[Handwritten margin notes:]

discover who + I am

Choice of schools

leave behind old definitions of self — from others

career, work

Anticipating Change

— Affirming who I really am

— Creating the Person I want to be

— Discovering the Person I was meant to be

— parents' visits to campus

— imagining what life at home is like

Leaving Home for College:
Expectations for Selective Reconstruction of Self

David A. Karp
Lynda Lytle Holmstrom
Paul S. Gray
Boston College

This paper describes how 23 primarily upper-middle-class high school seniors anticipated identity changes as they prepared to leave home for college. The transition from high school to college is a period of "liminality" during which students are structurally in between old and new statuses. We discuss how students anticipated change, planned to affirm certain of their identities, imagined creating new identities, and contemplated discovering unanticipated identities. Such interpretive effort must be understood in the context of the ambivalence they felt about leaving home and achieving independence. The data also provoke discussion of how social class membership might be implicated in people's ability to control identity change as they move through the life course.

In their important and much discussed critique of American culture, *Habits of the Heart* (1984), Robert Bellah and his colleagues remark that American parents are of two minds about the prospect of their children leaving home. The thought that their children will leave is difficult, but perhaps more troublesome is the thought that they might not. In contrast to many cultures, American parents place great emphasis on their children establishing independence at a relatively early age. Still, as Bellah's wry comment suggests, they are deeply ambivalent about their children leaving home. The data presented in this paper, part of a larger project on family dynamics during the year that a child applies for admission to college, show that such ambivalence is shared by the children. Our goal here is to document some of the social psychological complexities of achieving independence in America by analyzing the perspectives of 23 primarily upper-middle-class high school seniors as they moved through the college application process and contemplated leaving home.[1]

The students with whom we spoke were in the process of negotiating a delicate balance of independence and dependence, autonomy and reliance on others, distance and closeness, change and stability. Our respondents would see it as a personal failure not to gain independence at college, yet they expressed strong needs to maintain family connections, both for themselves and, as they saw it, for their parents. This paper captures the complex phenomenology of an important identity transition by detailing how students define the meaning of leaving home and make some of the concrete choices associated with accomplishing the transition toward greater independence. Their perceptions and choices illustrate how anxiety about leaving home requires charting a course that both maximizes independence while creating a social safety net in the event that freshly constructed identities prove inadequate for the new tasks in life.

As with much of social life, and consequently with much compelling sociological analysis, it is contradiction, irony, and paradox that often captures the complexity of things. In his compelling analysis of an Appalachian coal mining community following a tragic disaster, Kai Erikson (1976) shows that cultural beliefs are rarely unidimensional and wholly consistent. His work examines the responses of the mining community to the disaster in the context of tensions (what Erikson terms "axes of variation") in the miners' cultural orientations. He shows, for example, that while their lives are characterized by a strong ethos of individualism, they are in many ways deeply dependent upon the larger community. They are independent and dependent *at the same time*.

In the balance of this paper, we explore the terms of the same dependence/independence relationship among the 23 students with whom we spoke about their impending move away from home. We describe, in turn, how students anticipate change, plan to affirm certain of their identities, imagine creating new identities, and contemplate discovering unanticipated identities. Although organizational clarity demands such a sequential treatment, we do not view these as serial phases in some linear developmental process. The students' accounts suggest a more dialectical process that involves ongoing interpretations about identity stability and change. Our data show that, like Erikson's miners, the students with whom we spoke are also ambivalent about the desirability of independence and their readiness for it.

One notable exception to the paucity of sociological literature concerning the process of transition to college is Silver's (1996) discussion of the importance of the material objects that college students have in their dormitory rooms. He demonstrates that, as part of the role transition to college, students make strategic choices about the objects they leave at home and those they bring with them. He argues that certain objects symbolically "anchor" childhood or early adolescent identities while others serve as "markers," as "transitional objects," to newly forming identities during college. Moreover, he notes (p. 7) that "regardless of how close incoming students felt toward their parents, they carefully considered how much of their biographies they wanted to leave behind in the settings where they had lived most of their lives....They did not want to feel as if they were permanently leaving home." Our materials are centered more fully than Silver's on the character of the ambivalence associated with leaving home and assuming new identities, but his findings accord well with the themes of this paper. Our data also complement Silver's by looking at how high school students *anticipate* leaving home.

The matter of anticipation is central to our discussion. Although symbolic interactionists correctly place strong emphasis on the ways in which identities are forged contextually and through actual processes of interaction during which selves are named (Stone 1962; Turner 1968; Zurcher 1977), moments of significant transition in people's lives also call forth efforts at "cognitive engineering" (Nippert-Eng 1996) during which they devote considerable mental attention to how they might retain or discard current identities, as well as imagine future identities that they hope to assume. Cognitive engineering is an appropriate term because the identity work largely involves internal self-dialogue as persons try to build conceptual identity bridges that comfortably link current social worlds with ones they expect shortly to be entering.

The transition from high school to college well illustrates Van Gennep's (1960) notion of "liminality." During a rite of passage, as persons move from one social status to another, there is typically a period of time during which they are structurally in-between old and new statuses. Although high school students may already have begun the work of shedding certain identities (a pre-liminal stage of separation), the students with whom we spoke were squarely in a transitional period (the liminal stage) that precedes the full embrace of new social positions and, thus, new identities. Once in college, they will actually incorporate new identities into their selves (the postliminal stage). Therefore, the liminal stage of transition involves a kind of mental anticipatory socialization as students assess non-negotiable identities and desired new identities. They also imagine the kinds of identities they will discover during their four years in college.

In contrast to the analysis of moments during which identities radically and dramatically shift (Strauss 1959; Travisano 1981), our study caught high school students at a juncture in their lives when they were on the cusp of a major status change. The transition from high school to college provides the upper-middle-class students we interviewed ample time to evaluate carefully their hierarchy of identities (Stryker 1981), to assess which of their current identities most reflected their subjectively felt "true" selves (Goffman 1959), and to consider which disliked identities have been imposed on them (Becker 1963) and might be discarded once in college.

In general, the period covering application to college, the eventual choice of a college to attend, and then preparation for the actual move from home requires attention to ways in which the multiple identities constituting one's self might be reconfigured smoothly and with continuity. The liminal period between high school and college provides a time for persons in late adolescence to consider carefully just who they are and who they wish to become. As Hewitt (1996, p. 123) notes, "the self is never merely an object in the particular situation, but also an object linked to past and future." Such a view of the present self as a product of interpretive efforts to link past and future is thoroughly consistent with G. H. Mead's analysis of temporality (Flaherty 1987; Katovich and Couch 1992; Mead 1929; Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983).

A Meadian view of temporality understands the present only as an abstraction whose sense is continually constructed from both memory and anticipation. In this regard, Katovich and Couch (1992, p. 44) note that "one task confronting students of social life is specifying how the interface of social pasts in relation to joint acts and anticipations of joint acts

in the future is acco
developmental mom
present, and future, i
pretive work required

The data that form the
research project invo
1992-93 academic ye
to three hour) in-dep
ducted prior to the cl
seven were with stude
the college admission
being arranged, colle
interview was done w
allowed us not only t
with each other. Most

From the following
sational interview wa
period when most hig
which they have appli
least one of the paren
about it.

Although the data
study has a data base
conducted over a 14 m
guidance counselors a
inclusion, a family ha
home. We obtained a
and ethnic diversity. C
(four Asian, two Afric
middle-class (the rang

We emphasize that
among upper-middle-c
residential college. The
tunities to do so, are li
grounds and for young
sample.

It would be especial
working-class youth w
able to study poor and
with the tremendous po

in the future is accomplished." Precisely because the period of transition to college is a developmental moment during which our respondents quite consciously try to link past, present, and future, it is an empirically useful case for looking at the character of the interpretive work required to weave past and future into the present.[4]

SAMPLE AND METHOD

The data that form the basis of this paper are taken from a year-long, multi-stage qualitative research project involving college-bound high school seniors and their parents. During the 1992-93 academic year, the three authors conducted a series of lengthy (one and one-half to three hour) in-depth interviews with the parents. Twelve pilot interviews were conducted prior to the choice of our main sample of 30 families. (Of these pilot interviews, seven were with students.) Our involvement with these families followed the calendar for the college admissions process. From September through November, as campus visits were being arranged, college choices narrowed down, and application forms completed, a joint interview was done with the parents. Interviewing the mother and father at the same time allowed us not only to record their individual attitudes, but also to witness their dialogue with each other. Most of these interviews were conducted in the homes of our respondents.

From the following February through April, a comprehensive (one to two hour) conversational interview was conducted with 23 of the college bound children, during the time period when most high school seniors are waiting to hear the decisions of the schools to which they have applied. Finally, in May, a shorter follow-up interview was done with at least one of the parents to learn the outcome of the application process and their feelings about it.

Although the data presented here are taken from the children's interviews, the entire study has a data base of over 90 semi-structured interviews (including pilot interviews) conducted over a 14 month time span. Some of the families were referred by high school guidance counselors and the remainder obtained via snowball sampling. To be eligible for inclusion, a family had to have both parents or a parent plus a step-parent living in the home. We obtained a mix of public and private school children, variation by family size, and ethnic diversity. Of the 30 core families, 23 percent were minorities or part minorities (four Asian, two African-American, and one Hispanic). Most of the families are upper-middle-class (the range is from lower-middle to upper class).

We emphasize that our focus is on the shared aspects of a leaving-home consciousness among upper-middle-class youngsters—both white and minority—going on to attend a residential college. The meanings attached to leaving home for college, not only the opportunities to do so, are likely very different for young people coming from other class backgrounds and for young people whose social statuses differ in some other way from our sample.

It would be especially interesting to know the meanings of leaving home for poor and working-class youth who are college bound (Levine and Nidiffer 1996). It would be valuable to study poor and working-class students who leave home to go to elite institutions, with the tremendous possibilities for major social mobility that implies (Katchadourian and

Boli 1994). As well, researchers ought to study those attending community colleges. In one of the first studies of the culture of a "working-class" community college, Howard London (1978) showed that the students' primary ambivalence centered on whether they might be betraying working-class values by attending an institution designed to foster social mobility. The issue of betraying class-related identities and values is also a significant theme in a number of autobiographical accounts of working-class people who have attended both four-year and community colleges (Ryan and Sackrey 1984; Tokarczyk and Fay 1993). This literature also speaks to the continuing discomfort of those, like Stonequist's ([1937]1961) "marginal man," who must negotiate their commitments to two fundamentally different social worlds (see also Karp 1986).

   Still another group for further study would be college bound working-class minority students. One important question would be how class and race/ethnicity intertwine at this level. Available accounts suggest the enormous array of responses persons might make to confrontation with new world views and behavior patterns, ranging from resistance to full assimilation (See Berry 1995; hooks 1993; Rodriguez 1982). Of course, not all college students leave home. It would be equally fascinating to learn the responses of those students who do *not* leave home while attending college and who thereby are expected to attain a separate sense of self, but without a geographic separation from family while they do it.

   Consistent with the logic of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), this study did not begin with any explicit hypotheses to be tested. Instead, we began with broad sensitizing questions about the meaning of going to college and leaving home for both children and their parents. A future paper will detail how parents think about their children's impending move from home. Here, the goal is to identify underlying patterns or commonalities in the way students spoke about leaving home and gaining personal independence. As each transcribed interview was scrutinized for themes, it quickly became apparent how central questions of identity change are in the consciousnesses of students anticipating the transition to college. The more specific themes of affirming current identities, shedding unwanted identities, and discovering new identities, along with the ambivalence associated with achieving independence, constitute a parsimonious framework for analyzing a large volume of the collected data.

IDENTITY AFFIRMATION, IDENTITY
RECONSTRUCTION, AND IDENTITY DISCOVERY

While the students in this study anticipated college as a time during which they would maintain, refine, build upon, and elaborate certain of their identities, they also anticipated negotiating some fundamental identity changes. The students saw college as the time for discovering who they *really* were. They anticipated finding wholly new and permanent life identities during the college years. In addition, they believed that going to college provides a unique opportunity to consciously establish some new identities. Repeatedly, students described the importance of going away to college in terms of an opportunity to discard disliked identities while making a variety of "fresh starts." Their words suggest that college-bound students look forward to re-creating themselves in a context far removed (often

geographically, but
The immediately fo
seniors (1) anticipat
identities they wish
during college.

   Studies of aging a
the life course (see
1992). This work oft
ing of aggregate tren
nesses of the indiv
transitions can be rel
patients, for example
How many middle-a
sion between genera
sions of menopause
life stage that is pre
experience beyond a

   In other instances,
their life—that a char
and how they will de
children, and making
self-consciously und
dents with whom we
measure of consensu
home is the similarity
the transition to colle
over," to "become an
moreover, explicitly
fully prepared for a n

          The best thing ab
          Like I want to se

          I'm ready [to lea
          time and I think I
          I'm ready for mo
          really don't need
          mess up. You wa
          American female

   While all the studen
ward to it, their certa

geographically, but always symbolically) from their family, high school, and community. The immediately following sections attend, in turn, to how upper-middle-class high school seniors (1) anticipate change, (2) strategize about solidifying certain identities, (3) evaluate identities they wish to escape, and (4) imagine the kinds of identities they might discover during college.

Anticipating Change

Studies of aging are often directed at documenting fundamental and invariant "stages" in the life course (see, for example, Erikson 1968; Levinson 1978; Rubin 1979; Sheehy 1992). This work often describes moments of transition which reflect the researchers' reading of aggregate trends in a body of data, but which may not be explicitly in the consciousnesses of the individuals studied. It is possible, in other words, that important life transitions can be relatively opaque to the persons moving through them. How many dying patients, for example, know that they are in one or another of Kübler-Ross's (1969) stages? How many middle-aged persons are explicitly aware that they are grappling with the tension between generativity and stagnation (Erikson 1963)? As a last example, recent discussions of menopause (Sheehy 1992) have been directed at "discovering" the elements of a life stage that is presumably little understood despite its being a part of every woman's experience beyond age fifty or so.

In other instances, however, persons are acutely aware that they stand at a crossroads in their life—that a change is imminent which will definitively alter the shape of their futures and how they will define themselves. Along with such turning points as marriage, having children, and making an occupational commitment, it is plain that leaving for college is self-consciously understood as a dramatic moment of personal transformation. The students with whom we spoke all saw leaving home as a critical juncture in their lives. One measure of consensus in the way our 23 respondents interpreted the meaning of leaving home is the similarity of their words. Students used nearly identical phrases in describing the transition to college as the time to "move on," to "discover who I really am," to "start over," to "become an adult," to "become independent," to "begin a new life." The students, moreover, explicitly saw going to college as the "next stage" of their lives. That they were fully prepared for a major life change is evident in comments of the following sort:

> The best thing about leaving, I think, will be just the change....I want to see a change. Like I want to see a new life for me. (White male attending a public school)

> ***

> I'm ready [to leave home]. I've been ready for a year. I want to go [laughs]. I think it's time and I think I'd probably go stir crazy if I had to live here another year, just because I'm ready for more independence than I'm getting here....You get to a point where you really don't need people following your every move and making sure that you don't mess up. You want to make your own decisions and I think it's time for that. (African-American female attending a public school)

While all the students interviewed recognized the need for change and were looking forward to it, their certainty about the appropriateness of moving on did not prevent them

from feeling anxiety and ambivalence about the transition to college. Theirs is an anticipation composed of optimism, excitement, anxiety, and sometimes fear.

> [I'm] starting the rest of my life. I mean, deciding what I'm going to do and figuring out my future. I mean, that's one thing I'm looking forward to, but it's also one thing I'm not looking forward to. I have mixed feelings about that. It's exciting to figure out your future. In another sense it's scary to have all of the responsibility. (White male attending a public school)

<div align="center">***</div>

> Once I go to college there's a big shift....I'm supposed to be older and more mature. I don't know [laughs]. I think it's just in my mind it's a big shift, because going to college you're going to live away from home....And I always thought about it as being real scary....In my mind it's always been a huge shift. (White male attending a public high school)

These comments suggest that the prospect of leaving home generates an anticipatory socialization process characterized by multiple and sometimes contradictory feelings and emotions. Students long for independence, anticipate the excitement that accompanies all fresh starts, but worry about their ability to fully meet the challenge. The range of motives and concerns attached to the process of leaving home is nicely captured in the words of a young man who revels in the excitement of the unknown while feeling a palpable edge of anxiety:

> There's a kind of excitement about moving into the unknown. I've only been to camp twice.[5] I loved just being in a situation where I don't know anybody, to completely make new friends, to completely redefine myself as I want to be....I went to camp the summer of sophomore year and I defined my own life for myself. It was so completely different. I was completely unhappy my sophomore year. It was so completely different than my life at school. And I completely changed my life entirely. I'm now a completely different person than I was my sophomore year....I think it's time for a change. I think I talk a good game about independence and now it's time to see if I can actually do it. (White male attending a public high school)

All of the students who have thus far spoken conveyed their readiness for change. However, it would be short-sighted to view the transition to college as involving only logistical changes, such as how clean they can keep their rooms. Such concrete changes in their life circumstances constitute the frame for more powerful and permanent transformations of identity. As the preceding statement suggests, students are anticipating a change literally in who they are. They both welcome the change and are ambivalent about it. The ambivalence associated with identity change is particularly reflected in mixed feelings about leaving old friends and developing new ones. The ability to make friends is an important task in growing up. As Rubin states, "friends help us in the lifelong process of self-development, often becoming something akin to what D.W. Winnicott has called 'transitional objects'—people who join us in the journey toward maturity, who facilitate our separation from the family and encourage our developing individuality" (1985, p. 34).

Students are aware that going to college means changes in their friendship patterns, and, surely, part of the excitement of college relates to the anticipation of making new friends. For most students, however, the idea of making new friends is also filled with uncertainty.

They are excited about new friends but worry about leaving their old friends. They know they need to make a social life for themselves in the new campus environment but worry that perhaps they will not. Like so many areas of their lives at this stage, there is a tension between desiring both change and stability. While they may worry about leaving their old friends, ultimately, they know they must move on.

> We're all kind of concerned of what it will do to our friendships and relationships, but still, I mean, everybody's excited about it....Everybody I know is, you know, moving on. (Bi-racial male attending a public school)

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

> There's a point in your life when [your friends] are so important to you that meeting new people [is not so important]. You know, you are sort of tired of them but that's more important to you than meeting new people....But you realize...that the need to meet new people is getting greater and greater. (White female attending a public school)

Most students already have changed schools in their educational career, even if only going from elementary to middle to high school, and thus have some experience with shifting relationships. Now, however, they face a greater challenge. As largely upper-middle-class students, they are headed toward residential colleges. The large majority will arrive on campus knowing no one or, at most, only a handful of people. As they are about to embark on this journey, they are perfectly aware that they will be plunged into a campus "world of strangers" (Lofland 1973). They anticipate that the first few weeks will be socially difficult and imagine the discomfort they will feel. One expressed her concern in the following manner:

> It scares me. I mean, it's been a long time since I've had to just walk into a new place full of strangers and walk up to someone and say, "Hi, I'm so and so. Do you want to be my friend?" It's been a long time since I've had to use that kind of skill. I don't know if I still remember how to do that. (White female attending a public high school)

These seniors want new friends, but not too new. In other words, they envision meeting new people, but not people that are *too* different. They are looking for "kids like me." Above all, they want to feel "comfortable." They try to imagine what it would be like to be at a particular college as they look at books or visit a campus. One student said, "They sent me their Freshman book, and I looked at the people and I said, 'You know, I really don't know if I would fit in here.'"

Affirming Who I Really Am

The one concrete and critical choice that college-bound students must make is which school, in fact, to attend. This decision is often an agonizing one for both students and their parents and involves very high levels of "emotion work" (Hochschild 1983). The significance of making the college choice and the anxiety that it occasions go well beyond questions of money, course curricula, or the physical amenities of the institutions themselves. What makes the decision so difficult is that the students know they are choosing the context in which their new identities will be established. They may have yet to take a sociology course, but they viscerally understand the idea that the self is a situated object, rooted in

social and institutional ties. The fateful issue in the minds of the students is whether people with their identity characteristics and aspirations will be able to flourish. Consequently, it is not surprising that the most consistent and universal pattern in our data is the effort expended by students to find a school where "a person like me" will feel comfortable.

During our interviews, we encouraged parents and children to talk about the college tours which often became, of necessity, the family's vacation. Parents told of being at their wits end when their children flatly rejected a college without much investigation. In one case, for example, a family finally reached a campus after a six-hour drive. The son stepped out of the car, spotted a student wearing a bow tie, got back in the car and declared, "The students here aren't like me at all. Let's get out of here."

Every student's account of the application process centered on judgments about whether the students at various colleges were "like them." Over and over, we heard variations on this theme as in the comment of the student who said, "At Colby...there really were not a lot of people [who I could] really see being friends with....I think it was not even the way they dressed, but sort of the way they carried themselves and the look on their faces, whether or not they were really serious...." Such comments suggest that every student has a self image consisting of cultural, political, and interpersonal sensibilities and styles which they consider permanent and non-negotiable. Likewise, some students had an abiding interest in, say, music, business, or sports that dictated attending a college with the kind of ambiance that would foster these particular identity pegs.

In the most global way, prospective students were searching for a place where the students seemed friendly. On several occasions, students remarked that they were turned on or off to a school because their "tour guide" was either really nice or not friendly enough. One student was smitten with a particular school because of the unusual friendliness of the students:

> At some other colleges like you get a little nod or a hi or something, but usually they steer clear. At Boston College, one guy actually came up to me and he was like talking to me, and...I was like shocked....We were just standing there and he like came up and he was talking to me because he recognized my [high school] jacket....And we started up this whole conversation....I was just shocked at how nice all these people were....In like the little cafeteria I was just standing there and they're like, "Oh, are you lost?" I mean the people there have been the friendliest I've seen anywhere. (White female attending a private high school)

Another offered a variation on the people-like-me theme:

> I went down to Wesleyan...to visit there. I don't know, I just...couldn't see myself going there next year....Maybe it was a little bit too hippie. And everyone was wearing like sandals and I mean, not that I don't wear sandals. I mean it was just a different type of look. (White male attending a public school)

In contrast to the students-like-me theme, an interesting sub-set of seniors expressed a strong interest in diversity. These students not only wanted to meet new people, but different kinds of new people. Students who wanted diversity were excited at the prospect of meeting people different from themselves as a critical learning experience. It is important

to note that it was pr
as they contemplate(

> The more mixec
> healthy. If possi
> mate. I'd love tc

For some black st
black girl, for examp
a strong black comm
all black college (i.e

> Two of my frie
> friends is Russia
> mouth....We dic
> of people who h.
> tours all looked
> penny loafers. T
> school)

Although this studen
sitive to her minority
a historically black c

> I spent four day:
> anywhere else w
> tion that you'll r
> one was black.

Perhaps one of the
students a respite fro
society.

While the stateme
ments about the gooc
different colleges, a (
edly commented that
two fundamental wa
sense. Second, they s
of their disliked, stick

The idea that we b(
messages of social p
that theme is elabora
chiefly used to unders
man 1963; Rosenhan
ers in our lives are p
nearly impossible to

to note that it was primarily the minority students we interviewed who looked for diversity as they contemplated colleges. An Asian student put it this way:

> The more mixed the better. I think interaction with other ethnic and racial groups is very healthy. If possible, I would not mind having, you know, like an Afro-American room-mate. I'd love to. (Asian male attending a public school)

For some black students, matters of diversity may entail distinctive complexities. One black girl, for example, either wanted a school with sufficient diversity to include within it a strong black community (i.e., to have a niche with students like herself) or she wanted an all black college (i.e., no racial diversity). She described her visit to Dartmouth:

> Two of my friends and I, we call ourselves the Rainbow Tribe because one of my friends is Russian, the other one is Asian, and I'm black. So, her father drove us to Dart-mouth....We didn't see any Asian people; we didn't see any black people....The kind of people who had come to visit the school and the kind of people who were giving the tours all looked the same, except for us. They were wearing Dockers and Oxford shirts, penny loafers. They all looked the same. (African-American female attending a public school)

Although this student had attended a diverse urban high school, she was nevertheless sen-sitive to her minority status in her honors and advanced placement classes. For this reason, a historically black college held considerable appeal:

> I spent four days at Spelman....You get something at a black school that you can't get anywhere else which is a sense of community and the chance to be in a majority situa-tion that you'll never have again....I *liked* the feeling of being in a place where every-one was black.

Perhaps one of the positive functions of black colleges is to provide African-American students a respite from the rigors of participation in America's multiracial and often racist society.

While the statements immediately above illustrate that students make careful assess-ments about the goodness of fit between certain aspects of themselves and the character of different colleges, a dominant theme in the interviews concerned change. Students repeat-edly commented that, during their college years, they expected their identities to shift in two fundamental ways. First, they anticipated discovering "who I am" in the broadest sense. Second, they saw college as providing a fresh start because they could discard some of their disliked, sticky identities, often acquired as early as grade school.

Creating the Person I Want To Be

The idea that we become what others define us to be may be one of the most important messages of social psychology (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). A more particular variant of that theme is elaborated in labeling theory (Becker 1963; Lemert 1951) which has been chiefly used to understand the formation of "deviant" identities. Numerous studies (Goff-man 1963; Rosenhan 1973; Chambliss 1983) affirm that labels applied by significant oth-ers in our lives are profoundly influential because they fashion images of self that are nearly impossible to slough off. Just as it becomes extremely difficult to reject deviant

labels once they have been successfully applied to a person, the students in this study, like all of us, are subject to definitions of themselves by family and friends which they find unflattering or wrong. The prospect of leaving home, therefore, is extremely appealing because it means escaping the social contexts in which certain disliked definitions of self prevail.

Seen in terms of Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of interaction, going to college provides a new stage and audience, together allowing for new identity performances. Goffman notes (1959, p. 6) that "When an individual appears before others his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they come to have. Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain." To the extent that such impression-management is most centrally dependent upon information control, leaving home provides an unparalleled opportunity to abandon labels that have most contributed to disliked and unshakable identities. When students speak of college as providing a fresh start, they have in mind the possibility of fashioning new roles and identities. Going to college promises the chance to edit, to revise, to re-write certain parts of their biographies. Listen to the similarity in the ways these students spoke about starting over:

> It's sort of like starting a new life. I'll have connections to the past, but I'm obviously starting with a clean slate....Because no one cares how you did in your high school after you're in college. So everyone's equal now. (White male attending a public high school)

<center>***</center>

> I think what is nice about high school is that you've been with these people for thirteen years. [But] right now I'm ready to leave....A friend of mine wrote an article....He was talking about how...the people he knew [in college] he was meeting for the first time. And they didn't remember that you wore dorky shoes in kindergarten and that you ate paste in the corner and that...in the fourth grade you still sucked your thumb....People in high school still see you as someone who you used to be and you've evolved. But they still see you as the person that they used to know and they only know you partly in the new you. They don't really just meet you for the first time....[Of course] you have a bond with them....But I think that you need a fresh start. (White female attending a public high school)

Perhaps the most poignant story about hoping to construct a new identity was told by an Asian student who felt the acute pain of not having lived up to her parents' extraordinarily high expectations. Her uneven high school record (As and Bs in English, language, and math; Cs, Ds, and Fs in biology and history) caused her to feel like a relative failure. For her, going to college meant more than shedding a few unpleasant childhood labels. She desperately wanted a "second chance" to make her parents proud of her. Her words eloquently express the academic pressures some students face and their hopes for redemption in a new place. When asked if her parents were supportive, she responded with the following statement:

> You know, a lot of parents brag, brag, brag about their daughters. I have a really close friend of mine who...has two daughters and...just all the time she brags about

them....This [one] daughter had graduated on the top [of the high school class], number one or two....I'm just, you know, not up there. My mom is really close to her, too, and she has nothing to say about me [in return], you know. And I just hate it whenever she calls my house because I just wonder what kind of information she's got about her daughter this time, you know. I overhear it...and my mom is silent on the other end while she is talking on and on about how great...her daughter [is]....And my mom says, "Well, she does her best." And when I hear it...it strikes me and I just go back to [feeling like a] failure again. And I say, "I know mom, right now is not the time [and] I know someday I will make you proud...." Right now, for me, I just want the second chance...make my parents proud....It's [an Asian] thing, I guess. It's just so hard to explain. It's complicated. And I just want them to be [truthfully] proud of me when they say they are. I know I haven't made them proud yet, and I know it's waiting for me out there. I'm ready to get it, you know? I just need that second chance, that's all. (Asian female attending a public school)

As students described their hopes about college, the theme of "fresh starts" was almost universally voiced. Although, as described earlier, leaving friends behind is difficult, cutting such ties also provides the possibility to recreate oneself. Since adolescence is a time during which a "good" personal image and appearance are deemed critical, it is sensible that a chance to start over is extremely appealing. Leaving home, friends, and community offers students the possibility to jettison identities which are the product of others' consistent definitions of them over many years. Going to college provides a unique opportunity to display new identities consistent with the person they wish to become.

The data presented thus far are meant to convey the symbolic weightiness of the transition from high school to college. Every student with whom we spoke saw leaving home as a critical biographical moment. They see it as a definitive life stage when their capacity for independence will be fully tested for the first time. Some have had a taste of independence at summer camps and the like, but the transition to college is viewed as the "real thing." Their words, we have been suggesting, indicate that they see strong connections among leaving home, gaining independence, achieving adult status, and transforming their identities. Students carefully attempt to pick a college where they will fit in, thus indicating the importance of retaining and consolidating certain parts of their identities (see Shreier 1991). In addition, they believe that they will discover, in a holistic sense, who they "really" are during the college years.

Discovering the Person I Was Meant to Be

In their by now classic work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann observe that the phenomenon of large numbers of persons suffering from "identity crises" is distinctly a product of the "modern" world. In pre-industrial, agrarian societies any anxiety occasioned by identity questions was quickly siphoned off, if you will, by the importance accorded ascribed status characteristics. Berger and Luckmann (1967, p. 164) note that "In societies with very simple division of labor...identities...are socially predefined and profiled to a high degree.... Put simply, everyone pretty much *is* what he is supposed to be....A knight *is* a knight and a peasant *is* a peasant, to others as well as to themselves....The question, 'Who am I?' is unlikely to arise in consciousness,

since the socially predefined answer is massively real subjectively and consistently confirmed in all significant social interaction." Such simplicity hardly characterizes contemporary American society.

By the time they have reached their senior year in high school, most college-bound students must begin to confront, even if in a wholly preliminary way, questions concerning identity. The choice of a college is nearly always the most significant decision these students have had to make. It is a choice, moreover, that presumes at least some consideration of the questions "Who am I and what do I want to do with my life?" Not incidentally, application essays often ask some variant of these questions. This is important to note because such essays represent the institutional perspective of colleges themselves and thus contribute heavily to the expectation that the college years ought to be a time of substantial personal change. Application essays often simultaneously acknowledge students' anticipation of identity change and feed into that anticipation.

A few of the students in our sample had already decided their occupational destinies and were choosing colleges and programs on that basis. However, most of these high school students share an abiding belief that college will be the time for learning who they "really" are and ought to become. Students repeatedly told us that part of the excitement of their college years would be the discovery of who they really are. That students have high expectations about "finding themselves" in college is clear in comments like these:

> I was a little put off because of the bizarre nature of the [essay] question [for one college]. One of them was like "Who are you?" You know, that's part of the reason why I'm going to college 'cause I don't know who I am....The "Who am I [question]" really turned me off, especially at this age in my life. I have no idea who I am. Well, I have an idea, but I'm going to college to answer that question. (White male attending a public high school)

<div align="center">***</div>

> I think that college is not only an important extension of the learning process...but you're separated [from your family] and you're on your own and you're independent. I'm looking forward to that and I think it's important....You know, just meeting different people, learning how to get along with those people, learning how to interact with them and, you know, discovering yourself a little bit more deeply. (White male attending a public high school)

Certainly, part of what makes the transition to college an emotionally charged process is the students' expectation that their four years of education will deeply influence the course of their whole lives in ways that they will not fully anticipate. They also recognized that their departure from home might significantly change the character of their bond with family members. They saw leaving home as a fundamental turning point in their relationship with parents and siblings. Moreover, many wondered how their absence might affect the relationships of parents and children still at home. In some cases, the students we interviewed worried about how their leaving might influence their parents' marriage. In the next section, we describe how the students talked about their changing connection with their families and the ambivalence it creates.

The students in our s
imperative to strike
seniors contemplatin
poses immediate and
lenged to function, t
The tension between
the way students thin
to be "away," but not
would not want to be
definitely want to st
enough so that I can

The family is a sc
When a child goes of
the new circumstance
speculate that their re
attentiveness and con
parents' marital relat
they identify as being
quo ante. Finally, and
their place in the fam
ruefully, "I should hop
they will." "They'll n
don't have to be, like,
that they actually wan
positive that their mer
family system is assui
speculation regarding
are in college.

Parents' visits are i
1990). Most students v
although the visits do,
ated. Some speculated

> If I go to Harvard.
> night....That's wh;
> to them about, "L
> months I don't war
> ing a public high sc

These projections are
with dread. Perhaps the
matriculate.

WILL THEY MISS ME?

The students in our sample are emerging from high school brimming with enthusiasm. The imperative to strike out on their own is plain in their comments. However, for high school seniors contemplating the move to college, the idea of becoming more independent also poses immediate and practical problems. Arriving on campus, they will inevitably be challenged to function, to survive, in the absence of parental oversight, advice, and support. The tension between leaving home and maintaining ties with those at home is expressed in the way students think about geography, about how far from home they will go. Many want to be "away," but not too far away. Several mentioned a "two and one-half hour rule"; they would not want to be more than a 150 minute car ride from home.[6] As one senior put it, "I definitely want to stay close enough to home that I can send the laundry, but pretty far enough so that I can be independent."

The family is a social system in which roles are interconnected and interdependent. When a child goes off to college, the system is disturbed and the family will try to adapt to the new circumstances. College bound seniors worry about this process of adaptation. They speculate that their remaining siblings will miss them, or will be left to face the unremitting attentiveness and concern of parents. They also wonder about prospective changes in their parents' marital relationship. In particular, they are concerned for their mothers, whom they identify as being more invested than their fathers in keeping the family system *status quo ante*. Finally, and most significantly, these late adolescents manifest insecurity about their place in the family, especially now that they are leaving. Several of them remarked ruefully, "I should hope they feel some grief [laughter]!" "I think they'll be lonelier. I hope they will." "They'll miss me, I hope....I hope they feel my presence being gone....They don't have to be, like, mourning my departure, but just a little bit would be nice." It's not that they actually want their parents and siblings to suffer, but missing them would be proof positive that their membership in the family was valued, and that their future place in the family system is assured, in spite of their changing addresses. This insecurity extends to speculation regarding parents' visits to campus and students' future visits home while they are in college.

Parents' visits are imagined as a "double edged sword" (Frank, Pirsch, and Wright 1990). Most students value their privacy and are inclined to see parental visits as intrusive, although the visits do, of course, provide evidence that the student is missed and appreciated. Some speculated about how often they would see their parents when they were away:

> If I go to Harvard, I'm afraid that they're going to show up at my dorm every other night....That's what I don't want to happen. And, I'm sure we're going to have to talk to them about, "Let's set guidelines for how much...." I think probably the first two months I don't want to see them. To sort of break away, you know? (White male attending a public high school)

These projections are voiced by young people, sometimes with amusement, sometimes with dread. Perhaps they will be the subject of intense negotiation once the new freshmen matriculate.

Less subject to students' control are patterns of life at home during their absence. Students make predictions concerning variations in household routine, and the following respondent worried about potentially serious disruptions in her parents' marriage:

> I think [my parents] are scared shitless....I think they're scared for me because I'm going to be out there by myself...and I think they're worried about themselves because there aren't going to be any kids around any more to take care of, and they're going to have to get to know who they are personally again, and who each other are, because their life for years has been taking care of the kids....A lot of the things that they used to do and used to enjoy, they've forgotten....It makes me uptight just a little. I worry that they won't be able to handle it, or that they'll find out that they're very different people and that they're not happy with each other. (White female attending a public high school)

When asked to imagine life at home when they are away, the high school seniors in our sample began to compare their parents' reactions. Most of them seem to know their fathers less well as personalities, perhaps because they have been more absent, physically or emotionally, over the years. Mothers are typically seen as more knowable and predictable, and a substantial number of students are worried about them:

> Yeah, I am ready to leave home. Yeah...[but] my Mom isn't [ready for me to leave]. And I haven't heard anything about it from my Dad....I think he is very preoccupied with his business and stuff....My Mom...doesn't want me to leave....Yeah, my Mom is definitely not ready to have her little one leave. (White female attending a private high school)

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

> I think it will be really hard for my Dad, but he'll sort of silently handle it. I think it will really knock down my Mom because we spend a lot of time together. I'm trying to get her to finish her grad school degree because I think that...will take her mind off it....She'll be one of those people who do five million things because their kid went away. (White female attending a public high school)

In many of our conversations, it appeared that the worst thing about going away to college was that the young people would no longer be able to participate in many aspects of family life. However, perhaps no issue symbolizes the worry associated with leaving home as powerfully as pending decisions over space in the household. How quickly one's bedroom is claimed by other members of the family is, for many of these students, a commentary on the fragility of their position. Although Silver (1996) points out that both the home room and college dorm room are used to symbolically affirm family relations, our conversations with students were more focused on the meanings they attached to their bedrooms at home. One senior said, "They always joke around and they say, 'Oh, we're going to make your room into a den.'" Another young woman said, "When I come back home...it will still be my bed, but it won't really be my bed." Common sentiments about the recognition of household space are powerfully summarized by the student who made the following statement:

> [My room] it's an awful big issue...a confrontation. They want to turn it into a guest room, and it's the only room I have, and I want it to be my room when I come home from college, so that I can have something to come home to, you know? I mean, it's the

room I spent mo
one to sleep in n
of it unless it's
room that symbo
because then it v
a public high sch

Some of the senio
parents will be altere
reveal about themsel
to give their parents.
them there, so that th
can see a difference i
tions and the conseq
woman empathized w

> When I come ho
> [giggle], you kn
> changed my pers
> that would really
> least will be willi
> are for better any
> (White female att

What are we to mak
adults genuinely want
true independence. Ge
potential to alter fund
their worries, most stu
formation with life-lo
with parents and siblin
cess that will alter the
implicated in the calcu

> My mother's goin
> it....We know for
> syndrome, and we
> babies, and it's har
> for us. It's a very
> say? It's very awkv
> attending a public

> It's like, if you wan
> to be treated like a
> of your life, you've

"You've got to start s
embark on their great a
toward full adulthood.

room I spent most of my life in!...I don't even want people to stay in it. Don't want anyone to sleep in my bed....When it comes to my room, I don't want a blessed soul inside of it unless it's okayed by me!...I've created a room that I feel comfortable in, and a room that symbolizes home for me, and if that was changed it would be very difficult, because then it wouldn't feel like I was coming home as much. (White male attending a public high school)

Some of the seniors are beginning to understand that the nature of relations with their parents will be altered forever. They will have much more discretion concerning what to reveal about themselves, and therefore much more control over the impression they choose to give their parents. As one young woman put it, "I will experience a lot of things without them there, so that they won't know that they've happened...[unless] I tell them or if they can see a difference in me." Others expressed shared anxieties about personal transformations and the consequent stability of their place in the family constellation. One young woman empathized with a friend's concerns:

When I come home from college, what if I am different and my parents don't like me [giggle], you know, any more?...Or, what if...after living away from them, I've changed my personality and my views...so they don't appreciate me? But, I don't think that would really happen....I might not be the same person, but I think my parents at least will be willing to accept that [giggle], and the changes they would probably think are for better anyway, 'cause...I think you should change a little after high school. (White female attending a private high school)

What are we to make of these worries, speculations, and musings? College-bound young adults genuinely want to remain attached to their families, even as they are yearning for true independence. Getting into college is understood as a point of departure which has the potential to alter fundamentally their relationship with their family. However, in spite of their worries, most students see the transition to college as a good thing—a positive transformation with life-long consequences. They cannot predict precisely how their relations with parents and siblings will change, but they know for sure that they have initiated a process that will alter the character of these primary relationships. Such knowledge is plainly implicated in the calculus of ambivalence they feel about leaving home:

My mother's going to try to hold onto us as much as possible....We're positive about it....We know for a fact...she's an emotional person....She's got a major empty-nest syndrome, and we're her babies. And, we're trying to let her know that we're not her babies, and it's hard....She cries all the time...and she tells me she's sacrificed her life for us. It's a very deep thing to say. I say, "Thanks, Mom." What do you want me to say? It's very awkward. I mean, I didn't ask her to sacrifice her life for me! (White male attending a public high school)

***

It's like, if you want to be treated like an adult, you have to act like an adult. If you want to be treated like a child, act like a child. If you want to be treated like an adult the rest of your life, you've got to start sometime. (White male attending a public high school)

"You've got to start sometime." That, of course, is exactly what they are doing as they embark on their great adventure of self-discovery, into college first and hopefully, thereby, toward full adulthood.

DISCUSSION

The data in this paper affirm the significance of the transition to a residential college as a critical, albeit understudied, point in the lives of upper-middle-class adolescents undergoing that process. The students' words convey the strong consensus among them that they are "ripe" for change. They see college attendance as truly a new and qualitatively distinctive phase of their lives. The magnitude of the change, in both the concrete circumstances of their lives and in their self-conceptions, makes understandable the extent of ambivalence and uncertainty students feel about leaving home. They know they want to become independent, but anticipate the college years, especially the freshman year, as a test of their ability to achieve their identity goals. Thus, it is not surprising that students adopt concrete strategies to maximize the likelihood of success at the developmental tasks they face while maintaining a family safety net in the event that they are not yet prepared for the emotional and practical challenges of independent, adult living. The way students think about changing friendship patterns, meeting new academic challenges, mastering the routines of daily life on their own, and maintaining family connections reveals the contours of the college transition and the identity complexities associated with it.

Identity and independence concerns were shared by the upper-middle-class white and minority students in our study. However, the upper-middle-class minority students had concerns beyond those they shared with white students. African-American students, for example, sometimes contend with an additional set of questions regarding whether to attend historically black colleges versus predominantly white colleges (Willie 1995; McDonough, Antonio, and Trent 1995). And Asian students often contend with what they perceive to be exceptionally high achievement standards set for them by their parents.

We suspect that gaining independence from one's family of origin may carry different meanings for college-bound students depending on multiple factors, an important one being social class. Each socioeconomic level—from the wealthy to the poor—may present students with particular circumstances that make it easier or harder for them to gain independence from their family of origin. Furthermore, at each class level additional factors—such as race and ethnicity, immigrant or native-born status, and family structure (one or two parents)—may intersect with class to influence students' experience of leaving home. How multiple factors such as class and ethnicity affect other aspects of leaving home (for example, residential independence in non-family settings) is well documented (Goldschneider and Goldschneider 1993). Further research should explore the range of contingencies associated with college students leaving home in America. Such a research agenda would reveal both the regularities in the life courses of college-bound adolescents and the diversity of responses to this important developmental transition.

Aside from addressing the substantively distinctive features of the college application and choice process, the data presented earlier provoke reflection about the structural contingencies associated with identity transitions of all sorts. In particular, the logic of the "constant comparative method" (Glaser and Strauss 1967) requires consideration of how the process of transition to college compares to a range of other transitions. Immediately, the college transition process attests to the continuing value of Glaser and Strauss's (1968) distinction between regularized and non-scheduled status passages. Unexpected and rapid

status transitions su
1968), a spouse's un
a family member (I
change. They are in
inal stage during wh
tained.

The extent to whic
stantial time period s
the discarding of cur
vation dovetails with
emerging postmoder
the *saturated self*. W
life itself has virtuall
identities are so frag
Under the condition
"the fully saturated s
"Under postmodern
reconstruction; it is a
gives way to reflexiv
reality" (1991, p. 7).

Many postmodern
grated self becomes
the self have themsel
defined by increasin
that diminishes our c
and contradictory po
radically relativized.
tle to grab onto and t
only temporary comf
ity is unlikely.

The collapse of reli
some theorists say, ar
ingly vulnerable to a
describes the postmo
Stephen Pfohl (1992)
dens (1991, p. 9) wri
worthwhile to offer—
modernity."

Such dire descriptic
the general interactic
1977). When individu
inject into them some
people will collective

status transitions such as a job loss (Leventman 1981), sudden illness (Glaser and Strauss 1968), a spouse's unexpected exit from a marriage (Vaughan 1986), or the sudden death of a family member (Lopata 1973) allow no period of thoughtful preparation for identity change. They are intrinsically chaotic because they do not provide the possibility of a liminal stage during which alternative identity responses to a status change might be entertained.

The extent to which status passages are regularized, predictable, and extend over a substantial time period significantly influences how easily people can plan for and control both the discarding of current identities and the cultivation of new ones. This sociological observation dovetails with a growing body of literature on the fate of selves and identities in an emerging postmodern world. In his book of the same title, Kenneth Gergen (1991) refers to the *saturated self*. With this term, he means to convey that the pace of communications and life itself has virtually overtaken us and that, as a result, our selves are "under siege." Our identities are so fragmented in the postmodern world that they have become incoherent. Under the condition of postmodernity, the very concept of the self becomes uncertain and "the fully saturated self becomes no self at all" (Gergen 1991, p. 7). Gergen comments that "Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality" (1991, p. 7).

Many postmodern theorists maintain that the construction and maintenance of an integrated self becomes deeply problematic because the social structures necessary to anchor the self have themselves become unstable and ephemeral. The period of late modernity is defined by increasingly short-lived and superficial relationships, geographical mobility that diminishes our commitment to place, and mass media that confront us with multiple and contradictory points of view on nearly everything. In such a world, all values become radically relativized. Contemporary American society, the argument goes, gives us very little to grab onto and to believe in. Whatever values, rituals, or beliefs that do exist provide only temporary comfort since their validity is constantly open to question and their longevity is unlikely.

The collapse of reliable structures for ordering both social and personal meaning creates, some theorists say, an "ontological insecurity" (Giddens 1991) that makes all of us increasingly vulnerable to a range of emotional disorders. The cultural critic, Todd Gitlin (1989), describes the postmodern consciousness as blank, pessimistic, affectless, and cynical. Stephen Pfohl (1992) characterizes American society as a "panic scene" and Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 9) writes that "personal meaninglessness—the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer—becomes a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity."

Such dire descriptions seem to us at least slightly hyperbolic and do not accord well with the general interactionist view that presumes a mutable, highly adaptive self (Zurcher 1977). When individuals find their lives becoming too impersonal and rational, they will inject into them some sentiment, some passion. When social life becomes too routinized, people will collectively find ways to experience novelty. And, when they find their lives

becoming too unpredictable, they will find ways to introduce ritual and routine into their daily activity. Still, we cannot discount the possibility that, for increasing numbers of Americans, a sense of personal dislocation arises from a decrease in the number of coherent, predictable, and ritualized status passages built into the fabric of identity and culture. If it is true that establishing coherent identities is attached to the nature of status passages, then an additionally valuable question asks whether some segments of the society are more affected by the pace and predictability of status passages.

We might argue, for example, that different categories of people have greater or lesser control over the production of their identities. Surely a critical dimension of power and personal autonomy turns on the extent to which we shape our identities rather than having them imposed upon us. As with other dimensions of power, identity autonomy runs along class lines. Our hunch is that an inverse relationship exists between social class position and the frequency with which individuals must cope with non-standardized status transitions that do not allow a stage of liminality and thus a measure of control over identities discarded and identities successfully claimed. For example, the upper-middle-class membership of the respondents in this study "bought" them the capacity to plan a major life passage: the one into college. Their control over the transition to college is especially critical because college attendance provides an infrastructure that maximizes the likelihood of autonomy in making a range of later life choices (e.g., occupational choice, marriage decisions, family planning, and retirement planning).

While we maintain that one of the major privileges of being at the upper end of the class structure is a greater measure of identity control as persons move through the life course, we must also acknowledge that this privilege has been eroding. The world of work provides an obvious example. The disastrous consequences of underemployment and joblessness for those at the bottom of the American class structure is an old story (Wilson 1987). The poor in America have always lived with occupational instability and its fallout. In contrast, middle-class workers have historically been immune from occupational insecurity. Indeed, achieving the American Dream of middle-class life has, for much of the twentieth century, been synonymous with tremendous occupational stability. In decades past, middle- to upper-middle-class workers in large organizations could count on being taken care of from "womb to tomb" (a phrase that implies incredibly predictable status passages). No more. Instead of the strong bond of commitment and loyalty that organizations and middle-class workers previously felt toward each other, the new economic rules of corporate life emphasize efficiency, whatever the human cost (Newman 1988). Knowing that they could be here today, but gone tomorrow, middle-class workers are constantly in "fear of falling" (Ehrenreich 1989).

Examples from spheres of life other than work could have been used to illustrate the increasing tenuousness of social structures in the contemporary age. The critical point is that ever increasing uncertainty in a range of social structural areas is accompanied by a foreshortening and increased unpredictability of status passage rituals. Significant change in the nature of status passage rituals are both caused by and are a barometer of changing social structures. In this regard, social rituals constitute an important feature of the meso-structure of society (Maines 1979). They are concrete mechanisms through which social

structures shape our i
character of tradition
different populations
just how social struct

1. We used father's oc
    inantly upper-midd
    description include
    tions were either hi
2. Either because we (
    speak to eight of the
    of the 30 families h
3. One student, who d
    during his senior ye
    pate attending colle
4. There is another rea
    for examining both
    argues that social ps
    their empirical inve
    tains, they should st
    "initiate the search f
    cept change in reac
    changes initiated by
    context to another a
    that among the seve
    initiated relocations
5. A reviewer wondere
    suggested that perha
    described here. Our
    dents who have func
    or during a summer
    described in this pap
6. Distance from home
    students negotiate th
    choose to go. All 23
    we know the outcom
    relatively easy visitir
    tance (requiring a 4-
    The expected selecti
    most ways. Almost a
    self-identity, and im
    The groups did diffe
    ties. Students who w
    colleges between two
    drive from home. Es
    students if they rema

structures shape our identities and, thereby, our inner lives. Thus, analysis of the changing character of traditional status passages, with particular attention to variations in the ways different populations experience them, is a conceptually important space for understanding just how social structures exert influence over processes of identity transformation.

NOTES

1. We used father's occupation as a proxy for social class. We characterized our sample as predominantly upper-middle class. A sampling of the types of fathers' occupations that warrant this description includes: physician, lawyer, professor, administrator, and architect. A few occupations were either higher or lower in status.

2. Either because we could not reach them or because they declined to be interviewed, we did not speak to eight of the 31 students originally included in our sample. The number is 31 because one of the 30 families had twins.

3. One student, who declined to be interviewed, did not complete the college application process during his senior year in high school. He was the only student in our sample who did not anticipate attending college in the year following high school graduation.

4. There is another reason why the process of leaving home for college is a strategically useful case for examining both maintenance and change of self-concept. Stefan Hormuth (1984, 1990) argues that social psychologists wishing to understand changes in self-concept should not restrict their empirical investigations to circumstances that force people to change. In addition, he maintains, they should study situations where individuals purposely, willingly, and self-consciously "initiate the search for a new self concept" (1984, p. 111). It certainly makes sense that self-concept change in reaction to external threats to internal stability are of a different order than changes initiated by an individual. Much of his own work adopts "relocation" from one social context to another as a paradigm for considering self-concept changes. It is interesting to note that among the several studies Hormuth has conducted on how self-concept is affected by self-initiated relocations is one that focuses on *leaving* college.

5. A reviewer wondered about the effect of being away from home prior to leaving for college and suggested that perhaps boarding school students have already gone through the identity process described here. Our numbers are small, but there are cases in our sample that suggest that students who have functioned successfully away from home before (e.g., at boarding school, camp, or during a summer international service project) still may grapple with the identity process described in this paper.

6. Distance from home was an important factor for many students. Therefore, one might ask if how students negotiate their selective identity reconstruction hinges on how far away from home they choose to go. All 23 students were headed to four-year residential colleges. Of the 22 for whom we know the outcome, 27% went to college close to home (under 1 1/4-hour drive), 36% went a relatively easy visiting distance (between 2 and 4-hour drive), and 36% went a considerable distance (requiring a 4-hour drive or perhaps suggesting the possibility of an airplane trip to visit). The expected selective reorganization of the self was remarkably the same for all three groups in most ways. Almost all the students anticipated change, wanted to maintain specific parts of their self-identity, and imagined a future self, no matter what geographic distance they were going. The groups did differ, however, on whether students hoped to jettison certain unwanted identities. Students who wanted to discard some disliked aspect of themselves were most apt to select colleges between two and four hours away and none enrolled in a college within a 1 1/4 hour drive from home. Escaping an unwanted identity presumably would be more difficult for these students if they remained in close proximity to their existing social networks.

REFERENCES

Bassoff, Evelyn. 1988. *Mothers and Daughters: Loving and Letting Go*. New York: Penguin Books.

Becker, Howard. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.

Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Berry, Barbara. 1995. *Life After Johnnie Cochran*. New York: Basic Books.

Blos, Peter. 1962. *On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. New York: Free Press.

Campbell, Eugene, Gerald Adams, and William Dobson. 1984. "Familial Correlates of Identity Formation in Late Adolescence: A Study of the Predictive Utility of Connectedness and Individuality in Family Relations. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 13: 509-525.

Chambliss, William. 1983. "The Saints and the Roughnecks." Pp. 24-31 in *Social Interaction*, edited by Candace Clark and Howard Robboy. New York: St. Martin's.

Cooley, Charles. 1902. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: C. Scribner's and Sons.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. 1989. *Fear of Falling*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Erikson, Erik. 1963. *Childhood and Society*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton.

_____. 1968. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton.

_____. 1974. *Dimensions of a New Identity*. New York: W.W. Norton.

_____. 1980. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Erikson, Kai. 1976. *Everything In Its Path*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Flaherty, Michael. 1987. "The Neglected Dimension of Temporality in Social Psychology." *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 8: 143-155.

Frank, Susan, Lisa Pirsch, and Virginia Wright. 1990. "Late Adolescents' Perceptions of Their Relationships with Their Parents: Relationships Among Deidealization, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Insecurity and Implications for Adolescent Adjustment and Ego Identity Status." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 19: 571-588.

Gergen, Kenneth. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gitlin, Todd. 1989. "Post-modernism: Roots and Politics." *Dissent* (Winter): 110-118.

Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

_____. 1968. *Time for Dying*. Chicago: Aldine.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor.

_____. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Goldschneider, Frances and Calvin Goldschneider. 1993. *Leaving Home Before Marriage: Ethnicity, Familism, and Generational Relationships*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Grigsby, Jill and Jill McGowan. 1986. "Still in the Nest: Adult Children Living with Their Parents." *Sociology and Social Research* 70: 146-148.

Heer, David, Robert Hodge, and Marcus Felson. 1985. "The Cluttered Nest: Evidence that Young Adults Are More Likely to Live at Home Now Than in the Recent Past." *Sociology and Social Research* (69): 436-441.

Hewitt, John. 1996. *Self and Society*. Boston, MA: Alynn and Bacon.

Hochschild, Arlie. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

hooks, bell. 1993. "Ke...
   Women in the Ac...
   University of Ma...

Hormuth, Stefan. 1984....
   as a Paradigm." ...
   Vernon Allen an...

_____. 1990. *The Ec*...
   Cambridge Unive...

Karp, David. 1986. "'Y...
   of the Boy': Tow...

Katchadourian, Herant a...
   Decade After Col...

Katovich, Michael and C...
   for Situated Actio...

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. ...

Lemert, Edwin. 1951. *So*...

Leventman, Paula. 1981. ...

Levine, Arthur and Jana ...
   cisco: Jossey-Bass...

Levinson, Daniel, Charlot...
   Seasons of a Man'...

Lofland, Lyn. 1973. *A W*...

London, Howard. 1978. *T*...

Lopata, Helena. 1973. *Wi*...

McDonough, Patricia, An...
   Americans." Paper ...
   Washington, D.C.

Maines, David. 1979. "Me...

Maines, David, Noreen S...
   Mead's Theory of th...

Manaster, Guy. 1977. *Ado*...

Mead, George H. 1929. "T...
   edited by John Coss...

Mead, George H. 1934. *Mi*...

Newman, Katherine. 1988. ...

Nippert-Eng, Christina. 19...

O'Mally, Dawn. 1995. *Ado*...
   omy. Ph.D. dissertati...

Pfohl, Stephen. 1992. *Deatl*...

Rodriguez, Richard. 1982. ...
   R. Godine.

Rosenhan, David L. 1973. "...

Rubin, Lillian. 1979. *Wome*...

_____. 1985. *Just Friends*...

Ryan, Jake and Charles Sacl...
   Boston: South End Pr...

Schnaiberg, Allan and She...
   Dynamics of Incompl...

Schreier, Barbara. 1991. *Fit*...
   Society.

Sheehy, Gail. 1992. *The Sile*...

hooks, bell. 1993. "Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education." Pp. 99-111 in *Working-Class Women in the Academy*, edited by Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay. Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Hormuth, Stefan. 1984. "Transitions in Commitments to Roles and Self-concept Change: Relocation as a Paradigm." Pp. 109-124 in *Role Transitions: Explorations and Explanations*, edited by Vernon Allen and Evert van de Vliert. New York: Plenum Press.

———. 1990. *The Ecology of Self: Relocation and Self-Concept Change*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Karp, David. 1986. "'You Can Take the Boy Out of Dorchester, but You Can't Take Dorchester Out of the Boy': Toward a Social Psychology of Mobility." *Symbolic Interaction* 9: 19-36.

Katchadourian, Herant and John Boli. 1994. *Cream of the Crop: The Impact of Elite Education in the Decade After College*. New York: Basic Books.

Katovich, Michael and Carl Couch. 1992. "The Nature of Social Pasts and Their Use as Foundations for Situated Action." *Symbolic Interaction* 15: 25-47.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. 1969. *On Death and Dying*. New York: MacMillan.

Lemert, Edwin. 1951. *Social Pathology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Leventman, Paula. 1981. *Professionals Out of Work*. New York: Free Press.

Levine, Arthur and Jana Nidiffer. 1996. *Beating the Odds: How the Poor Get to College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Levinson, Daniel, Charlotte Darrow, Edward Klein, Maria Levinson, and Braxton McKee. 1978. *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Knopf.

Lofland, Lyn. 1973. *A World of Strangers*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

London, Howard. 1978. *The Culture of a Community College*. New York: Praeger.

Lopata, Helena. 1973. *Widowhood in an American City*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

McDonough, Patricia, Anthony Antonio, and James Trent. 1995. "The College Choices of African-Americans." Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meetings, Washington, D.C.

Maines, David. 1979. "Mesostructure and Social Process." *Contemporary Sociology* 8: 524-527.

Maines, David, Noreen Sugrue, and Michael Katovich. 1983. "The Sociological Import of G.H. Mead's Theory of the Past." *American Sociological Review* 48: 161-173.

Manaster, Guy. 1977. *Adolescent Development and the Life Tasks*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Mead, George H. 1929. "The Nature of the Past." Pp. 235-242 in *Essays in Honor of John Dewey*, edited by John Coss. New York: Octagon Books.

Mead, George H. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Newman, Katherine. 1988. *Falling From Grace*. New York: Free Press.

Nippert-Eng, Christina. 1996. *Home and Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

O'Mally, Dawn. 1995. *Adolescent Development: Striking A Balance Between Attachment and Autonomy*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Psychology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Pfohl, Stephen. 1992. *Death at the Parasite Cafe*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Rodriguez, Richard. 1982. *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. Boston: David R. Godine.

Rosenhan, David L. 1973. "On being Sane in Insane Places." *Science* 179: 250-258.

Rubin, Lillian. 1979. *Women of a Certain Age*. New York: Harper and Row.

———. 1985. *Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in Our Lives*. New York: Harper and Row.

Ryan, Jake and Charles Sackrey. 1984. *Strangers in Paradise: Academics From the Working Class*. Boston: South End Press.

Schnaiberg, Allan and Sheldon Goldenberg. 1989. "From Empty Nest to Crowded Nest: The Dynamics of Incompletely-Launched Young Adults." *Social Problems* 36: 251-269.

Schreier, Barbara. 1991. *Fitting In: Four Generations of College Life*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society.

Sheehy, Gail. 1992. *The Silent Passage: Menopause*. New York: Random House.

Silver, Ira. 1996. "Role Transitions, Objects, and Identity." *Symbolic Interaction* 19: 1-20.

Smith, Patricia. 1993. "Grandma Went to Smith, All Right, but She Went from Nine to Five: A Memoir." Pp. 126-139 in *Working-Class Women in the Academy*, edited by Michelle Tokarczyk and Elizabeth Fay. Amherst, MA.: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Strauss, Anselm. 1959. *Mirrors and Masks*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Stryker, Sheldon. 1981. "Symbolic Interactionism: Themes and Variations." Pp. 3-29 in *Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Morris Rosenberg and Ralph Turner. New York: Basic Books.

Stone, Gregory. 1962. "Appearance and the Self." Pp. 86-118 in *Human Behavior and Social Process*, edited by Arnold Rose. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Stonequist, Everett. [1937]1961. *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*. New York: Russell and Russell.

Tokarczyk, Michelle and Elizabeth Fay (Eds.). 1993. *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Travisano, Richard. 1981. "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations." Pp. 594-606 in *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, edited by Gregory Stone and Harvey Farberman. New York: Wiley.

Turner, Ralph 1968. "The Self Conception in Social Interaction." Pp. 93-106 in *The Self in Social Interaction*, edited by Chad Gordon and Kenneth Gergen. New York: Wiley.

Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vaughan, Diane. 1986. *Uncoupling*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Willie, Sarah. 1995. "'They Believed in Me': What Colleges Can Do to Help Black Students Through the Tunnel from Adolescence to Adulthood." Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Philadelphia.

Wilson, William. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Zurcher, Louis. 1977. *The Mutable Self*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Prison Gang
Work:
The Visual Con

Michael P. Phelan
Scott A. Hunt
University of Kentuc

The purpose o
moral careers
derived from o
officer in the C.
of the Nuestr
individual's se
membership,
person's past ca
analyze the mc
elaborate upon
initiate, membe
of the importar
work perspecti
on gang tattoos

Recent attention to ide
claims emerge (Snow a
Miller 1997; Hunt and F
investigation, other inte
dress, appearance, and
1992; see also Cahill 1
1997; Roach-Higgins a
these two approaches to
tional accomplishment
words, deeds, and image

Michael P. Phelan, Departme
mpphel0@ukcc.uky.edu or s.