

**Mother-Daughter Relationships and Transition to College: Physical
Distance and Communicative Changes**

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Abstract

The mother-daughter relationship is complex in many ways. When a daughter goes off to college, it can cause a change in the parent-child dynamic. This paper examined the mother-daughter relationship when the daughter transitions from high school to college. It explored the communicative processes in important to the relationship as this transition and changes that occur, as well as how physical distance affects the relationship. By interviewing college-aged women who moved away to college and having them fill out a turning point graph, this project revealed relational changes that occur when the daughter transitions to college. Overall, daughters indicated that they became closer with their mothers after the transition to college. Several important communicative changes that occurred between the mother and daughter were identified. Daughters established autonomy and believed they could make their own decisions. They *chose* to communicate with their mothers, and this gave them a sense that they had more control in the relationship. Daughters also felt that advice was given and taken by both the mother and daughter, and the number of arguments decreased. Daughters believed that the increase in physical distance made them closer with their mothers because they had to put more time and effort into sustaining the relationship. This led to a change in the meaning of closeness, as it switched from spending time with their mothers to opening up and seeing the mother as a friend and resource for support.

Keywords: mother-daughter relationship, transition, college, high school, communication, closeness

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Chapter One – Literature Review	4
<i>Emerging Adulthood</i>	4
<i>Turning Points in Relationships</i>	6
<i>Physical Distance</i>	8
<i>Relationship Perceptions</i>	11
<i>Relational Dialectics</i>	13
Chapter Two – Methods	21
<i>Participants</i>	21
<i>Interview Protocol and Procedures</i>	22
<i>Analysis Procedure – Interviews</i>	23
<i>Analysis Procedure – Turning Point Graphs</i>	24
Chapter Three – Findings	26
<i>Turning Point Graphs</i>	26
<i>Interview Analysis</i>	30
Chapter Four – Discussion	43
<i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	49
References	52
Appendix	54
<i>Interview Guide</i>	54
<i>Turning Point Graph</i>	56
<i>IRB Approval Letter</i>	57

Chapter One: Literature Review

The transition to college is a time of change in parent-young adult relationships. Some prior research has suggested that there is a decrease in closeness between a mother and daughter around the time the daughter heads to college (Golish, 2000). Mothers are often the primary caregivers for their children, and the physical distance of moving away to college poses a threat to the mother and her ability to provide the best care (Golish, 2000). College is also a time when many children discover their values and beliefs, likes and dislikes, and shape themselves into the person they want to be. During this time period, parents and young adults often struggle to negotiate independence and to redefine their relationship. This process of may be particularly challenging for mothers and daughters because of the expectations for closeness that may exist in this relationship (Golish, 2000). This research project examined the changes mother-daughter relationships go through during the transition from high school to college when the daughter goes away to college. This paper will argue that changes occur within a mother-daughter relationship when the daughter transitions to high school. These include changes in how the mother and daughter communicate with each other and a shift in the type of closeness experienced between mother and daughter when the daughter moves away from home, as well as consideration of how daughters perceive physical distance to affect the relationship.

Emerging Adulthood

Jeffrey Arnett (2000) claims that people do not transition straight from adolescence to young adulthood, but rather there is a period known as emerging adulthood in between the two. According to Jeffrey Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is

“a distinct period in the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life decisions,” “with a focus on ages 18-25” (p.469). During this time, there is often frequent change and exploration, and these offer opportunities for identity exploration, especially in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Similarly, according to Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson, & Kaufman (2011), emerging adulthood is a time in a person’s 20’s where they explore a variety of possible life directions. It is important to note that emerging adulthood is socially constructed, and there is little during this life period that is normative, meaning there is little that is normal or expected in terms of development (Arnett, 2000). Additionally, risk behavior is much more prevalent during this period, such as unprotected sex and drugs. Furthermore, emerging adulthood is self-aware and self-focused (Lefkowitz, 2005). Because of this, there is a great push for autonomy during this time. Arnett claims that the “two top criteria for transition to adulthood in a variety of studies have been accepting responsibility for one’s self and making independent decisions”(p.473); there is strong push toward becoming a self-sufficient person (Arnett 2000).

This means that during young adulthood, relationships between young adults and parents must change in order for self-sufficiency and autonomy to emerge. Autonomy is complex and typically a multifaceted construct (Kenyon, 2009). Because of the multifaceted nature of autonomy, it is often examined in both emotional and behavioral terms (Kenyon, 2009). Kenyon draws on Collins’ expectancy violation model, which indicates, “parents and kids must make gradual adjustments to maintain their bond and emotional connection” (Kenyon, 2009, p. 295). The Collins expectancy violation model is based on the idea that both parents and adolescents have certain expectations for each

other's behavior, and those expectations are violated when either the parent or the child "experience physical, social, or psychological changes" (Kenyon, 2009, p. 295). Interestingly, Kenyon found that, during young adulthood, it was actually parents who expected higher autonomous behavior from their children than the children themselves. This stems from the fact that children spend eighteen years having the guidance and authority, wanted or not, from their parents. Kenyon noted a paradox in college students' enactment of autonomy. College students want to gain autonomy from their parents and solve problems on their own; however, they are also nervous about their transition and want to hold on to the sense of dependency (Kenyon, 2009). This demonstrates the complexity of emerging adulthood and reveals that this relational transition may be a particularly important one for parents and young adults.

Turning Points in Relationships

One way that communication researchers have examined transition in relationships is through the study of turning points in relationships. Turning points can be defined as "points of change that result in the recalibration" of relationships (Miller-Day, 2004, p. 80). In other words, any event that changes the relationship is a turning point. Studies focused on turning points ask individuals to report retrospectively on experiences in their relationships that led to changes in closeness; this allows researchers to better understand events that shape relationships. Research on turning points in mother-daughter relationships has demonstrated that turning points can include both big, life-altering moments such as the daughter giving birth, or smaller relational events – such as when either the mother or daughter violates relational expectations (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). An article by Fisher and Miller-Day (2006) examined what effect turning points have on the mother-daughter relationship. Through interviewing 21 young

adult women and mothers, they were able to identify changes in the relationship from both the perspective of the mother and of the daughter. Some of these turning points included when mothers could see a growth in her daughter, and when daughters felt their mothers were treating them as adults (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). Some of these turning points they found include the daughter's marriage and changes in proximity (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). They also found that the turning points identified generally led to positive effects on the mother-daughter relationship. Mothers felt their daughter's had become more independent and had a change in attitude, and this led to a shift in the relationship as becoming more of a friendship and an increase in openness from the mothers (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006).

Relatedly, Golish (2000) examined turning points in young adult-parent relationships. Golish (2000) argued that there are main three factors that stimulate change in closeness of these relationships. The first was a time of crisis, such as divorce, family illness or death (Golish, 2000). The second was the age of the child and parent. Golish describes a "curvilinear relationship," in which the parent and child are close when the child is young, a decrease occurs during teenage years, and an increase that occurs in adulthood (2000). The last major factor was physical distance. Using retrospective interviews and turning point graphs with 30 young adults who had completed college, Golish examined events that led to changes in closeness in relationship with mother and with father. Golish (2000) discovered that physical distance was the most frequently identified turning point and that it had mixed results in terms of its impact on closeness – it brought some parents and children closer together and created a barrier for others. Additionally, patterns of closeness varied for relationship with

mother and relationship with father. The most common pattern between mothers and children was the single major disruption (Golish, 2000). In this pattern, there was a particular event that caused a significant decrease in closeness, but the mother and child were able to regain closeness eventually (Golish, 2000). This demonstrates how the mother and daughter relationship commonly goes through ups and downs throughout the relationship.

Taken together, the turning point research suggests that mother-daughter relationships may experience significant changes in closeness at the transition to adulthood and that the daughter and mother must negotiate the relationship as they redefine their relationship. It is notable that this redefinition often occurs as mother and daughter live away from one another.

Physical Distance

For many young adults, a key part of the transition into adulthood involves living away from parents for the first time. Physical distance may be one of the biggest turning points and is a key element that impacts the parent-young adult relationship. According to Arnett (2000), physical proximity to parents has been found to have a negative impact on parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood. This may be partly because young adults believe that they are more likely to be monitored at home and will not be able to pursue new experiences if they live with their parents (Arnett, 2000). This suggests that physical proximity has a clear effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children during this time. Arnett (2000) claims that young adults with frequent contact with their parents or who live close to them physically tend to be the least close emotionally with parents, especially if they still live at home. Harrigan and Ott (2013) examined mother-daughter relationships of college-aged women and found that physical

distance influences the amount of support mothers provide, along with the type. They found that when there is more physical distance between a mother and daughter, mothers provided more emotional support and less instrumental support (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). Additionally, Harrigan and Ott (2013) found that supportive communication from the mother could help the daughter in college. As the authors point out, warmth and support have been shown to ease the relationship between stress, life events, and depression. Harrigan and Ott (2013) found that when children live with their mothers, the sense of connection is found primarily through spending time together. When children were physically separated from their mothers, the sense of connection had to shift to focus more on emotional closeness rather than physical (Golish, 2000). This was seen particularly in mother-child relationships because the physical distance gave children the separation they needed from their mother to feel an increase in emotional closeness (Golish, 2000). Lefkowitz (2005) found that children who leave home are better adjusted than those who stay at home, and, interestingly, the relationship with parents remains positive and often even improves. This suggests that physical proximity has a clear effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children during the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, this highlights the fact that communication between mothers and daughters when living apart should be examined to understand how they reshape their relationship.

Establishing Independence from Parent

One key issue in young adulthood is establishing independence. A turning point that often causes a strain, especially between mothers and daughters, is when the child resists the rules or beliefs that have been in place in the family. Golish (2000) describes rebellion as a stage when teenagers need autonomy and independence from their parents.

This rebellion can often come from lack of maturity, and the teenager's struggle of wanting to remain connected to their mother but also feeling peer pressure to separate from their mother's protection and find themselves (Golish, 2000). As young adults seek to establish autonomy, they may reject or challenge parents' values. A study done by Lefkowitz (2005) examined changes in a college students' lives as they began college, such as their relationship with their parents, religion, and sexuality. A large percentage of students claimed their relationship with their parents had changed in ways including more open communication, feeling more equal, and having independence (Lefkowitz, 2005). Lefkowitz found that college students attended their place of worship less if religion had been part of their upbringing, but they also, interestingly, gained interest in religion overall. This is one way college students explored personal interests in their lives. Another was by increased risky sexual activity. Emerging adulthood is a time when young adults will seek out novel experiences as well as exploration of themselves (Arnett 2000). Lefkowitz (2005) found that in college there was an increase in overall sexual activity and casual sex. With this increase came a decrease in condom use and more sexual exploration (Lefkowitz, 2005). This is another way emerging adults explore different life paths. As Arnett (2000) mentions, the concept of identity exploration is tied to sensation seeking, "which is the desire for novel and intense experiences" (p. 475). It appears as though it is through this rejection of previously established norms that emerging adults gain a sense of independence. College is often a time when young adults may engage in behaviors their parents disapprove of. One challenge that emerges from this is how students communicate and sustain the relationship with their parents even though they are doing things they might not be able to share with their parents. Young

adults want to explore their sense of identity, and they do so by separating themselves from their parents. However, to transform their relationship, they need to communicate with their parents and learn to manage what information that can and cannot share.

Relationship Perceptions and Mother-Daughter Relationships

Research suggests the mother-daughter relationship is the closest parent-child relationship (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). Mothers provide support in many forms, such as emotional, instrumental, and financial (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). One important distinction to make is the type of relationship the mother and daughter have regarding levels of closeness. Drawing from work in family studies, Miller-Day (2004, as cited in Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006), Miller-Day identified two types of closeness that are often evident in mother-daughter relationships: connected and enmeshed. A connected relationship type occurs the mother and daughter live in close proximity to each other and are emotionally connected, but also lead independent lives (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). This relationship type is highly adaptable to relationship changes and involves less judgment and defensiveness (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). Conversely, there is the enmeshed relationship type. This style occurs when the mother and daughter are extremely close, physically and emotionally, and have few boundaries (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). In this style, any change in the daughter's life is perceived as threatening by the mother (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). If the mother depends on her daughter to reinforce self-worth, and if the daughter seems to value her mother less, it will be perceived as demoralizing by the mother (La Sorsa, 1990). Furthermore, the mother's acceptance of her daughter in this type of relationships is conditioned on whether the daughter meets the mother's high expectations, and daughters typically show a skewed admiration to their mother's beliefs and values (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). This means the daughter

thinks all of her mother's beliefs and values are correct, even if they might not be. These two types of closeness between a mother and daughter could have an effect on how the relationship changes during a transition period. Those in a connected relationship type were better able to switch from viewing the mother and daughter through this family role to a more personal role, positioning themselves as a unique individual (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). These mothers and daughters communicated more openly and were able to tolerate debate or negotiation (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). Mothers and daughters in an enmeshed relationship, on the other hand, were less able to view one another as a unique person rather than a mother and a daughter. Therefore, communication from the daughter to the mother remained guarded, reinforcing the mother's positional status (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). Because of this, it could be that mother-daughter pairs who have a connected relationship could have an easier time when the daughter transitions to college than those in an enmeshed relationships because of the connected relationship's ability to adapt and change how they interact with each other.

The mother-daughter relationship is often one-sided during the daughter's adolescence; the mother is the one who provides support and guidance to the daughter (Bojczyk et al., 2011). Furthermore, the daughter often sees her mother as a role model, and some daughters view continuous support as a sign of closeness (Bojczyk et al., 2011). Bojczyk et al. mention that the mother-daughter relationship often becomes an "object of reflection and meaning making for mothers and daughters" (p. 456). La Sorsa (1990) furthers this point. When a daughter distances herself from her mother, it can be done out of hostility because of her mother's control. This can result in a loss of self-esteem for the mother because the mother places so much dependence on her daughter to

feel good about herself (La Sorsa, 1990). When a daughter then doesn't want her mother's control, the mother can often see it as her daughter doesn't want her in her life (La Sorsa, 1990). This could be a source of conflict between a mother and daughter when the daughter transitions to college because of the inevitable physical distance between the two. When the daughter is at college and is gaining independence, the mother could perceive it as her daughter wanting to have a more separated life.

The expectations that mothers have for their daughters have an impact on the relationship (Bojczyk et al., 2011). La Sorsa (1990) found that mothers will often experience their daughter's failures as their own, but also envy their daughter's youth and feel resentment toward their daughter. This envy stems from wanting to live life through their daughters, and because of this envy, mothers may create a sense of competition between her and her daughter (La Sorsa, 1990). This competition results in the daughter being afraid of outdoing her mother, which again presents the relationship as a paradox (La Sorsa, 1990).

It is apparent that the mother daughter relationship is complicated. Sometimes, the complexity can be deepened by the transition to emerging adulthood because of all the changes that occur in the daughter's life during this period. If the daughter has new experiences when she goes off to college because of the inevitable change in environments, there is a possibility the mother could feel envious of her daughter because the mother also wants to have new experiences (La Sorsa, 1990). This could then lead to tension between the two.

Relational Dialectics

Given the complexity both of the mother-daughter relationship and of the transition to adulthood, it makes sense that this point in mother-daughter relationships

would be filled with competing desires and contradictions. One theoretical view that has been used by researchers to consider the contradictions and tensions inherent in relationships is relational dialectics theory (RDT) (Baxter, 2011). Baxter's theory states that relationships involve the ongoing experience of dialectics—opposing but mutually defining contradictions that are central to relating. For instance, autonomy-connection is a foundational dialectical tension in ongoing relationships, with relational partners experiencing the need for both autonomy and connection throughout the relationship. Recently, Baxter (2014) has noted that the meanings of dialectics are created by the struggle of opposing discourses. Experience is defined by language use, therefore meaning is not already in one's mind but is instead created through interactions with relational partners and defined by the cultural ways of sense-making that are available to communicators. Baxter (2014) explains this in terms of centrifugal and centripetal forces. Some discourses become centered, or preferred, and other discourses become centrifugal—less socially expected but an important counterpoint to centered discourses. The push and pull between these differing discourses allows meaning to shift, and new meanings to be created.

The theory of relational dialectics has been used by two previous studies to examine the mother-daughter relationship. According to Fisher and Miller-Day, relational dialectics states “contradictions in relationships are social rather than cognitive phenomena” (p.10). Thus, the goal in examining dialectics is to understand how they are experienced and managed within the relationship. For instance, openness-closedness is a dialectic that has received research attention in mother-daughter relationships. Based on RDT, we would expect daughters to be open about some topics and closed on others

(Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). When the daughter is closed off about a topic, it is either as a relational maintenance function – that is, to maintain the relationship as it, or as a protective function – that is, withholding in fear the information would upset the other or be used against her (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). Additionally, the relationship type played a role in the amount of openness and closedness. If the two had a connected relationship, the mother and daughter would be expected to manage the amount of openness and closedness as part of the daughter becoming an autonomous adult (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). However, if the two had an enmeshed relationship, the mother would be expected to demand disclosure from her daughter but practice large amounts of secrecy herself (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006). This demonstrates the differences in perceptions of social expectations between the two relationship types. The connected mother sees the mother-daughter relationship as one that will evolve into a friendship, whereas the enmeshed mother simply views the mother-daughter relationship as the mother being the security and authority figure. Thus, in enmeshed relationships, it is difficult to change the roles in the relationship. In an enmeshed relationship the emotional tie is so strong that often times each woman felt her identity was fused with the other's (Miller-Day, 2004). This created a situation where role change was difficult.

Relational dialectics also demonstrates “the complexity of the meaning making process” (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). Harrigan and Ott (2013) note that meaning is created “through the interplay of competing discourses” (p. 116). The discourses relational partners draw on come both from broader culture and from the specific relationship and its patterns of interaction (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). These two sites are often dissonant. The concept of autonomy is a source of conflict for mothers and daughters because while

there are times when contact can bring the two together and enhances closeness, contact can also hinder autonomy (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). There is a constant push and pull between a mother and daughter throughout their relationship.

Discourses of Closeness and Distance

Due to the complex nature of the mother-daughter dyad, researchers sought to examine the relationship from a dialectical perspective, which seeks to identify the tensions that mothers and daughters experience in this relationship and the ways they manage these. In the study done by Harrigan and Ott (2013), they sought to identify the discourses of relating that undergird mother-adult daughter relationships. They conducted in-depth interviews with 36 college-aged women who also completed a turning point graph reflecting on events that affected their relationship with their mother. After analyzing these, Harrigan and Ott (2013) found three discourses of closeness and three discourses of distance that reflect the dialectical tensions of mother-young adult daughter relating. The first discourse of closeness was friendship. As daughters went through emerging adulthood and even into adulthood, they found that they could relate to their mothers more than they could before (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). One of the most important points to note is that if the daughter did not perceive her mother as a friend before, the transition from perceiving her as a mother to a friend was more meaningful for those young women (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). This shift included having more meaningful conversations with their mothers, making it feel more like a friendship, and both sides start the communication, which makes the daughters feel that the friendship is reciprocated. The second closeness discourse was parenthood. Daughters felt close to their mothers when they recognized that mothers are there to advise daughters, and that the advice they have is coming from experience, therefore it is much more appreciated

(Harrigan & Ott, 2013). The last discourse of closeness was independence. While daughters do want to have a friendship with their mothers, daughters actually felt closer to their mothers when they felt their mothers were giving them space, which also included less judgment from the mothers and withholding opinions (Harrigan & Ott, 2013).

Harrigan and Ott (2013) also found three discourses of distance. The first was containment; this occurred when the daughter felt the mother was trying to limit her independence and the connection/communication between the two felt excessive and was unwanted (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). This led to the daughter feeling more disconnected from her mother (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). The second discourse of distance was impropriety. This occurred when the mother violated “expectations of what constitutes appropriate motherly behavior” (Harrigan & Ott, 2013, p. 124). These inappropriate actions often stemmed from the mother’s emotional state (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). For example, Harrigan and Ott describe a situation where a mother was going through a difficult time and relied on her daughter for emotional support. This role reversal violated the daughter’s expectations and led to a sense of emotional distance (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). The last discourse of distance was separation, which is different from independence. For the daughters, experiences of separation occurred when they felt as if they were on their own both physically and emotionally, because daughters equated physical distance with relationship distance (Harrigan and Ott, 2013). For some daughters, they felt as if they could not be as close emotionally from a distance. This led the daughter to feel as if her mother did not understand what she was going through, or she could not rely on her mother for support (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). This also can stem

from the idea that mothers are typically regarded as the primary caregiver (Golish, 2000). The physical distance creates a sort of barrier and causes a decrease in closeness because of the increase in distance (Golish, 2000). This leads to the daughter feeling separated from her mother because she equates physical closeness with emotional closeness. From all six discourses, it was evident that college years are spent with the daughter changing her expectations of what a mother does and the role she plays (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). These discourses further support the idea that the college transition is messy and difficult. Based on this research, it is evident that there are many ways for mothers and daughters to adjust to the transition of the daughter going off to college and going through emerging adulthood.

Research Questions

It is clear from prior research that the mother-daughter relationship is complex, and changes in the relationship at the transition to young adulthood can be challenging. For instance, at this transition, openness is important (Golish, 2000). Golish (2000) mentions, “honesty, respect, friendship, and affections are especially important to well-functioning relationships” (Golish, 2000, p. 92). Having some level of open communication can be beneficial to parent-young adult relationships. On the other hand, having too much involvement can be frustrating. This was clearly evident in the discourses of closeness and distance Harrigan and Ott (2013) found. This adds to the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship because it is challenging to know when honesty is too much. For the transition to college to be successful, mothers and daughters will have to change how they communicate to one another.

Previous research indicates that mothers and daughters experience a change in their relationship when the daughter goes off to college. Emerging adulthood plays a

large role in college students' desires for independence and experimentation, as well as a strong desire for autonomy (Arnett, 2000). The previous research also indicates that there are many turning points that have an impact on closeness between a parent and child during the transition to college (Golish, 2000), with physical distance playing a role in how relationships change. Moreover, research on mother-daughter relationships highlights the complexity of the relationship (Miller-Day, 2008), and the way that discourses of relating influence daughters' sense making about the nature of the mother-daughter relationship in young adulthood (Harrigan & Ott, 2013). Drawing from a dialectical view of relationships, Harrigan and Ott revealed the complex ways in which closeness and distance may intersect in the experience of mother-daughter relationships. However, research that directly examines changes in communication processes at the transition to college as well as the sense making daughters do to understand the changing relationship has not been fully studied. In an attempt to address these issues, this paper examined the following research questions. The first research question considers turning points and the trajectory of change. Turning points are a useful way to conceptualize shifts in relationships across time; Golish (2000) examined changes in parent-young adult relationships, looking at both mothers and fathers. This study focuses on mother-daughter relationships and asks (RQ1), what are the trajectories of change in mother-daughter relationship closeness across the first year of college? Additionally, although some research has explored communication in mother-daughter relationships (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006), it seems like more research on this issue is warranted. Thus, the second research question (RQ2) asks, what were the important communicative processes involved in the changes in mother-daughter relationships? Finally, one aspect of the

transition to young adulthood that seems important in both research on emerging adulthood and mother-daughter relationships is physical distance. There is evidence that physical distance can improve young adult-parent relationships (Arnett, 2000) but also evidence that it may decrease closeness (Golish, 2000). Thus, the third and final research question (RQ3) asks, how do daughters make sense of physical distance in relation to emotional closeness in mother-daughter relationships?

Chapter Two: Methods

This study found interpretive methods to be the most useful. Interpretive methods are best used to understand interpersonal relationships, in this case, the relationship between mother and daughter. Qualitative data provides deeper insight in to an individual's experiences in the relationship through asking participants to explain and describe changes in the relationship and how they made sense of those changes. Qualitative methods work inductively – taking data and creating overarching themes from the data and linking them together. In this study, interviewing and having participants explain a turning point graph allowed the researcher to interact with the participants as one who wants to learn and understand their experiences. The interviews allowed the researcher to take the stories and explanations the participants gave and find the overarching themes that were stated throughout the interviews and trajectories that were given by the turning point graphs.

Participants

Participants were recruited for this project using snowball sampling. This meant that the researcher asked within her own social network who would be willing to participate in the study. Those participants would then ask their friends as well as identify others who might be eligible to participate. The researcher then contacted those people. A recruitment email was sent out to those who were willing to participate, and after respondents contacted the researcher, a time to conduct the interview with the participant was scheduled. In order to participate in this study, the participant had to be a female, currently enrolled in college, and with an ongoing relationship with her mother. She also had to be a sophomore in college or older. All participants read and signed an informed

consent form that had been approved by the researcher's institutional review board before beginning the interview.

A total of 13 participants were interviewed for the study. All participants were white, college females who were over the age of 18 and sophomores or older. Ages ranged from 18-22 years. All interviews were conducted in person and were recorded for transcription purposes. Of the thirteen participants, six were in-state students, and the remaining seven were out-of-state students.

Interview Protocol and Procedures

Interview protocol. An interview guide, created by the researcher, asked about the participant's relationship with her mother in high school, as well as various aspects of her relationship with her mom across the first year of college. The questions asked about how the relationship was in high school, and how the daughter felt about going away to college. Some of the questions that asked about the transition included the amount as well as topics of communication between the mother and daughter and any arguments that occurred between mother and daughter during the freshman year. Finally, the interview asked about changes in the relationship from high school to college and how participants viewed the relationship now. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to reflect on their experiences and to describe communication experiences with their mother.. The IRB protocol allowed participants to decline to answer any question that made them uncomfortable, but no one did. The interview guide was semi structured, allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions and clarification questions.

Procedure. When participants met with the researcher, the researcher gave each participant the consent form to read and sign. Participants were then given a turning point graph to fill out. Turning points graphs are a research technique used to study change

across time in relationships (Baxter & Bullis, 1987; Golish, 2000). For this technique, participants are presented with a graph where the vertical axis represents the levels of closeness, with 1 being “not at all close” and 10 being the closest. The horizontal axis represented the months during the participant’s first year of school, with an added point for two-three months before heading to college, and a point for the transition point to college, followed by one-month intervals. The participant would mark on a graph how close she believed the mother-daughter relationship was during the summer before she transitioned to college and when she transitioned to college. Then, the participant was asked to identify at least three points during the school year when the closeness increased or decreased. This graph was used as a starting point for participants to identify how their closeness changed across time during the first year at college. Once the participant filled out the graph, the researcher asked the participant to explain each of the closeness markers on the graph.

After discussing the turning point graph, the researcher began asking questions from the interview guide. These interview questions guided a more in-depth discussion of the mother-daughter relationship as it went from high school to the transition to college. The interview questions then covered the mother-daughter relationship during the daughter’s freshman year and ended asking about the current relationship. On average, interviews lasted twenty-five minutes.

Analysis Procedure – Interviews

All interviews were audio recorded. After finishing the interview process, the researcher began open-coding. This involved listening to all interviews to transcribe and catalog key phrases and quotes from each interview, making notes about each statement in terms of what it revealed about the mother-daughter relationship. Then, the researcher

looked at the key statements from interviews to identify categories within the data to develop a sense of the types of relational experiences that were important within the interviews.

Themes were then identified related to relational processes. The themes emerged out of three components – repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). Repetition is seen when key words or phrases are repeated verbatim (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). Recurrence is when different words express the same idea, and forcefulness is seen by changes in volume or tone in oral texts (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). By using these three criteria, the following themes were identified. The first theme found was communicating and shifting in relational control. The second theme was physical distance and what it meant to the daughter. The third theme was a change in the meaning of closeness.

Analysis Procedure – Turning Point Graphs

All participants were asked to connect their turning points in order to create a visual representation of the trajectory of closeness across the first year of college. For analysis, graphs were sorted according to overall trajectories. This created six groups of trajectories. The first was a linear pattern of increasing closeness across the first year. The second trajectory based on overall trajectory was a drastic decrease when the daughter returned home from school for the summer. The third trajectory was a “steady-state,” in which there was essentially no change in closeness across the first year of college. The fourth group of trajectories included graphs where there was a critical event during the daughter’s freshman year that led to a sharp increase in closeness, then the closeness returned to normal. The fifth trajectory found was a gradual decline in closeness. The

sixth and final trajectory also included a critical event during the daughter's freshman year, but it led to a sharp decrease in closeness, and then returned to normal.

Chapter Three: Findings

Turning Point Graphs

Turning point analysis allows researchers to examine the trajectories of relational change across time. Trajectories of relational change were inductively derived by inspecting the turning point graphs and grouping graphs together that revealed a similar trajectory of the change in the mother-daughter relationship across the first year of college. This examination revealed four trajectories of change. The first trajectory was that over the daughter's first year of college, there was a linear pattern of increasing closeness. Five of the thirteen (38.46%) participants reported this trajectory of relationship change. All of these women reported that one of the biggest changes they noted in their relationship is a change in the types of conversations they had with their moms. When asked how one participant believed she and her mom got closer, she said, "Our conversations were more meaningful, I guess, and like more insightful rather than just like small talk". Another participant said she liked talking to her mother more because "the details and depth of our conversations are probably more now than they were in high school. Our conversations were, like, different cuz they were more like conversations whereas, like, her being like, 'What are you doing today, have you done your homework?' kinda thing". She said she "felt closer because I felt like I matured when I was at school and then we, like, were able to talk about stuff that we wouldn't be able to talk about before". After beginning her freshman year in a fight with her mom, one young woman said that what ended up helping their relationship improve was having a conversation where, "It felt like we were talking as two adults and not like she was the parent and I was, like, the child". When asked what made her and her mom closer, this

young woman said that, “us having conversations that are, like, on a deeper level and not just, like, random” helped their relationship recover and grow.

The next trajectory, represented by two participants (15.39%), involved relationships that started around a mid-level of closeness with a critical event occurring during freshman year which sharply increased the level of closeness, after which closeness decreased slightly; this resulted in a trajectory in the shape of an inverted “V”. In both cases, they were events that happened to the mother. One daughter’s mom lost her job, and this led to the two of them seeing each other more because her mom “had a lot more time to see me,” and her mom “felt really nervous about it so she, like, liked to come up a lot and we would talk all the time”. Another participant’s mother lost her mother and was having a tough time dealing with the loss, so the mother “would, like, call me all the time and we would talk about it”. Later when the participant’s mother was struggling with the estate, the participant’s mother “would just want to call me all the time”. These two examples demonstrate how the mother daughter relationship can change to more of a mutual support system when the daughter is off to college. What is interesting to note is that this shift occurred fairly soon after the daughter went off to college.

The third trajectory involved a sharp decrease in closeness around the end of the school year. Two turning point graphs (15.39%) revealed relatively consistent closeness while away at school but drastic decrease in closeness when they returned home. One participant stated that she and her mom grew very close because “I was really homesick and missing her,” but then when she did go home, “it was awful, cuz I was living with my mom again”. What made the move back home difficult was having to switch from not

having to tell anyone plans, and then having to explain every plan to the participant's mother. As this participant stated, "coming all the way to Colorado and not having that anymore and then going back and just, like, you know...like, that's annoying to me". Another participant expressed that going back home was difficult because, "Since leaving home, I've kinda been able to see the bigger picture, and then I go home and it's like, my family just gets so wrapped up in like all these things and like, it's always so emotional". College allows students to have experiences they wouldn't have at home, which can sometimes make it difficult to return to a setting they previously lived in.

The fourth trajectory actually revealed "steady-state" relationships between daughter and mother. Two participants' turning point graphs (15.39%) revealed a virtually no change in closeness across the first year. Both participants believed their relationship with their mother's to be extremely close. Additionally, both participants claimed that their closeness with their mother decreased slightly because they didn't see them as often. As one stated, "After the first month I said it was like a nine and then went down to like an eight and then back up to a ten because that's when I went back home". This participant also explained how her and her mother's closeness went, "back down again just because I was here, and then back up just at the end of the year when I go back home". For this participant, emotional closeness depending on being physically close to her mother. The other participant explained a decrease in closeness due to her being "really wrapped up in myself – didn't really see her much". Spending time with her mother is what makes this participant feel that she and her mother are very close. For this participant, her father had passed away when she was in high school, which is what led to her closeness with her mother to be so high when she transitioned to college. For both

daughters, closeness varied only a bit across the year and did not drop down significantly. This suggests that if the relationship is strong and the daughter considers herself to be close with her mother before going off to college, there was not a lot of change that occurred in the level of closeness. The closeness stayed approximately the same.

It is important to note that one turning point graph (6.67%) showed a significant decline in closeness between the mother and daughter across the first year of college. This could be described as a linear decline trajectory, although it is difficult to assess because only one participant experienced this. For this relationship, the amount of closeness depended on whether or not the daughter needed her mother as a support system or not. When the daughter first moved to Colorado, she states, “We were relatively close...cuz I didn’t have any friends.” As the year went on, “I just didn’t really care. Cuz we didn’t talk! Like, I have always just thought of my friends as like my family”. The desired decrease in closeness from the daughter stemmed from the daughter having a boyfriend. As she puts it, “I had David and like, I didn’t really need her anymore”. However, “and then when we broke up it went up cuz I needed her again”. From this relationship, a relationship with her mother was viewed as using her mother as someone to have as support. However, the daughter was constantly trying to find people to replace her mother as that support system.

There was one more turning point graph (6.67%) that did have a critical event occur during the daughter’s first year, which led to a sharp decrease in closeness, and then the closeness was regained. It was an event that happened to the daughter when she got in trouble in the dorms. This led to a decrease in closeness because the daughter “had never been in trouble before, so we didn’t really know how to deal with it”. The novel

experience and uncertainty that came with it led to a decrease in closeness because it becomes difficult to regain the same closeness during a new experience due to the uncertainty of the situation leads to an uncertainty of how to act. However, working through the novel situation leads to a return of the closeness because the mother and daughter work through it together.

From these turning point trajectories, it is evident that for the most part, transitioning to college had a positive effect on the mother-daughter relationship. The largest percentage of participants said that the increase was, in general, gradual. Trajectories that had a critical event occur reveal that if the mother goes through the event, closeness seems to increase. If the event occurs to the daughter, closeness seems to decrease because of it but can rebound. Overall, relationships that started at a mid-point level of closeness ended at a higher level after the first year of college. Other trajectories are more complicated to make sense of due to small sample size.

Interview Analyses

In addition to the discussion of the turning point graphs with participants, interviews were conducted to better understand the experience of mother-daughter relationships. Interviews were different from the turning point graphs in a couple of ways. First, the turning point graph only asked about events that occurred during the first year of college. The interviews were more holistic in the sense that they gathered information about how daughters viewed the relationship over time and how they perceived the changes in the relationship. The goal of the interview analyses was to better understand how daughters experienced changes in the mother-daughter relationship as they transitioned into college and the communicative processes that they saw as

important to this shift. Additionally, the analyses sought to understand how daughters made sense of physical distance in relation to emotional closeness with their mothers.

After analyzing the data, three themes emerged. Themes were identified using three factors: repetition – repeating words or phrases verbatim, recurrence – different words expressing the same idea, and forcefulness – changes in volume or tone (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). The first was communication and shifting relational control, which included the daughter establishing autonomy, choosing to communicate, a change in advice giving, and a change in arguments. The second theme was physical distance, and what it meant to the daughter. Physical distance meant the daughter was more responsible for the relationship and was more aware of her influence on the relationship. The third theme was a change in the meaning of closeness. This included a change in the depth of conversations between daughters and mothers and a change in how daughters perceived mother's intentions.

Communication and Shifting Relational Control

Establishing Autonomy

The first theme found in the interview data was a shift in the relationship that involved a sense of autonomy on the part of the daughters. A number of participants explained that they gained a sense of autonomy from the relationship after going to college. One interesting aspect about this theme is that it occurred fairly quickly during the daughter's freshman year, and furthermore, it led to an increase in closeness.

When daughters were in high school, a majority of them said that they felt as if their mother was in control of the relationship. Meaning, it felt to the daughters like their mothers made the rules and they were to be followed; any deviation from what the mother expected was a problem. This seemed to be tied to the fact that daughters felt

their mother dictated their schedule; daughters also felt mothers told them what they could and could not do, and other things of this nature. As one participant stated, “She was always very, like, strict and protective I guess...like I had a curfew”. Another woman stated, “The fact that I was living at home, she made me feel guilty, saying ‘I need you to come home earlier, I can’t sleep unless I know you’re home’”. When asked what she and her mom disagreed on, a third woman said they disagreed on, “What I wanted to do with my life. She wanted to control everything. Like, she told me I – she would not pay for college if I came for dance”.

Participants who described their relationship in high school as one where their mother controlled, or tried to control, many aspects in the daughter’s life saw the transition to college as a way to establish autonomy. The woman whose mom made her feel guilty at home stated, “I wanted that freedom...living under rules is something I couldn’t handle. College has rules but it’s a lot more freedom and it’s really nice to not have to tell your mother where you’re going all the time or what you’re doing”. Another woman shifted the control of the relationship in terms of religion. She was raised religiously, and when she went off to college she chose to not attend church every Sunday as she previously did in high school. She would ask her mom, “‘why do I have to go?’ And then she’d get really upset with me”. Furthermore, this woman stated, “[My mom], you know, was trying to kinda, like, force me but she couldn’t really do that over the phone”. These changes created a shift in the relationship. When the daughter was in high school, she felt that the relationship centered about ensuring that daughters did specific things or followed house rules. Since these things were no longer central to the

relationship, the increased sense of autonomy daughters experienced created a space to feel like the relationship was less constraining and a site for more closeness.

Choosing to Communicate

Another way there was a shift in control of the relationship was seen as a change in communication between the mothers and daughters. When the women were in high school, they felt they had to talk to their mothers and see them essentially every day because they lived under the same roof; communication was related to practices and processes of living together. However, when the daughter went off to college, that changed, and the daughter gained control of not only how often she would talk to her mother or see her, but also what they would talk about. One woman stated, “I didn’t want to be in-state...it’s nice to be able to see [my parents] kinda whenever I want”. Another woman stated moving away helped her relationship with her mom immensely, because now when they communicate, “It makes me want to actually see her”. Another woman stated, “If I needed her she could come up”. Similarly, another in-state student liked that “CU is farther enough that I can see her when I want to see her”. Even out of state students discussed the ability to come home when they wanted. One woman said, “If I ever wanted to, I could go home”. These illustrate a change that in college, the daughters would choose to have their mom come up and visit, and furthermore, they would ask their mom to do so. This was an important change to the relationship because now the daughter can choose these interactions. The daughters realized that the amount and type of communication she had with her mother was now in her hands. The daughter believed that she could call her mother and ask to spend some time with her, and to the daughters it felt as if they were the ones who decided when they would see their mothers. There were no interviews in which daughters said that their mother came to visit as a surprise

because they missed their daughters. This demonstrates that the communication between the mother and daughter was a choice made by the daughter.

Shift in Advice-Giving

Another shift that was evident from interviews was that the types of conversations the mothers and daughters were having were different from the ones in high school, and that daughters perceived this to be the result of a difference in their own behavior. When the daughters transitioned to college, daughter felt that what changed was how their mothers offered advice, which impacted how the daughters chose to take it. For one participant, going to college allowed her to have more control over how she handled situations. “I knew, like, I would sort it out my own way instead of her telling me exactly how she would do it”. It helped that “she couldn’t really keep track of me,” which gave the participant the ability to listen to her mom’s advice, but in the end, she was able to choose how she would handle these issues. Another participant acknowledged, “I still ask her for advice on things and stuff, but, I know that she also asks me for advice too”. Here it is evident that giving advice has become a mutual aspect of the relationship, as opposed to just her mom giving the advice. Another aspect regarding advice that changed in college is that the daughter’s got to choose to ask for her mother’s advice more often, rather than just getting told regardless. When one participant went off to college, “usually when I was calling her, it would be for advice about something, whereas in high school I never really turned to her for advice that often”. It is evident that when a daughter heads off to college, changes in the relationship stem from a sense of autonomy that reflects reduced interaction around daily choices, a sense of increased choice in communicating with mothers, and a shift in the experience of advice seeking and receipt.

Change in Arguments

Another aspect of the changing relationship reflected a shift in how arguments emerged and were handled once the daughter was away at college. One change that occurred during arguments was that they would be resolved much quicker in college than they were in high school. As one young woman stated, “At home it’s easy to hold a grudge,” so in college the arguments “were probably resolved a lot quicker”. Another woman believed that if there was an argument, “it was like, really short and over with,” therefore “there was no need to resolve because it wouldn’t linger”. A few women regarded arguing as unnecessary simply because of the limited amount of time they would have with their moms. One woman said that when she would call her mom to talk, “We’re not gonna argue over the phone or over text...I know now it’s not really worth it”. Especially as an out-of-state student, talking over the phone is the primary way daughters communicate with their mothers. For the daughter, arguing over the phone takes time away from telling her mom about any exciting and new experiences that she is going through. This also leads to a change in closeness type because of the kinds of conversations they are having over the phone – they are conversations rather than arguments. Another participant discussed how arguments were less present when she would go home for breaks. “When you’re not with someone, you, like, see – you don’t have as much time, obviously, you know? So you don’t wanna – there’s not a reason to pick a fight when you only have ten days”. This shows a sign in a change in closeness because of the decision to have more quality time together with each other. Knowing that their time together is limited makes the time together that much more special. There is no need to diminish it over a petty fight.

Another change in mother-daughter arguments in college was that they were much less emotionally charged. Furthermore, the daughters often felt this change was both the result of the fact that communication involved technology and also related to how they approached things on which they disagreed with their mother. For one woman, fights “were a lot more aggressive in high school...we would scream and yell at each other all the time”. Now in college, “if we’re on the phone it’s like a lot more calm”. The daughter would “actually tell her what’s wrong” in college “instead of just leaving like in high school”. Another participant noticed, “Our arguments are probably a lot nicer in college because...I would watch what I was saying. Versus when I was at home I would just let loose, say whatever I want”. Having arguments over the phone helped daughters have calmer conversations. One participant noted that having an argument over the phone “taught me to calm down and think about what I wanted to say before I said it to her”. Having the option and also, “Knowing when to hang up on her, and not yell or say something stupid” helped this participant and her mother as well. This demonstrates that by changing how daughters argue with their mothers they were able to improve the relationship.

Distance Made Us Closer

Physical distance played a large role in the change in relationship between mothers and daughters. In nearly all cases (84.62%), participants reported that the distance helped improve their relationship. For many women, moving away made them appreciate their mothers more than they did in high school. One participant described it in the following way, “I can feel the distance, but it’s, like, always so much fun when I get to see her”. For her, going away makes coming home that much better. Distance also

helped daughters appreciate their moms more. “I just appreciate her, and I did not when I was a freshman. At all”. For another participant, distance made issues that seemed to take over the relationship disappear. As she states, “Distance helped. Those same problems over and over and over – all of a sudden they weren’t issues anymore cuz I was gone”. Physical distance made some realize how much their moms had done for them. One participant stated, “You start to realize like the way you are now is like, half the reason, like, because you were raised that way...you start appreciating everything you do have”. Another said, “The distance always makes you miss them more and realize how much they did for you...it just makes you more appreciative”. Physical distance seems to provide a chance for reflection for the daughters after they move away to college.

Another way that daughter perceived physical distance to have an impact on the relationship was by allowing them to change their view of the world. The first way this happened was related to the experiences college exposed participants to. For one participant, “Being in college my freshman year I was opened up to a lot more opinions about things...I think that helped me grow up a little bit”. Being exposed to different opinions and experiences helped participants see that there is a lot out there in the world, which helped them to mature. For many, being physically apart from their mothers forced them to become independent. For one woman, “Me being away from her I really learned how to be an adult on my own”. This was something she would not have achieved had she still been at home. Two participants chose to come to this school because it was so far away from their homes. One woman, “Just wanted to grow up. I wanted to become independent”. Even though she would often get homesick freshman year and she wanted to come home occasionally, “I can’t just drive there – but that also taught me to grow

up”. Another woman said that the responsibility that came with going far away to college, “Helped me really mature and that’s what made our relationship grow, cuz like, I became a lot more independent and we could, like, be friends instead of her telling me what to do”. This increase independence led to the daughter becoming more mature, which eventually led to her relationship with her mother becoming stronger and more of a friendship rather than strictly mother-daughter.

Another difference that physical distance made to the relationship was that the daughters realized they had more influence on the relationship than they had before. Participants realized they had to put more effort in to the relationship. One participant recognized, “The distance has also made us closer...just because we know that we don’t know every second of each other’s lives so we have to like, put in the effort”. Another participant didn’t feel that she was very close to her mother in high school because she wouldn’t tell her mom things about her life. But, when she went off to college, “I went to her for more things,” and she took the time to do so. Another participant stated that, “We just started to get closer because I was calling her more,” and she was taking the time to consciously reach out to her mom and tell her what was going on in her life. The increase in effort came from the physical distance that separated the mother and daughter.

Another way daughters had more influence on the relationship reflected a sense that they had realized what was truly important. When one participant was explaining arguments in high school versus college, she said, “In high school I always felt like I had to like, fight back, and like, like, stand my ground, whereas in college I’m just like, just call me later”. For this participant, petty fights didn’t seem as important anymore after being in college. Another participant who fought with her mom often in high school

realized that, “I try to be more understanding I guess now...I care a lot more about her and like what happens to her”. For this participant, the distance helped the daughter understand that her mom’s wellbeing is more important than trying to rebel and prove a point to her mom. One participant recognized, “When I was in high school it was all about me,” and now she admits, “I’ve taken a step back...when I think about my mom...I think of her as someone I really respect”. This participant realized her selfishness and was able to change this and therefore form a stronger relationship with her mother.

For daughters, moving away to college and having that physical distance meant to them that their mothers viewed them as more mature. One participant stated that she felt that her mom, “Realized, oh, you’re growing up and I have to, like, accept that,” which helped their relationship. For one participant, noticing this change in how her mother viewed her helped their relationship immensely. The participant noted, “That was our problem a lot – is that she always talked down to me and treated me like I was too young and I didn’t understand anything and I was never gonna grow up and, like, now it’s as if I’m an equal to her and it just – that’s why we get along a lot better”. Another participant thought that her mom, “She just sees me as more of adult and, you know, trusts that I’ll make the right decisions and things like that”. This made the daughter feel as if her mother believed her to be more mature, which helped their relationship. This belief led to an improvement in the relationship because it felt like the relationship had more aspects of a friendship rather than strictly parent-child relationship. Physical distance had an impact on the mother-daughter relationship when the daughter transitioned to college because it created this sense of maturity for the daughters, and they also felt that their mothers perceived them to be more mature as well.

Change in the Meaning of Closeness

The interviews revealed that the meaning of closeness in the mother-daughter relationship seemed to shift for participants from high school to college. When the daughters were in high school, they defined closeness as spending time with their mothers. One daughter said that her relationship with her mother in high school was “terrible”, and when asked if she would spend time with her mom at that point answered, “absolutely not”. On the other hand, in relationships where the daughter reported being close with their mom in high school, spending time together was seen as key. As one participant stated, “I think that’s also, like, why we’ve been so close just cuz she was so present”. Others framed it as having similar interests, which led them to spend time together doing those activities. As one woman stated, “We’ve always been very close – we’re very similar people, we like to do the same things”. For women who reported being extremely close with their mothers in high school, the fact that college forced them to physically spend less time together made the daughters feel as if their closeness decreased. One participant explained that her and her mother’s closeness went “back down again just because I was here, and then back up just at the end of the year when I go back home”. For this participant, her perception of closeness with her mother is physically being close to her.

When daughters transitioned to college, they had to adjust what it meant to be close with their moms. For a majority of the participants, this adjustment took form as changes in communication. Descriptions of these changes in communication centered on a change in the depth of the conversations. Every participant said that the conversations changed once they went off to college in the following ways.

Several participants saw this change as related to a change in their own approach to communication. As one participant said, conversations “are just based more around like, life in general” and daughters “know that she also asks me for advice too”, said another. Another participant said, “Our conversations were like more meaningful I guess and like, more insight, rather than just like small talk”. A third participant said she would “take the time and like, invest myself in to, like, talking to her for a bit instead of blowing her off”. Daughters stated that, “I was more respectful, you know? Knowing that, like, she had done all of this before” was one of the biggest ways they changed how they would talk to their moms.

However, the change also seemed to reflect a shift in how daughters perceived mother’s intentions. One participant said, I “just felt more comfortable telling her about what was going on. In high school I always felt like she was worried but in college she finally let go and gave me like – she trusted me making my own decisions”. Another participant, “realized that like, my mom’s not out to get me,” which made their relationship improve because there was a decrease in hostility from the daughter. In college, one participant understood that even though her mom would parent her at times, moving away, “Helped me kinda realize that, I dunno, that she’s gonna be there for me no matter what”. This led to the daughter to realize, “How good she is,” which is something she did not realize in high school. Another participant stated that, “I trusted that I was, like, able to talk to her more about anything and be open about even like hard topics to talk about, like, I wasn’t scared to – I wasn’t scared of her”. This made their relationship closer because the daughter was able to open up to her mother. Moving away to college created a shift in the meaning of closeness. Before, daughters perceived being

close with their mothers as spending time together and sharing similar interests.

However, being away from their mothers meant that daughters had to change what it meant to be close. For many, this meant having deeper conversations and putting more effort into conversations, as well as realizing that their mothers are not out to get them in trouble, but rather are going to be a constant source of support.

Chapter Four: Discussion

This paper examined the mother-daughter relationship as the daughter transitioned from high school to college and explored the changes that occurred within the relationship during this transition. It considered how mothers and daughters changed their communication with one another and how daughters perceived physical distance to have an effect on the relationship. It also examined how the meaning of closeness changed during college. Findings from turning point trajectories revealed that the most common trajectory was a steady linear increase in closeness. Interview findings revealed three major themes. The first theme revolved around communication and shifting relational control, and involved daughters establishing autonomy, choosing to communicate, a change in advice giving, and a change in arguments. The second theme related to physical distance and described how daughters felt more responsible for the relationship and more aware of their influence on the relationship. The last theme was a change in the meaning of closeness, involving a change in the depth of conversations and a change in how the daughter perceived her mother's intentions.

Communication and Shifting Relational Control

In this study, for nearly all participants, physical distance did not create a barrier to closeness; in fact, it aided in increasing a sense of closeness between the mother and daughter. Arnett (2000) stated that young adults with frequent contact with their parents or who live close to them physically tend to be the least close emotionally with their parents. Through both turning point graph trajectories and interviews, participants revealed that they believed their closeness increased when they moved away from their mothers, and furthermore, the type of closeness changed. Their closeness changed because daughters would communicate with their mothers more, but it was on their own

time. Both in-state and out-of-state participants reported that they were more aware of initiating communication with their mothers. This reveals that frequent contact with parents, by the daughter's choosing, can actually be related to an increase in closeness.

This study looked specifically at the transition from high school to college and how the mother-daughter relationship changes across the first year because of this transition. Emerging adulthood is a stage in a young adult's life that typically occurs when the child goes out to college (Arnett, 2000). This study is important to our understanding of emerging adulthood and changes in the parent-child relationship because transitioning to college can often be the starting point for this period of emerging adulthood. Previous research has shown how values, beliefs, work, and love can all be areas of change during emerging adulthood, as well as how there is a greater push for autonomy, increase in novel and risky activities, among other actions that occur during emerging adulthood. However, it does not look at the beginning stages and communicative processes of emerging adulthood. This project has looked at these two areas within the mother-daughter relationship. This project found that when the daughter transitioned to college, there were communicative changes that occur. The first change was that daughters felt they were more able to choose how and when to communicate with their mothers. The second change was that the daughters viewed their mother's advice differently, and they attended more to what their mothers had to say. The daughters felt their mothers did not give commands as often, but rather listened more and gave advice. Importantly, the daughters felt their mothers did not assume the daughter would take the advice.. Additionally, there was a reported change in how arguments took place. Daughters felt they were calmer and realized that their mothers were there for

support. These communicative changes align with Collin's expectancy violation model that Kenyon (2009) mentioned. When expectancies are violated, new ones must be created. When the daughters transitioned to college, the expectancies that were previously there were violated. Therefore, new expectancies must be created, and this was seen in the communicative changes that occurred between the mothers and daughters.

Physical Distance Made Us Closer

Physical distance played an important role in the changes within the mother-daughter relationship, and the findings of this study indicate that physical distance had a positive impact on the relationship. This contrasts with a study done by Golish (2000) which revealed that physical distance could cause a decrease in closeness because it created a sort of barrier between the mother and daughter. This was not the case in this project. This might have occurred because the majority of the turning point graphs (84.62%) started at a mid-level point of closeness, so there was room and opportunity for improvement. Or, it may reflect the fact that these participants perceived physical distance to create an opportunity for closeness to shift. Interestingly, there were two turning point graphs that did align with Golish's (2000) findings. They showed that when mothers and daughters start at a very high level of closeness there could be small declines in closeness across the first year of college. These relationships really reflect "steady-state" relationships, which align with the findings from Harrigan and Ott (2013) that stated daughters felt separated from their mothers when they lived away because these daughters equate physical distance with relationship distance, which was how these two participants felt about their relationship with their mother. This study revealed that physical distance can often lead to increased closeness in mother-daughter relationships,

and it may only create a barrier between the mother and daughter if they start out with a very high level of closeness. Those whose turning point graphs began at a midpoint level of closeness increased closeness across the first year of college.

This study also revealed how daughters perceived change in their role in their relationship with their mothers. While previous research has examined changes in the mother-daughter relationship during the daughter's time in college, there was no research on what role the daughter believed she played in producing this change. Harrigan and Ott's (2013) six discourses regarding dialectical tensions between a mother and daughter all focus on how the daughter perceived her mother's actions and how those then affected the daughter's view of the relationship. However, relational dialectics theory suggests there is a constant push and pull within the relationship and the process of relational change results from both partners. So, while we have previously seen how the mother's actions influence the relationship, we must now look at how the daughter's actions influence the relationship. This can be seen in this project's findings about how physical distance influenced the relationship. Participants stated that physical distance made them appreciate their mothers more than they did in high school, and they realized just how much their mothers do for them. They also realized what was important because they weren't able to see their mother every day. This made daughters want to treat their mothers with more respect. As some participants noted when they spoke about their mothers and how they could not see them as often, this change made them reflect back on high school and see how they treated their mothers. They realized that how they treat their mothers in college is different than how they treated their mothers in high school. Daughters realized that in high school they did not respect their mothers as much as they

do now in college, and they also would argue more in high school and not show their appreciation for their mothers like they do in college.

Daughters reported that they had this realization and reflection when they moved away, and it led to an improvement in the relationship because daughters changed how they thought of their moms. Physical distance also forced daughters to become independent much more quickly than they thought they would have if they were still living at home. Gaining this sense of independence allowed daughters to feel they were closer to their mothers. This reflects sense making about distance that seems to be related to the fact that many of the participants chose to move away from their mothers for college because they felt like they needed the distance to mature. Many participants felt that distance allowed them to gain independence and a sense of maturity; they felt their mothers gave less direction/parental advice and conversations became more personal. Daughters realized that they had to put more effort into their relationships with their mothers due to the increased physical distance. Participants stated that they would consciously reach out to their mothers while away at college. Daughters also recognized that they had to call their mothers more and tell them more about what was going on in their lives because they weren't with their mothers every day.

Meaning of Closeness

Turning point graphs were used as a starting point for this project in looking at the mother-daughter relationships across the first year of college. Four trajectories of change were found. In this study, the most common trajectory was a linear increase in closeness over time. A study done by Golish (2000) revealed that the most common trajectory for a mother and child relationship was a single major disruption, in which an event caused a significant decrease in closeness, but closeness was eventually regained. However, in this

project, single major disruption was evident in only 23.08%, or three, of the graphs, and two of the three actually led to an increase in closeness. In both of these cases, the events happened to the mother, with the mother relying on the daughter for support. This suggests that if the mother goes through a major disruptive event, it may lead to an increase in closeness. This finding contrasts with prior research by Harrigan and Ott (2013), which found that the role reversal of the mother relying on her daughter for emotional support violated the daughters' expectations. However, this project revealed that helping a mother through an event and providing emotional support can actually strengthen the relationship and lead to at least a temporary increase in closeness, because the daughter perceives this as a shift in the relationship from strictly a role relationship to a friendship.

Daughters noticed a change in the type of closeness they felt with their mothers once they transitioned to college. Harrigan and Ott's (2013) study revealed three discourses of closeness: friendship, where the daughters were able to relate to their mothers more as individuals; parenthood, where daughters realized mothers were giving advice based on experience; and independence, where daughters felt closer to their mothers because they felt mothers were giving them space, which included less judgment and withholding opinions. Interview data regarding the change in closeness showed responses that align with these three discourses of closeness. The most important aspect of the change in how the daughter perceived her mother's intentions. When daughters were in high school, they felt that their mothers were always worrying and didn't trust them. After daughters moved away to college, they felt as if their mother let go and wasn't trying to influence them as much. Daughters felt like they could open up to their

mothers, and they weren't afraid of being in trouble or violating expectations as much. This made the daughter feel more comfortable telling her mother about what was going on in college because of the decrease in judgment and opinions. Many participants stated that they felt that moving to college made them more mature. For the participants, becoming more mature meant that they felt more rational and were able to see other people's perspectives as well as their own. It seemed as if moving away provided a new perspective, which allowed her to have a different understanding of what she could/should talk to her mother about. Opening up to their mothers seemed to have the biggest effect on the change in closeness for the daughters. This occurred because of the daughter's change in perception of her mom. From a distance, daughters perceived that their mothers' intentions were different than they had thought in high school.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this project was that only daughters were interviewed, so the findings provide insight into only member of the relationship. Interviewing mothers would have allowed for insight from the mother's perspective on how the transition from high school to college went and how she dealt with the changes in the relationship.. It also would have been interesting to learn the mother's opinion regarding how the physical distance changed or influenced her daughter. It also would have beneficial to have the mothers fill out a turning point graph to learn how they perceived the trajectory of her relationship with her daughter across the first year.

Another limitation of the study was that daughters were reflecting on the experience, as opposed to tracking changes as they happened within the relationship. Furthermore, because of the nature of snowball sampling, all the participants had some

similarities in their experience of college. All the participants went away to college, so there was no data from women who live at home and go to college, or women who move away to work. This study also did not focus on the frequency of communication and how that affects the perception of closeness, but rather it looked at the quality of interactions. A future study that considers what affect frequency of communication has on the relationship would be useful.

Additionally, this study did not examine the events daughters believed had an effect on the level of closeness with their mothers. By only focusing on the trajectories, it limited the analysis that could have been done on the turning point graphs. Knowing the specific events daughters identified would have allowed for an analysis of how and why those events had an effect on the change in closeness. Furthermore, having mothers fill out a turning point graph and comparing both the trajectories and what events each believed had an effect on the relationship would have been beneficial. This would have allowed learning if mothers and daughters believe the same events have an effect on their level of closeness. One final limitation regarding turning point graphs was the small sample size meant was not possible to make clear claims about the trajectories that occurred infrequently. For instance, one participant reported a trajectory of declining intimacy across the first year of college. It would have been interesting to compare communication in relationships with this trajectory to communication in relationships with trajectory of increasing closeness. Future research with a larger sample could make such comparison possible.

Future research should examine the mother-daughter relationship if the daughter goes to college but still lives at home, thus eliminating physical distance as a factor for

change in the relationship. Because physical distance seems to play such an important role in the improvement of mother-daughter relationships, further research should look at what mothers and daughters do to improve the relationship when the daughter is not able to move away. Future research might also further study the differences between a major disruptive event happening to the mother versus the daughter during the daughter's college years, and the differences in perceived levels of closeness from both mothers and daughters in each case.

In conclusion, the mother-daughter is complex and multifaceted. The transition to college from high school is often a period of change for the relationship. This study suggests that physical distance plays a key role in whether the relationship improves and increases in levels of closeness. Physical distance also affects how daughters perceive the level of emotional closeness with their mothers. One important factor in mother-daughter relationship change was a shift in daughters' perceptions of how mothers spoke to them and a change in how daughters took responsibility to communicating in the relationship. Through analyzing daughters' discourses and turning point graphs, this project found several reasons for how and why daughters believe their relationship with their mother changed as the daughter transitioned from high school to college.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

*Tell me about each turning point on the graph

1. What was your relationship with your mother like in high school?
 - >Did you spend time together?
 - >What did you talk to your mother about? Not tell her about?
 - >Who was in charge of the relationship?
 - >How close would say you were?
 - >Tell me more about that
 - >What were some things you disagreed on?
2. How did you feel about going away to college?
3. College students have more freedom when they are away at college to make their own decisions and feel independent, but also have more responsibility. How did you feel about this?
4. Are you an in state or out of state student?
 - > Why did you choose to stay in state/go out of state?
 - >How did you feel moving away from home?
 - >How did you feel about the amount of distance between you and your mother?
5. How frequently did you talk to your mother during the first year of college?
 - >Was this more or less than you talked when you were in high school?
 - >How did you like talking more/less?
 - >Who initiated most of the texts or phone calls between you?
6. What topics did you and your mother typically talk about?
7. Did you have conflicts or arguments during the first year?
 - >Tell me about a conflict or argument you had
 - >Can you remember a specific conflict/argument?
 - >What about?
 - >Why do think it occurred?
 - >How was it resolved?
8. Did you and your mother have any ongoing conflicts or arguments? If so, what about?
9. How were conflicts or arguments with you and mom once you were at college different from any you had in high school?
10. Did you notice differences in how conflicts or arguments were resolved?
11. How do you think moving away affect your relationship with your mother?
 - >Describe any changes in your relationship?
 - >Was your relationship affected positively or negatively?
 - >Why do you think your relationship changed?

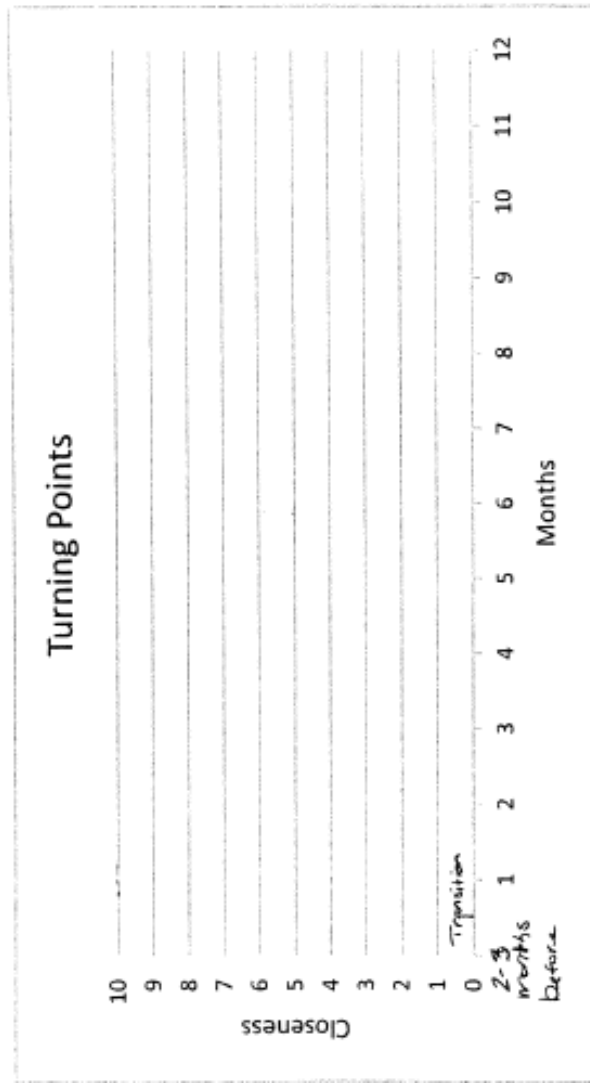
12. What changes did you notice in how your mom communicated with you across the first year?
13. What changes did you notice in how you communicated with your mom across the first year?

14. Would you say your relationship during college improved, stayed about the same, or got worse...?
15. Was there something that happened when you knew that your relationship changed in college?
16. What changes occurred between you two when you realized your relationship had changed in college?

17. How would you describe your relationship with you mother now?
18. Is that different than how it was during your first year of college?
19. How is it different from your relationship with your mother in high school?

Turning Point Graph

Parent-Young Adult Relationships



Begin by marking the level of closeness you felt toward your parent two to three months before leaving for college. Closeness here is defined as sense of connection, awareness of other's feelings/concerns, and your involvement in the relationship. Use the scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being a complete lack of closeness and 10 being extremely high closeness. Mark this by putting an X on the vertical axis of the graph marked closeness (in line with zero on the horizontal axis).

Next, mark the level of closeness you felt for your parent at the point you began college. Mark an X above the point on the graph marked Transition to College.

Now, at the end of the line for Time, mark an X that indicates the level of closeness you felt one year after beginning college.

Finally, go back and mark in each event or experience that could be considered a turning point in the relationship—a memorable event or experience that impacted the relationship. Make an X for each event that shows when the event occurred and the level of closeness you felt at the time of the event. **Please identify at least three turning point events.** Then, give a brief description of each event. Before you turn in your graph, draw lines that connect each of the X's you marked so we can see the trajectory of the relationship.

IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
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APPROVAL

03-Dec-2014

Dear Nina Patrikyan,

On 03-Dec-2014 the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Submission:	Initial Application
Review Category:	Exempt - Category 2
Title:	Mother-Daughter Relationship Transition to College: Physical Distance and Communication
Investigator:	Patrikyan, Nina
Protocol #:	14-0726
Funding:	None
Documents Approved:	Protocol; Interview Guide; Turning Point Graph; Consent Form; Recruitment Email;
Documents Reviewed:	HRP-211: FORM - Initial Application;

The IRB approved the protocol on 03-Dec-2014.

Click the link to find the approved documents for this protocol: [Approved Documents](#). Use copies of these documents to conduct your research.

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the [INVESTIGATOR MANUAL \(HRP-103\)](#).

Sincerely,
Douglas Grafel
IRB Admin Review Coordinator
Institutional Review Board