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University of Northern Colorado  
Greeley, CO

THE FOUR-BLOCK JOURNEY: ATTENDING COLLEGE IN YOUR HOMETOWN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for  
Graduation with Honors Distinction and  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Madeline Azari

Thesis Advisor: Matthew Birnbaum

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

May 5, 2018

THE FOUR-BLOCK JOURNEY: ATTENDING COLLEGE IN YOUR HOMETOWN

PREPARED BY:

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Madeline Azari

APPROVED BY:

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Matthew Birnbaum

HONORS DEPT LIASON:

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Matthew Birnbaum

HONROS DIRECTOR:

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Loree Crow

*RECEIVED BY THE UNIVERSITY THESIS/CAPSTONE PROJECT COMMITTEE ON:*

05/05/2018

## ABSTRACT

Hawthorne High School sits approximately four blocks away from Rocky Mountain University in Hawthorne, CO. The University attracts multiple Hawthorne graduates each year, and in return, the city and the University aid in financing and aiding these students on a path towards a bachelor's degree. Due to Hawthorne's agricultural background and diverse multicultural demographics, the attendance of students from Hawthorne (a high school of about 1,500) at Rocky Mountain University (a school of about 12,000) remains a phenomenon for students in these types of communities. In association with the relationship that the high school, community, and the University share, this phenomenological study uncovers themes explored from the lived-experiences of attending college in your hometown. Between 10-15 Hawthorne High School graduates—who consider Hawthorne, CO as their hometown—participated in either an interview or a focus group. The interviews and focus groups addressed topics relating to the lived experiences of these students, including the topics of identity development, success at Rocky Mountain University, and the relationship to community through college. To better analyze the responses of the participants, the responses were split into categories based on Marcia Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship. The participants involved in the study helped in clarifying the successes, downfalls, and surprises of attending college in one's hometown so that future students and researchers in higher education and student affairs can understand the influential experiences that could help or hinder a student's success through this phenomenon. With little research or literature regarding the phenomenon of students attending college in their hometown, this study remains crucial in accessing information that has not yet been uncovered. The research acquired in this study also acts as a catalyst for directors and staff in various enrollment departments through Universities (including Housing, Admissions, Orientation, etc.) to harness a foundation of understanding for future enrollment of students from these populations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Every year, millions of high school seniors endeavor into the tough task of deciding what lies beyond the high school diploma: work, travel, trade school, or college. If post high school decision trends continue, of the 3.6 million high school students who graduate in 2017-2018, about 70% of those students will attend some sort of college education immediately post-graduation (National Society for Educational Statistics). Of the students who choose the college route, researchers in the field of Higher Education and Student Affairs desire to understand why students select the colleges they do and what types of experiences students receive from their institution. Additionally, practitioners in the field of Student Affairs desire to provide students at their institution opportunities to grow in their identity development; understanding a student's experience or trends in the student experience help practitioners provide students opportunities for growth. This study operates as a potential catalyst for higher education practitioners in understanding the student experience of students who attend college in their hometown.

To best understand the components that influence college selection and identity development for college students, the need to understand how and where a student goes to school and journeys through school remains critical. Therefore, this study's basis lies on the interest of students who attend college in their hometown, how this population selects college in their hometown, and what lived experiences this population gains while attending college in their hometown.

The purpose of this phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of students of attending the college in their hometown. Because of this study's broad nature, narrowing down the population critically influenced the reactions that can arise from the

topic. This study specifically targets a specific population of students who attend a specific university. This study aims to explore the lived of attending college in one's hometown, while also understanding whether or not identity development remains impacted in any way by an individual's experience of attending college in their hometown.



## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To dissect the topic of attending college in one's hometown, four components influenced the review of literature: how one selects a college or university immediately post high school graduation, why students may attend a hometown college, the current assumptions of attending college in one's hometown, and how the Theory of Self-Authorship showcases identity development. Because there remains little literature written or published on attending college in one's hometown, this literature review aims to interweave various components of college selection and development of identity through the college experience, and what factors may help or hinder the college experience of someone who attends college in their hometown.

### **Selecting a College or University**

When choosing which college to attend, many students utilize the “Fit Assessment” (Bohannon, 2013). The Fit Assessment can further help students establish precisely what the desire to gain from a higher education institution. Sample elements on the “Fit Assessment” include Location (“How far are you willing to travel? Does climate matter? Do you prefer urban or a rural setting? How often can you afford to come home once you're there?”), Living Arrangements (“On campus? Off campus? At home? In a sorority or a fraternity?”), or the Importance of financial aid (“Do you need to apply for scholarships and/or financial aid? If so, how much? Will staying in state keep costs down?”) (Bohannon, 2013). Many of the elements of the Fit Assessment require students to process various elements of which college will be suitable for them—many elements that address whether or not a student should consider attending a school close in proximity to their current location (possibly a hometown university).

### **Why a Student May Attend a Hometown College**

In analyzing this topic, dissecting the base elements of why students would choose to attend college in their hometown. Choosing to attend college after high school remains a large decision for many students in the United States every year. There remains a large decision-making process when many students endeavor into the task of selecting the school that they will potentially call home for the next four years. Alice Kleeman, college information specialist at Menlo-Atherton High School in California, notes, “the most competitive and highly selective colleges are not always the best or the most appropriate choices for all students” (Bohannon, 2013). Kleeman’s support perpetuates the notion that many students do not aspire to attend highly competitive schools—in many cases Ivy Leagues—which may, in return, influence students to attend less competitive schools closer to home.

To address a specific example of the Fit Assessment in relation to a specific population, the literature gathered for this review focuses on a specific city that’s demographics align closely to the city addressed in the study. Greeley, CO houses a large population of individuals who identify in the Latin/x community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau of QuickFacts, Greeley, Colorado contains a population of 36% Hispanic or Latino population. With a large population of Latin/x individuals, some of which are students in the public schools, many of these students will consider attending a post-secondary institution. In relation to a student who identifies as Latino/a, choosing a college can remain influenced largely on location. “According to a study conducted by Santiago and Cunningham (as cited by Muniz, 2006), a primary reason for college-bound Latinos in selecting a college to attend is the proximity of the institution to the student’s

home.” (McCorry-Andalis, 2013). However, in her article *Where Hispanics go to College*, Marilyn Gilroy notes that “some of the obstacles to degree completion [for Hispanic students] include family obligations, not having the financial means to afford college, and lack of English proficiency required to do college level work.” (2012). To further Gilroy’s perspective, Catie McCorry-Andalis illuminates the effect that the obstacles of family obligations, financial strain, and lack of English proficiency may have on a student’s experience in college: According to Santiago and Cunningham’s study, “families of Latino students contribute on average \$1,000 or less to their student’s college tuition causing students to work when not in class, possibly preventing them from being as engaged as they would like on a college campus” (2013).

However, while some Latino/a students may feel compelled to stay close to family as they journey into college, college proximity in relation to a student’s community does not remain a large part of how students select schools. In their study *Where Colleges are and Who Attends*, Anderson, Bowman and Tinto emphasize that “propensities to attend college are spread by many influences, but college proximity is among the least influential factors bring about the diffusion of college going among members of a community” (1972). In fact, when evaluating the narrow margins of where to go, “both low-cost tuition and the elimination of ability constraints on entry are more relevant than school location to those youth who are at decision margins.” (Anderson, Bowman, Tinto, 1972).

### **Assumptions of Attending College in Hometown**

The literature regarding college selection points towards the necessity to understand how students select college, but not necessarily what the effects of attending

these schools mean. In regards to the effects of attending college in one's hometown, more literature must be observed. Unfortunately, the literature available for observation regarding the effects of going to college in one's hometown remains sparse. However, there remain personal accounts of the benefits of attending college in one's hometown. In his article *The Benefits of going to College in your Hometown*, Jacob Jewell articulates that attending a school out of state from one's home state could potentially put a student at a disadvantage: "college is pretty competitive and a home court advantage adds real value to any competitive endeavor" (2016). Jewell's address of this idea may resonate with many students attending college in their hometown. Being in a familiar community already advances the success of a student: the student may already have opportunities in relation to networking that many out-of-state or out-of-town students may not have access to. In fact, polishing already-established networks in one's hometown could potentially lead to national success. Jewell iterates that "rebasing [his] education offered [him] more national opportunities than [he] had at a well-known, nationally recognized school..." (2016).

Furthermore, attending college in one's hometown may ultimately lead to a less expensive option. "According to the College Board, the average cost of room and board at a public university was \$9,804 last academic year. Being a commuter alleviates these expenses. This opens up a floodgate of opportunities for around \$9,804 worth of college experiences..." (Jewell, 2016). With a large rise in tuition and fees, many colleges that offer in-state tuition could suit students better than paying a larger sum to attend college out-of-state. In fact, attending college in one's hometown could lead to scholarship opportunities. "[In 2007] out of the 2,250 incoming freshman, 60 came from Greeley

schools.” (Casey, 2008). However, Casey continues, “Part of a multi-pronged effort to revive lagging enrollment, UNC added \$2.3 million to the next year’s scholarship pool and is reworking scholarships to target students of greatest need. The university [in 2007] invited hundreds of eight-graders from Greeley-Evans School District 6 to spend a day on campus visiting with students and faculty.” The Greeley Promise Scholarship shines as a promising example of hopefully aiding students in paying for college. The University of Northern Colorado has awarded an inaugural set of scholarships... to 111 students graduating from Greeley high schools...” (First Greeley, 2009). “The Greeley Promise will provide annual funding up to the full cost of tuition, fees, books, for 2009 graduates of Greeley high schools who attend UNC.” (New Scholarships, 2008).

Achievement in academics could potentially be another effect of attending college in one’s hometown. In their study regarding high school cohorts journeying to college together, Fletcher and Tienda discovered that “students with larger high school peer groups upon entering college outperform their counterparts with fewer coenrolled classmates and are more likely to remain enrolled after four semesters” (2009). If multiple students attended high school together and then proceeded to accompany each other to the college in their hometown, what might the results be of this event?

Many of the primary questions that I will pursue through my research have not yet been addressed through literature. However, gaining an understanding of the context from which most of the research might generate can potentially suit my further inquiries.

### **Theory of Self-Authorship in Identity Development through College**

Marcia Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship operates a lens for understanding how students develop their identity through college and stands as a

framework for understanding the results of this study. "Robert Kegan and Marcia Baxter Magolda define Self-Authorship as a holistic meaning-making capacity. Self-Authorship is characterized by internally generating and coordinating one's beliefs, values, and internal loyalties, rather than depending on external values, beliefs and interpersonal loyalties. Self-authoring individuals take internal and external responsibility for their thinking, feeling, and acting" (Baxter, Creamer, Meszaros, 2010. p. 4). Because understanding how students grow through their identity development in college, it is also critical to understand whether or not attending college in their hometown acts as help or a hindrance to their identity development.

Kegan and Baxter Magolda set up a fluid structure for understanding how students venture through self-authorship in college. The first phase of the formula, Following Formulas, means that a student will, "rely on formulas for what to believe, how to construct their identities, and how to guide their social relations. They tend to privilege others' perspectives, to define themselves in ways that others will see as successful, and to act in relationships to gain others' approval" (Baxter et al., 2010, p. 12). In this aspect of self-authorship, the individual abides by what they know to be true; they follow the formula of what they already know and they stray from challenging the process. For instance, if a child grows up as Christian, they may choose to continue following the formula of Christianity rather than challenging the process and accepting a new religion. Influences on the child (either from parents, friends, etc.) may influence their own course—privileging others' perspectives over their own.

However, when a child chooses to challenge the process or chooses to start generating a new belief process, the student then approaches the second structure of Self-

Authorship: The Crossroads. The Crossroads acts as "the transitional space between relying on external formulas and achieving self-authorship... This phase is characterized by meaning-making in the transition between the socialized mind and self-authorship" (Baxter et al., 2010, p. 12). In this structure, students may stray from the predisposed ideas they were taught to follow throughout their life. Students may start asking several questions about their identity and may start privileging their own perspective more than the perspective of others. For instance, if the student from the example earlier begins to question whether or not they actually want to practice Christianity, or whether they might be more atheist than question, the student ventures in to The Crossroads of choosing or changing their ideology.

After approaching the Crossroads and navigating through various routes in affirming or changing beliefs, a student will enter the phase of Self-Authorship. Baxter, Creamer, and Meszaros note that an individual becomes self-authoring "when internal authority moves to the foreground to mediate external influence" (2010, p. 14). When an individual gains the ability to make their own decisions or solidify their beliefs through internal decisiveness rather than external influence, the individual becomes the author of their own story. For instance, if an individual approaches the crossroads struggling with their religion (not knowing if they want to remain Christian or explore other options), but then the student definitively decides to stick with Christianity regardless of any external influence (parents did not intervene, etc.), then the individual becomes the author of their own life. Adjacently, if an individual approaches the crossroads struggling with religion and decides, on their own without any external influence, that they will pursue Buddhism, then the individual also becomes the author of their own life. In creating the Theory of

Self-Authorship, Marcia Baxter Magolda produced a longitudinal study in which she interviewed a series of participants throughout their development in Higher Education. Upon compiling responses, "Baxter Magolda (identified) three elements within self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments" (Baxter et al., 2010, p. 15).

In developing an internal voice "Baxter Magolda's participants described a point at which they realized that although reality was beyond their control, they could control how they reacted to it. (The participants) recognized that they were responsible for interpreting experiences that happened to them by using and coming to trust their internal voices to decide how to feel and react" (Magolda et al., 2010, p.16). For example, if a student encounters a choice of religion at The Crossroads, and they decide to pursue Buddhism instead of Christianity, their internal voice may help them in times of questioning. The student may recognize that while their family's opinion in the choice of religion operates beyond the student's control, but the student possesses the internal voice to reassure them that their choice in their specific religion remains their responsibility to choose.

In her study, Baxter Magolda also identified "Developing an Internal Foundation" as a second portion of Self-Authorship. Developing an internal foundation "involve(s) embracing one's personal characteristics and sense of self as a cornerstone for developing a philosophy for life" (Magolda et al., 2010, p.16-17). For example, for a student who has reestablished a new religion in the face of differing religions that their family practices, the student become a self-author when they identify that they align with their own perspectives rather than a familial perspective. Another example might lie in a student



who uses college as a time to discover their own racial identity that parents have shied away from acknowledging during the student's childhood. For instance, if a student identifies in a Latin/x community, but their parents did not want to have the student learn about their identity as a child, the student might use college as a time to discover more of their culture or ethnicity. If the student, at The Crossroads, decides to reaffirm their culture or ethnicity and create more meaning-making out of their identity, they become the author of their own life by developing that identity as an internal foundation.

Lastly, in the phases of Self-Authorship, Baxter Magolda identifies securing internal commitments by recounting, "(the participants) articulated another shift: one from holding convictions in their minds to holding them in their hearts. They described this as stemming from living one's convictions so that they became second nature" (Magolda et al., 2010, p.18). In this portion of Self-Authorship, the identity that the student has accepted starts to become second nature and fully engraved in who they are as a person. The student may not even acknowledge that they must think fully about accepting the identity—instead, the identity that they have accepted has become a way of their life. For instance, if a student develops their own religious identity as Buddhism, the student may start to acknowledge aspects of Buddhism practice in their own life to the extent that they forget that they are actually practicing the religion. In another perspective, a student who identifies as transgender may fully accept their new gender fully, like second nature; they may hold the gender so strongly in their hearts that the gender forms into a conviction rather than a continuous, conscious thought.

## METHODOLOGY

Due to the specificity of this study and the nature of the types of observable populations, the methodology for this study remained compact and specific. Therefore, this thesis works strictly as a Phenomenological study: because the populations explored in this study are specific, the results of this study should only apply to populations of similar demographics.

Before calling for participants, this study received IRB-approval (see Appendix B) in August of 2016. The approval from IRB outlined that the study could release names of participants upon participant request, and the study could specify the specific name of the high school the participants attended, as well as the name of their University. However, to best safeguard participant involvement, this study reflects pseudonyms for participants, the high school, and the University. Additionally, any replication of this study or oral presentation of this study also incorporates pseudonyms.

The thirteen volunteer participants in this study call the town of Hawthorne Colorado their hometown, where all participants attended and graduated from Hawthorne High School. Upon graduating from Hawthorne High School, all participants then attended Rocky Mountain University for Higher Education. Hawthorne High School houses around 1,400 students, contains a 70% Minority Enrollment Rate, reaches around 70% Free/Reduced Lunch, and contains a 20:1 student to teacher ratio. Rocky Mountain University, which sits around four-blocks away from Hawthorne High School, houses around 9,500 undergraduate students, contains over a 30% Undergraduate Minority Enrollment rate, serves 60% First Generation, Low Income, or both, and contains an 18:1 student to teacher ratio.

Participants volunteered for the study after the researcher privately messaged participants via email and Facebook. Additionally, the researcher reached out to Hawthorne High School and spoke to the school counselor to retrieve contact information of students who attended Hawthorne and transitioned to Rocky Mountain University. The researcher desired to reach a goal of 20 participants, but only reached thirteen. Additionally, after further investigation, some participants did not match the criteria for the study (either they did not consider Hawthorne their hometown, or they did not ultimately graduate from Hawthorne High School). Therefore, the results from this study incorporates eight participant responses.

To gather participant responses, the researcher devised a list of questions (see Appendix C) regarding college experience and identity development through college. The researcher completed two focus groups with two individuals in each group, and completed four admissible interviews. The focus groups and interviews spanned about 30 minutes to an hour, and all interviews or focus groups occurred within a three-month span from Midterms to the end of a semester. Before each interview or focus group, the researcher required signatures on IRB-related releases, specifically noting that the individuals would sign a document and verbally consent to recording of the interview for transcription. (See Appendix A). The researcher verbally expressed and provided written documentation that the participant may revoke their participation at any time, as well as strike their narrative from the study up until the April 1, 2018 submission date. After agreeing to IRB approval and recording of interview, the researcher then started to ask questions and gather information about the lived experiences of attending college in one's hometown.

Participants who volunteered for this study came from various backgrounds and experiences, and identities:

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Year/Grad Status</b>	<b>First Generation</b>	<b>Lived in Halls/Off Campus</b>	<b>Parent working on campus</b>
Jill	Female	2015 Alum and current Graduate Student	No	Lived at home	No
Charlie	Male	Senior	No	Lived in halls 1st Year, then moved off campus to apartment	Yes
Sabrina	Female	Junior	Yes	Lived in halls 1st Year, then moved home	No
Rachel	Female	Junior	No	Lived in halls 1st Year, then moved home	No
Yvette	Female	Freshman	Yes	Lived in halls 1st Year, then moved home	No
Kathy	Female	1979 Alum	No	Lived at home every year	No
Madi	Female	Senior	No	Lived in halls 1st Year, moved off campus to apartment, then moved home	Yes
Michael	Male	2017 Alum and Current Graduate Student	Yes	Lived at home 1 <sup>st</sup> year, then lived off campus in apartment	No

After interviewing participants, the researcher then transcribed each interview and recorded similar themes or ideas in each interview. The researcher completed a general search for common words by conducting a “Find” in the documents. The researcher looked for similar words, such as “hometown,” “money,” “home,” “identity,” “parents,” “friends,” “scholarships,” “college,” etc.

After gathering themes and common associations in the interviews, the researcher then properly destroyed all recordings on the recording device via proper destruction per IRB regulations. Upon submission of this thesis, the researcher will properly destroy all materials associated to the participants.

## RESULTS

In understanding the results, the researcher created separate categories to display common themes. The categories include “Remaining Close to Family or Home,” “Living at Home,” “Finances and Cost,” and “Discovery of Self.” To evaluate and understand the findings, the researcher also related the specific excerpts from the interviews to the Theory of Self-Authorship.

### **Remaining Close to Family/Home**

When adventuring into the concept of attending college in one’s hometown, understanding if a student’s home in proximity to campus acts as a negative or positive—does living in your hometown, does living close to home act as a helpful situation or a hindrance. Throughout the study, many participants echoed that remaining close to home acted as a positive experience rather than negative. In an interview with Rachel, who lived in the residence halls her first year, she articulated that remaining close to home helped her in times of stress: “It’s nice to have your family around you. When I had [a] problem with my roommate... I didn’t move out immediately because there wasn’t anywhere for me to go, so I stayed at home for a little bit while things simmered down.” For Rachel, remaining close to home helped her deal with stressors, while her parents also gave her the freedom to handle the situations on her own: “My parents were always supportive, but at the end of the day, they let me figure my problems out by myself.” The agency that Rachel was able to explore during times of stress, while also having a support system nearby, helped her in being able to grow and navigate life experiences on her own.

Similarly, Jill, a current Graduate Student at Rocky Mountain University, echoed that staying close to home does not correlate to a lack of involvement. In the interview, Jill emphasized the “securing internal commitments,” portion of the Theory of Self-Authorship by illuminating her passion and love for music. In asking Jill if she feels as though remaining close to home made her feel less involved, she stated, “I don’t [feel a lack of involvement] at all. Another part of my life is that I am really big into live music... I go to shows all the time. My family doesn’t mind because it’s what I like to do. I have like a multitude of other friends that I’ve met through work in music. And, I haven’t been held back at all.” Jill’s ability to recognize her love for music and attending shows displays her ability to secure her internal commitment to music. Additionally, she expresses that she does feel less involvement by living in her hometown—Jill still follows her desires and aspirations.

Some participants noted that they have a parent who worked on campus. In an interview with Charlie, whose parent works in the hall directly adjacent to the hall where Charlie takes classes in and studies in, Charlie expressed that establishing boundaries with his father remained the best way to attend school without feeling too awkward about seeing his father on campus. Charlie stated:

Well my dad said, he's not gonna come see me. If I want to see him, I can go over and talk to him, so it was nice that I don't get just get bombarded. He does joke every once in a while, like “Oh, I saw your bike, it's good that you're getting to class and stuff,” but he usually just jokes around and doesn't try to overload me.

For Charlie, maintaining boundaries with his father helped in Charlie not feeling bombarded by his father’s presence. Charlie’s ability to establish his own sense of self

even though his father worked in the building adjacent to the building Charlie studies in relates to Charlie's development of his internal voice in relation to the Theory of Self-Authorship.

### **Living at Home**

For many students who attend college in their hometown, living at home may act as a cost-effective option. However, in many of the interviews, participants expanded on more elements in living at home than just the benefits of saving money. For Jill, living at home meant that she could keep a close relationship with her parent: "I have a great relationship with my parents. I could see how other people would not [want to live at home], but my parents are really cool. I mean we don't always get along, but, for the most part, we get along well. They're like my roommates."

Rachel echoed a similar experience after living on campus her first year and moving home afterwards. For Rachel, she needed to establish boundaries because she wanted to feel like an adult: "At first it was weird [moving back home]. I mean, I had to live with my parents again. But we laid out ground rules and they respected the fact that I'm still a college kid, so the adjustment was quick. I still feel just as connected to campus as I did when I lived there." Rachel's ability to identify her needs as a person by establishing boundaries relates to the "internal voice" aspect of the Theory of Self-Authorship. Rachel's reality was beyond her control because moving home was beyond her control. However, her ability to recognize her situation and her ability to have control over her emotions and her outlook allowed her to become the author of her own life.

For Madi, however, moving back home with her parents after living off campus for three years did not quite have the same impact on her: "You know, it kind of sucks



because I'm used to living with regular roommates, but it's so nice because I'm saving money..." Madi did not explore the same outcome in living at home that Rachel and Jill shared, but Madi was able to identify the positive component of saving money while in school.

### **Finances and Cost**

For many students who choose to attend college in their hometown, as reflected in the literature review, cost remains the largest contributor. Because attending college in one's hometown opens many opportunities for community scholarships, financial aid, and in-state tuition, many students that exit Hawthorne High School choose Rocky Mountain University for affordability. As reflected in Sabrina's interview, "I think [cost] is one of the main reasons I chose RMU is because my financial aid was set here, I didn't really set it up anywhere else... I think that's what really attracted me to RMU was the scholarship and I knew that it was gonna help me." Yvette, another participant, echoed a similar perspective in regards to the wealth of scholarships that Rocky Mountain University offers Hawthorne High School students:

On top of the one that we got from high school which provides \$3,000 for four years, the (other local scholarship) gives \$2,000 every year... And just little scholarships I found along the way in this little town were helpful, and although they don't cover everything... I didn't pay as much as any other University would make me pay.

Taking into consideration the two view points from Sabrina and Yvette, these two students may experience more hindrance in their potential Self-Authorship. Because the

two students remained so greatly impacted by the wealth of money offered to them, they may be impacted more by their external influences than by their internal motivations.

However, Charlie, while also motivated by the wealth of money offered to him to attend Rocky Mountain University, decided to also follow his internal voice in attending Rocky Mountain University. “The biggest reason I chose Rocky Mountain University is that they have a good business school which I was interested in, and also a big thing for me I got free tuition here 'cause my dad works here,” Charlie stated. Even though he receives free tuition at Rocky Mountain University, Charlie also decided to attend Rocky Mountain University because of his interest in the Business School. His internal voice allowed him to become the author of his own life.

### **Discovery of Self and Discovery of Community**

In each interview, each participant echoed similar notions about the construction of their identity or the construction of their perceptions regarding their hometown. Each student displayed a sense of Self-Authorship in their response, articulating how they each have shaped their own perspectives.

Madi articulated how her journey off and on campus is respected by community members just as much as college personal: “Rocky Mountain University is its own little bubble inside of Hawthorne and so when you’re here, you’re a college student. But you can still go off campus and be recognized as a college student.” Madi’s elaboration regarding the ability to maintain status on and off campus showcases her ability to establish an internal foundation; she understands her identity and, therefore, she is able to remain transparent with her identity on campus an off campus.

Michael brought forth the notion that attending college in his hometown has helped him in building friendships: “(People) have asked me about the local places, like where to go for certain things, especially people who haven’t lived here very long ask me for local stuff. Those people end up becoming some of my best friends because I meet them randomly and then we just get along well.” Michael later stated, in response to his perspective, “I guess knowing where things are have helped me in knowing that I know my little town more than I thought... I kinda like this place.” Michael’s contribution regarding his hometown advantage showcased the internal commitment to his town; for Michael, it is second nature to offer up suggestions where people should go, and, as a result, he learned to like the place he grew up.

Sabrina illuminated in her interview that attending college in her hometown strengthened her sense of community with Hawthorne: “No, my community didn’t weigh me down at all as I went to Rocky Mountain. I think the other way. I think it strengthened it, a lot. People will be like, ‘Oh, you’re from Hawthorne?’ And I’ll be like, yeah, I’m from here. I love Hawthorne.” In an earlier portion of Sabrina’s interview, she stated that she did not know if she wanted to attend Rocky Mountain initially because of the placement in her hometown. Her perspective at the start of the interview highlighted her past self at The Crossroads—not secure in what she wanted to attend Hawthorne due to preconceived notions. However, as she articulated in her perspective regarding Hawthorne, Sabrina displayed her internal commitment to the town: “I love Hawthorne.”

Yvette, similarly to Sabrina, showed a similar perspective in relation to developing a love for her hometown:

I think in high school I hated Hawthorne because it's Hawthorne and everyone always gives it a bad rap. Now that I'm in college, when someone's like "it sucks," I'm like listen, "this is my town. Leave it alone." I think the town is more community-based and it kind of gives me that sense of home. If I go out of town to the (nearby city), and I come home and see the Hawthorne sign, I'm like, "I'm back!"

Yvette's perspective also enunciates the framework of Self-Authorship through her internal voice regarding Hawthorne. Yvette's admiration for the community and for the town grew since her time in High School, and her energy for the community acts as though it has been with her all along; Yvette's heart is with Hawthorne.

## REFLECTIONS

In reflecting on the responses gained from participants, and the intersections between the results and Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship, several concepts arise as an outcome for this study. The following are takeaways from the retrieved results: Misaligned Perspectives with Reviewed Literature, Self-Authorship and Development of Identity at a Hometown College, and Significant Benefits of Attending College in One's Hometown.

In general, the literature retrieved in the search for "attending college in your hometown," generated typically negative responses. Several articles articulated the potential drawbacks of attending college in one's hometown, while negating to address the potential benefits. After completing the interviews and reviewing the results, the literature reviewed did not align with the results. While various articles addressed the strangling-like affect that a hometown can have on the collegiate experience for a student ("the student will not receive opportunities to grow in their college experience," or "the student won't receive the 'full college experience' if they attend college in their hometown,"), the results in this study misaligned; the results gained in this study perpetuated more benefits than drawbacks. While this study remains phenomenological in nature, future inquirers of "College Experience in a Hometown" should look at literature with a keen eye.

In reflection regarding the understanding of a student's identity development when attending college in a hometown, Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship operated as a reliable lens for understanding student development. Because higher education practitioners seek to understand how students develop as they maneuver

college, this specific population of students and their responses can help inform practitioners nation-wide on the lived experiences of the students who attend these institutions from specific high schools. Upon reflecting on the retrieved responses, this study supports the notion that attending college in one's hometown does not negatively impact a student's identity development through college. Furthermore, the students, in relationship to Self-Authorship, not only grow positively in the relationship with themselves and others, but most of the participants in this study also grew positively in the relationship that they share with their hometown.

In reflecting on the results, each participant shared the commonality that attending college in one's hometown produces more benefits than drawbacks. Every interview produced at least some kind of introspective reflection in which the participant articulated what they loved about attending college in their hometown, whether the participant enjoyed remaining close to family or sharing stories of hometown memories with outsiders. In reflection, this takeaway reinstated any notion that "home is where the heart is," and, sometimes, a hometown can occupy the largest area of one's heart.

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## APPENDIX A

**Consent Form for Human Participants in Research**

## Institutional Review Board

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: The Four-Block Journey: The Lived Experiences of Attending College in Your Home Town  
 Student Researcher: Madeline Azari  
 Research Advisor: Matthew Birnbaum  
 Phone: 970-313-6197 E-mail: [azar3291@bears.unco.edu](mailto:azar3291@bears.unco.edu)

**Purpose and Description:** This project is designed to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate students attending a university within one's hometown, which I define as the place individuals attended K-12 schooling. A sample of students from the University of Northern Colorado will be interviewed for this project. The selected students for this project will identify as being raised in Greeley, CO, will be graduates from Greeley Central High School, and will be interviewed and contribute to focus group discussions specifically regarding their experiences including their perspectives and attitudes towards attending the University within their hometown. If you choose to participate in this study, you have the opportunity to participate in either an hour-long interview, a focus group, or both. The individual interview will include questions geared towards your individual experiences on campus and how going to college in your home town has influenced your college experience. If you choose to participate in the focus group, the questions will be more targeted towards the relationships and community connections that you have encountered through college.

By giving consent to participate in a focus group, you understand the risks of sharing personal stories with a group of people. While as a researcher it is my obligation to protect the information that you share, I am unable to guarantee that others in the group will not share your information elsewhere. If you choose to participate in a focus group, you are potentially waiving confidentiality. There is no risk to being in this study outside of those that naturally occur when we share about ourselves. During interviews or during focus groups, individuals may be reminded of experiences from their high school or college experiences that will bring discomfort. While no questions in the interview process are geared towards arousing discomfort for the participants, you may encounter emotions from your own experiences. If you find that you are uncomfortable at any point during the interview or focus group process, please do not hesitate to let me know. It will be my responsibility as a researcher to implement safeguards to guarantee utmost physical, psychological and emotional safety for my participants.

At the end of the research, I would be happy to share your data with you at your request. I will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee full confidentiality for you as I am studying a small, easily identifiable population. However, if you would not like your legal name associated with your experiences, then I can help you create a pseudonym. My thesis advisor, Matt Birnbaum, my Honors Advisor, Loree Crow, and myself are the only individuals who will have access to previewing your data. Identifiable data (including voice recordings and signed recordings) collected and analyzed for this study will be kept on a password-protected computer for a maximum of two years and then will be permanently erased from the hard drive by an IT professional. De-identifiable (such as de-identifiable transcripts) will be stored on a password protected computer until researcher chooses to delete data from storage. Any further data not stored on the password protected computer will be stored in Matthew Birnbaum's locked office.

Participation is voluntary. There will be no compensation for your time. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

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Subject's Signature

Date

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Researcher's Signature

Date

## APPENDIX B

## IRB Approval

*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: January 9, 2017

TO: Madeline Azari

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [980722-2] The Four-Block Journey: The Lived Experiences of Attending College in Your Hometown

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 9, 2017

EXPIRATION DATE: January 9, 2021

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

## APPENDIX C

### Sample Interview Questions

- Do you consider Hawthorne your hometown?
  - What makes Hawthorne a hometown to you?
- Why did you choose UNC?
  - If you had a parent that worked here, did you receive free tuition?
- Did you live on campus, at home, or off campus?
  - How do you feel your living situation influenced your experiences in college?
  - If you lived at home, do you feel that you were less involved because of that?
- What activities were/are you involved with at Rocky Mountain University?
  - Have you made many friends by being involved?
  - Do you feel that you have to be involved in activities to have a good college experience?
  - How did you pick these activities (did identity sway you)?
- How was the transition between coming from Hawthorne High and coming to RMU? Was it an easy adjustment?
  - Do you feel if you had gone to school out of state or even out of town, that your experience would be vastly different?
  - How was the transition for your family?
- How close are you to your family? Does attending school in your hometown help or hinder the relationship you have with family?
  - If you lived at home, did you setup boundaries between you and your family?
- Do you feel that any aspects of your identity were impacted by attending college in your hometown?
  - Had you gone to school out of Hawthorne, do you feel that you'd be any different than you are now?
- Do you feel that knowing people on campus and knowing the Hawthorne area has helped you at all by coming to RMU?
- What are your plans for after school? Do you plan to move away? If so, why? If not, why not?