that come from this study. Please send an

electronic copy to me at this email address: _____

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____