

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF
CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISMS
ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH
SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY**

Adelaide Tsholofelo Molapisi

2009

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Adelaide Tsholofelo MOLAPISI

**A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters in Counselling Psychology at the University
of Zululand**

Supervisor: Dr J. D. Thwala

March 2009

(i)

DECLARATION

This serves to declare that this dissertation is my own work both in concept, compilation and execution.

All sources and references quoted have been duly acknowledged in the references section.

Adelaide Tsholofelo Molapisi

Date

(ii)

ABSTRACT

While entering the university is often a wonderful experience to a number of students, to some students it is very a challenging exposure to a degree where they even end up discontinuing their studies. This study was concerned with the challenges and coping mechanisms that students used as they were confronted by the university environment. The purposive sample of ten students were selected from the University of Zululand student population and they volunteered participation in the study. The research findings of this study indicated that many students found entering the university very challenging, as the environment there was experienced as impersonal, demanding, competitive and directionless. The aim of the research study was to investigate students' experiences in association with the transition from high school to university and to identify mechanisms that they used to handle the transition in question.

(iii)

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, my fiancé and my siblings.

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I would like to thank God that He enabled me in managing to finish this research. I will forever be thankful for His sufficient grace.

I am also grateful to my parents, fiancé and siblings, who were my pillars of strength during this journey.

The Sibiya family, thank you for your support and hospitality.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Change can be unsettling and the transition from high school to university can place significant demands on people and especially to young adults who are prospective students with different dreams in life. Santrock (2001) argues that the transition to university is a critical period in students' academic path and it involves a significant amount of flexibility and it often causes distress. The main question therefore becomes: which coping strategies or mechanisms do they use? The family structure and the environment from which a prospective university student comes from, previous exposure to challenging life experiences, plays a major role (Snyder & Ford, 1987; Thwala, 1996).

For many students, going to university means entering an even larger, more formidable and more impersonal environment (Steinberg, 1993). This transition may be of contrast to the expectations of students, for example, the first year students reported that all they ever visualized about the university was the freedom one will possess as a university student only to be faced with an array of challenges and responsibilities. To impress on the contradiction between the ideal university and the real university, Larose and Boivin (1998) as cited by (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose & Guay, 2007) state that the transition from high school to university means having to shoulder more responsibilities (e.g. leaving their family; restructuring their social network; managing their study time, leisure

time and budget) in addition to adjusting to the organizational and pedagogical demands of their new academic environment.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study provides an opportunity for students to express themselves and for the administration of the University of Zululand to gain insight to how the students experience the transition from high school to university. This therefore poses the following question: How do registered students of the University of Zululand handle the transition from high school to university?

1.3 AIMS

- To investigate students' experiences
- To identify mechanisms that students used to handle the transition from high school to university.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach was adopted as an endeavor to allow the researcher to understand the meaning that the participants ascribe to their experiences of transiting

from high school to university. The stories written by the ten participants therefore broadened the picture of their experiences. A purposive sampling method was utilized in the selection of the participants who were the most representative of the issues involved in the research. The purposive selection of data sources involves choosing people or documents from which the researcher can substantially learn about the experience, (Polkinghorne, 2005). Patton (1990) as cited by Polkinghorne (2005) has mentioned that it is important to select information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposive sampling.

The process of data analysis began with immersion – reading and rereading texts and reviewing notes. As the researcher read, she listened for emerging themes and began to attach labels or codes to the chunks of the text that represented those themes. Once the text was coded, the researcher explored each thematic area, first by displaying in detail the information relevant to each category and then reducing that information to its essential points. At each step she searched for the core meaning of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours described in the text – that is, she interpreted that data. Finally, the researcher provided an overall interpretation of the study findings, showing how thematic area relate to one another, explaining how the network of concepts respond to the original study questions, and suggested that these findings meant beyond the specific context of the present study.

1.5 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

The last quarter of the year is a very significant time for many learners doing their grade twelve, not only are examinations the centre of their daily topics but also the picturesque of the universities they are going to attend the following year. This study was partly motivated by the current researcher's expectations of the university life. As Santrock (2001) maintain, students often go to university expecting something special, and although that might be the situation, their transition from high school to university may be less than ideal.

Since these changes occur over a short period of time, they can generate poor outcomes (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose & Guay, 2007). One reaction of many adolescents to the transition from living at home to attending university and living apart from parents is homesickness, which is manifested by feelings of grief, depression and a sense of loss (Aldous, 1978; Haley, 1980) as cited by Leigh and Peterson (1986). Homesickness may be mild and temporary for many but intensely felt by some adolescents who are ill prepared to separate from their parents (Leigh & Peterson, 1986).

The transition to university does not only have negative and stressful features, there are also positive aspects (Santrock, 2001). For example, this transition by students represents the opportunity to take up new challenges, strengthen their identity, and clarify their

career choice (Chickering & Reiser, 1993) as cited by (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose & Guay, 2007).

1.6 VALUE OF THE STUDY

It is hoped that the study will be of value, because the administration of the University of Zululand would know what changes would be acceptable to the University community and be given some guidance in deciding how best to allocate and re-shape resources to improve the students' (especially first year students) adaptation skills to the transition in question.

1.7 RESUME`

This chapter was an introduction to the study. The basic foundations of the study were explored (i.e. aims, motivation, and value of the study). The next chapter will focus on the relevant literature and how it impacts or relates to the present study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on a literature search and review of previous work done with regard to the transition from high school to university. The review is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and assists in predicting and directing the future studies.

Going to college or university is one of the most common circumstances under which adolescents leave home for an extended period of time. The difficulty of adapting to a university academic environment is widely appreciated, but considerably less attention has been paid to the stress of leaving home and living apart from parents, in most cases for the first time. Personal stress is high during the first year of college, especially for the first few months, and an important source of this difficulty in adaptation is separation distress (Hansburg, 1972), as cited by Leigh and Peterson (1986). In addition, even many academic difficulties may have as their underlying basis problems with separation (Bloom, 1971; Margolis, 1981), as cited by Leigh and Peterson (1986).

As with any major life change, beginning college requires a process of adjustment. Previous research studies have pinpointed the transition to college as a crucial period of time that, in many ways, sets the stage for later college success or failure (Gall, Evans, &

Bellerose, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Padilla, Trevino, Trevino & Gonzalez, 1997; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo, 1994; Tinto, 1987), as cited by Fischer (2007).

Going away to college provides a rehearsal for the real thing, an opportunity to be away from home and friends, to make a new life among strangers, while still retaining the possibilities of affiliation with the old.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED WITH THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

Major life changes are stressful, and school transitions are no exception (Fenzel, 1989; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell & Feinman, 1994), as cited by Jaffe (1998). Each school transition carries its own potential burdens and challenges. Each student adjusts differently, depending on his or her personal maturity, temperament, personal coping resources, social support and the specific stressors and circumstances. How well young people adjust partly depends on how much control they believe they have over the situation and partly on other stressful life changes. The more the change there is, the more the pressure can be expected (Jaffe, 1998).

2.2ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT

Academically, students need to adjust to the new demands of the tertiary environment. This includes developing process related skills, such as study techniques, time management and planning (Grayson, 1998; Jacobi, 1991; McManus and Russell, 1997), as cited by Schreiber (2007).

2.2.1 STUDY TECHNIQUES

2.2.1.1 GROUP STUDIES

Just as students form ties to others in the school environment, in the social realm of the university, they also form connection to others in the academic realm as part of the process of adjustment. How students respond to academic demands will be based partially on past experiences and partially in response to cues in their new environment. Students may also organize informally with fellow students to study for tests and examinations. This type of interaction does not only serve to integrate the student into the academic life of campus but also forges connection with other students that may turn into friendships (Fischer, 2007).

Krause, Hartley, James, and McInnis, (2005) as cited by Krause (2006) mentioned that a key to high-quality learning experiences for undergraduate students is a sense that they belong in the institution and that they understand and can access the rules for participating successfully in the academic culture of the institution. Academic integration occurs in a variety of ways and across a range of contexts (Kraemer, 1997; Moss & Young, 1995), as cited by Krause (2006). In order to become academically integrated from the earliest point of contact with an institution, students need to develop a sense of affiliation with the academic environment (Nora, 1993), as cited by Krause (2006), whether it be in face-to-face formal learning contexts, in social settings, or online facility (Krause, 2006).

2.2.1.2 TIME MANAGEMENT

A successful student is not necessarily the brightest, but rather the best organized one. Planning is of major importance in effectively achieving the goal of a college education. Time management is the most critical factor in college success and can determine whether one reaches one's goals (Jenkins, 2005). In college certain activities must take priority over all others, (because other interest may try to encroach upon the time that should be devoted to study), and these priorities change the way one lives.

Managing one's time can be a crucial factor on one's journey to success. Effective time management depends on the ability to organize and plan time effectively. In managing one's time one needs to identify priorities ('importance') and determine when things must be done ('urgency'). "Managing one's time begins with making the most of what one is doing at the moment", (Jenkins, 2005).

2.2.2 LECTURER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Students who form connections to lecturers are likely to be more engaged in their coursework and having this connection to the formal side of academic life serves to further integrate them into the campus environment more generally. Some students who come to campus inadequately prepared for the demands of college may need to seek out

formal enrichment and tutoring to catch up with those better prepared for college (Fischer, 2007).

Collier and Morgan (2008) stated that success in college is not simply a matter of students demonstrating academic ability. In addition, students must master the “college student” role in order to understand instructors’ expectations and apply their academic skills effectively to those expectations.

2.2.3 LECTURE HALLS

Freshmen classes, especially, are likely to have as many as four hundred to one thousand attending, so that a student begins to feel like a number instead of an individual. Instructors in these large classes are not apt to know either the student or his family. This in essence raises questions to the intake of such high number while there is limited lecture space.

2.2.4 LECTURING METHODS/STYLES

It is worth mentioning at this stage that the transition from one status to the other is usually abrupt. Instructional and learning methods are markedly different. At the high school level, instruction is interrupted by the necessity, or at least the prevalence of frequent check-up on whether the assigned lesson had been prepared, assignments of work are usually short-term if not merely one day in length, and examinations are short

and somewhat perfunctory – the student is judged more on daily work than on semester or term performance. At a college level, a minimum amount of time is spent in check-up, and therefore a maximum of time could be given to instruction, assignments of work are usually long term, and grades rest almost entirely on written exams (Smith, 1960).

Even at large universities students report that professors and administrators are available for consultation with students. The principal difference between high school and college as far as help is concerned is that in college the responsibility for making the contacts lies with the students, not with the faculty.

In high school there is a good deal more “spoon feeding” on the part of teachers, counselors, and administrators. Generally, there is little latitude for students to determine the courses they take and the teacher they have. High school students are usually told what they must do and when and how they must do it. However, in college there is comparatively little direction given; students are expected to assume much more responsibility for making decisions and are given the freedom to do so.

2.2.5 WORKLOAD

Since classes meet less often than in high school and because assignments are given in less exacting terms, a student may not realize at first that the workload in college is considerable. A college student is expected to accomplish a minimum of twice the amount of work given in high school in about the same amount of time.

A student must expect to meet higher academic standards than in high school and deal with the challenges of a much wider variety of course offerings. He is expected to be adult in his ideas and actions and to meet higher academic standards, yet he may still be struggling with the problems of adolescence. The present challenges facing a freshman can be overwhelming.

2.3 SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

Students in South Africa, indeed in the world, face a myriad of adjustment issues (Kagee, Naidoo and Mahatey, 1997), as cited by Schreiber (2007). These provide opportunity for the growth and development, and simultaneously have the potential to precipitate psychosocial problems (Grayson, 1998), as cited by Schreiber (2007). Socially, new relationships challenge previous attachment experiences and need to be negotiated within personally developed parameters. Also, some students might come from possible quite insular communities which necessitate an adjustment to the multi-cultural environment of the university in which they need to negotiate multiple social relationships, (Schreiber, 2007).

The literature suggests that symptoms resulting from developmental and psycho-social adjustment can affect academic functioning (Grayson, 1998; Jacobi, 1991; McManus and Russell, 1997), as cited by Schreiber (2007). Black students at historically advantaged universities face additional psycho-social adjustment problems (Malefo, 2000; Naidoo,

1999; Nicholas, 1997), as cited by Schreiber (2007). These might include contextual and background factors, such as educational or scholastic background, social and occupational status of parents, attribution of success and family environment (Malefo, 2000), as cited by Schreiber (2007). Kleeman (1994) as cited by Schreiber (2007) alerts to the responsibility of historically advantaged and pre-dominantly white universities to demonstrate their commitment to the diverse needs of South Africa's student population in order to facilitate their personal and academic development and their adjustment to the new tertiary environment.

2.3.1 FRIENDSHIPS

Entering university, students face the never-ending challenge of developing new friendships, while maintaining old relationships. Lifelong friends provide them with a sense of identity and history, while new friendships bring opportunity for growth, fellowship, and the sharing of new experiences (Kastenbaum, 1993).

Fischer (2007) mentioned that the friendships that students form on campus serve to integrate them into campus life, provide companionship and provide a potentially valuable source of support, advice and information.

Kastenbaum (1993) also mentioned that friendships are an important part of the informal social network of most people. Friends provide companionship, assistance, and emotional support as they contribute to one's sense of well being

Giving up or changing old friendships and developing new ones is often a stressful activity associated with college life (Greenberg, 2006); hence the norms of friendship permit physical separation; however, ongoing contact through phone calls, letters, computers, or personal conversations is vital to the preservation of all types of friends (Kastenbaum, 1993).

2.3.2 FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

Living apart from one's parents is an important developmental milestone on the road to adulthood for both adolescents and parents. For most, it signifies that a certain degree of autonomy has been reached and also further hastens the development of self-reliance. What little is known about this transition suggests that it is stressful for many adolescent, at least temporarily (Leigh & Peterson, 1986).

Secure parental attachment and healthy levels of separation-individuation have been consistently linked to greater college student adjustment (Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004).

The amount and kind of support that college freshmen receive from their parents also is related to adjustment problems during first year of college (Henton, Lamke, Murphy & Hayness, 1980), as cited by Leigh & Peterson (1986). Henton and colleagues reported that freshmen who had high crisis scores- which included such feelings as being tired,

helpless, inadequate, and disorganized - had families who lived far away from school and wanted to go home for more visits during the semester (Leigh & Peterson, 1986).

2.3.3 ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

It is always maintained that human beings always live in relation to others, whether they are relatives, friends, acquaintances or strangers (van Heerden, 2005). Romantic relationships can be a major cause of pressure and stress at university. University is a fantastic place to meet people and it is unlikely that one will ever find so many opportunities to get together with people he or she is attracted to (Palmer & Puri, 2006).

2.3.4 PEER GROUP

During adolescence, peer relations become more intense and extensive, and the adolescent begins to encounter many new demands and expectations in social situations. A peer group can be a small group of similarly aged, fairly close friends. Second, it can mean a group of age-mates not necessarily friends. It has been suggested that the peer group is important in the individual's attempts to establish a viable identity Erikson, (1968) as cited by (Coleman & Hendry, 1990). Acceptance by peers generally, and especially having one or more close friends, may be of crucial importance in a young person's life (Coleman & Hendry, 1990).

On the basis of formal as well as informal investigations, many observers have established that the student peer culture has a potent influence on the growth of students. In this respect, a student's most important teacher is another student. Friends and reference groups filter and modulate the messages from the larger student culture. They amplify or attenuate the force of curriculum, faculty, parietal rules, and institutional regulations. Thus, relationships with close-friends and peer groups or sub-cultures are primary forces influencing student development in college (Van Zijl & Van Aarde, 1977).

It is also the peer group that principally defines the appropriate responses to institutional authorities and the acceptable modes of interaction with, for example, lectures. A student's set of friends can probably also be important in reinforcing certain of his values and attitudes as well as in bringing about changes in these values and attitudes. Generally speaking, the friendships thus provide the wide range of resonances through which a satisfying and productive sense of self is built, (Van Zijl & Van Aarde, 1977).

2.3.4.1 PEER PRESSURE

The influence to go along with the behaviour and beliefs of the peer group is called peer pressure. There are two types of peer pressure. Positive peer pressure is what one feels when his or her peers inspire him or her to do something worthwhile; example: encouraging him or her to do his or her best at school. Negative peer pressure is what

one feels when his or her peers challenge him or her to do something wrong or try something that goes against her values; example: urging her to use drugs, (Merki, 1996).

2.3.4.2 WAYS OF RESISTING NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE

As suggested by Merki (1996):

- Avoid situations where trouble might occur.

Try to prevent problems by staying away from situations in which one might be subjected to negative peer pressure.

- Do a values check

When faced with negative peer pressure, consider whether you are being asked to go against your values and beliefs.

- Get a buddy

Find a friend who thinks the way you do. Get support from each other when other peers put on the pressure.

- Say no

You have the right to refuse to give in to negative peer pressure. Often times you can say no by making an excuse or suggesting a different activity.

- Walk away

If the pressure is too great, the best thing is to leave.

2.4 PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

Going to college presents students with many challenges such as changes in relationships marked by moving away from home and parents for the first time, as well as establishing lifelong friendship and sometimes marital relationships (Harrist, 2006). Another factor that may interfere with adjustment is the extent to which students retain their connections to off-campus friends and relatives once on campus. Tinto's model in particular highlighted this as problematic. His model builds on Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage (1960) to argue that separation from past communities is necessary in order to integrate into the new university community. Fisher (2007) states that it is necessary for students to separate from communities of the past in order to make a smooth and successful transition to college education.

2.4.1 HOMESICKNESS

For many students feeling homesick or isolated becomes less intense as time goes by. One makes friends with like-minded people, gain a greater understanding of her environment and the way things work at university and create her support and networks and daily routines (Palmer & Puri, 2006).

Lokitz and Sprandel (1976) as cited by (Leigh & Peterson, 1986), for example, reported that more than 70 percent of a college freshman sample admitted to being homesick during the first year. According to Bloom (1980) as cited by (Leigh & Peterson, 1986),

the degree of stress that adolescents experience as a result of leaving home is related to factors as the readiness of the individual to leave home, the amount of parental encouragement of independence, and the number and kind of past experiences of parent-child separation.

Another factor that could ease or make more difficult the separation is the life into which the adolescent moves. To the degree that adolescents who leave home perceive their new lives as satisfying and of high quality and have their personal and interpersonal needs met, they should find leaving home and living apart from their parents easier, (Leigh & Peterson, 1986).

2.4.2 SENSE OF BELONGING

After reviewing much of the more recent literature on the effects of belonging in the school community, Osterman (2000) as cited by Clegg (2006), concluded that students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school. She also concluded that a sense of belonging influences students' feelings about themselves and the quality of the relationships with other students.

In a study by Sargant, Williams, Haggerty, Lynch-Sauer and Hoyle (2002) as cited by Clegg (2006) the absence of belonging was found to be associated with loneliness, emotional distress, psychosocial disturbance, and a sense of belonging was found to be

associated with psychosocial health. A sense of belonging has also been identified with better school performance (Degelsmith, 2001) and adjustment (Lee & Davis, 2000), both cited by Clegg (2006).

In one study of loneliness during first year in college, Cutrona (1982) as cited by (Leigh & Peterson, 1986) reported that the most important aspect related to decreases in loneliness was the development of satisfying friendships. The quality of relationships was more important than the number of friends a student had (Leigh & Peterson, 1986).

2.4.3 HEALTH

The importance of good health cannot be overstressed. Without proper rest, food (proper nutrition is another necessity for clear thinking and productive work, and recreation, an individual's problems become magnified. Irritants which normally upset one can become overwhelming when life's basic needs are not taken care of adequately (Jenkins, 2005).

There is plenty of evidence that chronic stress is often a companion of college students, researchers Towbes and Cohen concluded that college students are particularly prone to chronic stress as a result of their experiencing and having to manage developmental transitions. The more life changes one experience, the more stress he will feel and the more likely it is that illness and disease will result. Just imagine all the life changes associated with attending college for the first time (Greenberg, 2006).

2.5 UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

The first-year student at university is a newcomer to an unfamiliar social environment where he is confronted with new values, norms and role structures. This experience normally involves pressures to unlearn certain past values, attitudes and behavior patterns and can be coupled with pressures to participate in the new social structure. In addition, the student has to cope with the frustration involved in moving from an environment where he is a complete novice. At the university they found that their earlier status was no longer valid and that they had to make certain adjustments, some of which proved to be quite painful, (Van Zijl & Van Aarde, 1977).

How students adjust to college involves not only the students' behaviour but also the environment to which they are responding. One factor that may influence adjustment strategy is the size of the student body (Fischer, 2007). The impact of the population explosion which followed World War II is presently being felt at the college level, and the small college campus of yesterday is rapidly turning into a huge complex. Larger campuses might be more intimidating, (Fischer, 2007) and students might encounter a degree of coldness and impersonality which represents a major change from high school.

However, greater size also increases the likelihood that a diverse array of backgrounds and interests will be represented, among the student body. The broader setting in which the school is located might also influence how students adjust to campus. The most

relevant distinction, at least for minority students, is likely to be whether the campus is urban or not (Fischer, 2007).

2.5.1 RESIDENCE LIFE

Most people leave school at the age of 18 or 19 years, ready to enroll at a tertiary institution. For many it coincides with a move away from home, family and trusted friends for the first time – a time when many of the students not only leave behind security and familiarity of family life, but also the support of well-known teachers and friends and one's community at large. This is also at the age at which one has to make the transition from late adolescence to young adulthood. This is the time that students have to learn to stand on their own two feet, to take responsibility for their own actions, and to plan their own future and to ensure that they reach the goals they set for themselves (van Heerden, 2005).

College life can be quite stressful because it requires adapting to a dramatic life change, (Greenberg, 2006). In the residence, and even more so in the fraternity and sorority, one finds himself on his own but at the same time surrounded by strangers who may become friends. One has the experience of learning to shift for oneself and making friends among strangers. Furthermore, all the little chores that the student's family did for him now have to be taken of in some other way. He gets his own room, make his own bed, and clean his own clothes (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2000; Martin, Marsh & Williamson, 2003, Nation, 1997).

2.5.2 DIVERSITY

Diversity expresses and represents differences between individuals. Diversity is a complex phenomenon, and it does not just mean cultural differences. It deals with issues such as why some people like to work alone and others prefer to be part of a group. It is how we are as individuals – it is anything and everything that makes people unique, (van Heerden, 2005).

Our differences are found in both our nature (genetic predisposition) and our nurture (upbringing, schooling, socialization) and how they both interact. Our behavior is due to the complex interaction of our personality, our cultural values and our norms. Therefore, although our mental and emotional preferences are strongly influenced by genetics, the environment in which we live also influences our personality traits and cultural practices. This means that the way we do things depends largely on the degree of cultural programming we receive from our parents, peers, or significant role models, (van Heerden, 2005)

In trying to understand diversity scientific research has revealed that personality traits, gender, age and ethno-cultural difference would head the list, followed closely by language, religion and marital status. But why is diversity such a problem in today's society? Many people are afraid of what they do not understand; we are threatened by more differences. Different people lead their lives in ways that seem strange to us; in ways that we as outsiders cannot understand. People eat different food, they listen to

different music, and they worship in different religions. Our imagination often raises fears and prejudices about what we do not know or do not understand about others, (van Heerden, 2005).

2.6 COMMUNICATION/LANGUAGE

Communication is the exchange of thoughts and feelings between two or more people, (Merki, 1996). From the infant's cry to the aged person's last words, people are linked to each other through the process of communication. Effective communication is often a critical component in developing interpersonal relationships, establishing a positive self image and achieving desired results in the world. Furthermore, our guiding values and meanings are established, shaped, and challenged through communicational exchanges, (Kastenbaum, 1993).

2.7 DECISION MAKING

The way in which young people reach decisions will relate to previous social learning and role-Modelling Hertherington, (1972) as cited by (Coleman & Hendry, 1990). Where levels of parental control have been carefully lessened and parents' involvement with the adolescent has been warm and friendly Elder (1968) as cited by Coleman and Hendry (1990) the adolescent may have a confident baseline from which to progress towards independence.

2.8 INDEPENDENCE/AUTONOMY

The largest difference between college and high school is personal freedom. No one is looking over the students' shoulders, they need to be independent. The personal freedom of college life can take its toll on some students.

2.9 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Some of the most significant stressors that college students experience relate to money. To begin with, paying for college is a challenge for many students and their families, (Greenberg, 2006).

Student poverty is hidden from university authorities, from families, and often denied or underestimated by students themselves. The disclosure of debt comes normally when a student has reached a personal crisis (Haselgrove, 1994).

Student financial support is inherently complex: income is from a range of sources and within that range students' debt and hardship are determined by a number of modalities which are created both within and outside a university (Haselgrove, 1994). Therefore, as Fischer (2007) states, college financing can be an additional stress facing some students; since according to Haselgrove (1994), access to higher education has been normatively related to students' financial circumstances.

2.10 UNIVERSITY VERSUS HIGH SCHOOL

A difference between high school and college is the difference in traditions. There is also a great difference in the ground rules between high school and college. Generally colleges are more lenient than high schools in matters of dress and social behaviour. Another difference between high school and college is the social climate. College students are usually older and mature than high school students.

Also, competition is usually much keener than the student has experienced before. The changed competition in college is often reflected in the grades received.

2.11 RESUME

This chapter helped in understanding of the study by exploring relevant literature and previously work done concerning the field. It also touched on specific challenging areas faced by students in new environments. The next chapter deals with methodological underpinnings of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a layout of all the procedures followed in order to reach the aims of this study.

The transition to college is critical time in students' academic path, Gerdes and Mallinckrodt, (1994); Lopez and Gormely (2002); Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991) as cited by (Duchesne et al, 2007). For most students this transition represents the opportunity to take up new challenges, strengthen their identity, and clarify their career choice, (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) as cited by (Duchesne et al, 2007). However, they also have to shoulder more responsibility in addition to adjusting to the organizational and pedagogical demands of their new academic environment (Brooks & DuBois, 1995; Larose & Boivin, 1998) as cited by (Duchesne et al, 2007).

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Phenomenological research is a research in which the researcher identifies the “essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects, (Moustakas, 1994), as cited by Cresswell (2007).

In phenomenology, the researcher transcends or suspends (brackets) past knowledge and experience to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level (Merleau-Ponty, 1956), as cited by (Cresswell (2007). It is an attempt to approach a lived experience with a sense of “newness” to elicit rich and descriptive data. Bracketing is a process of setting aside one’s beliefs, feelings, and perceptions to be more open or faithful to the phenomenon Colaizzi, (1978); Streubert and Carpenter, (1999) as cited by (Cresswell, 2007). As the process of bracketing (called a phenomenological reduction) continues, the researcher becomes increasingly aware of still further assumptions and thus is able to move from a natural attitude through to a transcendental one (Davidson, 2004; Goodwin, 2002; Stones, 1986).

Phenomenology focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (Cresswell, 2007).

Phenomenological studies how participants express what they experience, and this is determined only by how they participants have experienced the phenomena, no objective reality is assumed. Yet this method assumes that a commonality or commonalities are found in shared experiences (Ashworth, 1996).

Phenomenology therefore seeks to describe these commonalities, without referring to secondary methods on assuming an objective reality. Instead it endeavors to put aside any preconceived ideas and attitudes, allowing commonalities in experiences to be revealed and described (Ashworth, 1996).

Phenomenological psychology is also a human, not a natural science. It is a human science both in content and method and it strives to be rigorous and systematic. Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative research (Kruger, 1986).

Phenomenological research is strictly scientific but concentrates on meaning rather than measurement, does not reduce meaning to more elementary (e.g., physical) dimensions and is of a participant nature. It treats the data rigorously without doing violence to it (Kruger, 1986).

Phenomenology is regarded as the science of experience. The fundamental issue addressed by phenomenology is how to approach consciousness. The goal of this close description of the facts of consciousness is to find how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and how they are organized in it (Stanghellini, 2004). According to one of the phenomenological psychologists, each and every experiential flow is to be respected precisely what it is in the way that it appears in consciousness; i.e., it legitimately and credibly is the flow of experience that it presents itself as being. By invoking the epoche – arguably that element of phenomenological method which makes it most unique – we have suspended our concern with the reality status of the objects of experience in order precisely to explore and understand the experiences in their own terms. Rather than approaching another person's experiences with distrust or suspicion, it is an essential foundation of phenomenological inquiry to treat each and every moment of experience with the same degree of basic respect for what it is: one experiential moment out of the life of this particular instantiation of transcendental subjectivity.

The fundamental point of departure of phenomenological praxis from traditional natural scientific research is that priority is given to the phenomenon under investigation rather than this being secondary to an already established methodological framework, (Stones, 1986).

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

Since the goal of qualitative research is enriching the understanding of an experience, it needs to select fertile exemplars of the experience for study. Such selections are purposeful and sought out. The concern is not how much data were gathered or from how many sources but whether the data that were collected are sufficiently rich to bring refinement and clarity to understanding an experience.

The ten participants were selected using the non-random sampling method referred to as purposive sampling method. The number of participants selected for phenomenological research varies considerably (Polkinghorne, 1989). It is argued that in using one subject certain aspects of the experience may be omitted (Kruger, 1979). Stones (1986), suggests that the use of several subjects provides greater variability and so facilitates a greater fluency with the phenomenon.

3.4 DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The participants were accessed by word of mouth, meaning that the researcher made announcements of the study in different lecture halls. Interested students were individually administered a questionnaire which was handed out directly to them and was left with them for completion. No time limit was placed regarding the return of the completed questionnaires. Each questionnaire comprised of two open-ended questions to

complete. The first one was to relate the different kinds of challenges that one had with the transition from high school to university; and the second one required one to relate also the coping mechanisms that they used to deal with the transition in question. To maintain confidentiality, participants signed a separate informed consent form but did not put any identifying information on the questionnaire.

The respondents' particulars namely; age, gender, level of education, and race were included in the questionnaire. Ten questionnaires were distributed and they were all completed.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The current researcher ensured that all students who participated in the study voluntarily agreed to do so. The participants were told about their right to withdraw from participating at any time without penalty (no participant withdrew from participating). Confidentiality of the records of their performance was guaranteed. All participants signed a written consent agreeing to participate in the research project, and the consent form did not include a section for their names.

3.6 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Qualitative analysis emphasizes how data fit together as a whole, bringing together context and meaning. In keeping with the holistic approach of phenomenology, the

following steps, as suggested by Creswell (1998) as cited by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) were used to guide this study in analysis and interpretation of the stories.

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING STATEMENTS THAT RELATE TO THE TOPIC

The researcher first read for content that is she was checking whether she had obtained the kinds of information that she intended to collect, and whether the responses were full and detailed or were they superficial. As the researcher reviewed the data, she began to identify emergent themes and developed tentative explanations.

The researcher separated the relevant information in the questionnaires and then broke the relevant information into small segments (e.g., phrases or sentences) that each reflected a single, specific thought. In this part of the process, the researcher remained mindful of bracketing her personal preconceptions and judgments, so as to remain faithful to the data,

After achieving a holistic sense of the data, the stories were repeatedly read again – with a more reflective attitude – in order to prepare the researcher for the further phases in which a more particular and exacting analysis is stipulated.

STEP 2: GROUPING STATEMENTS INTO “MEANING UNITS”

The researcher grouped the segments into categories that reflected the various aspects (“meanings”) of the phenomenon as it was experienced.

The data was broken down into naturally occurring units – each conveying a particular meaning – which emerge spontaneously from the data. This unit, termed a Natural Meaning Unit (NMU) may be defined as ‘a statement made by the subject which is self definable and self-delimiting in the expression of a single, recognized aspect of the subject’s experience (Cloonan, 1971), as cited by Kruger (1979).

The intention conveyed by each NMU was then expressed in a reduced form as concisely and as accurately as possible. Wherever possible as suggested by Kruger (1979), the subject’s own terminology and phraseology – his linguistic style – should be adhered to in order that the data may ‘speak for itself’. However, the shared nature of our lived – world suggests that we are able to understand fellow man’s meanings and as such the researcher may articulate the central themes (reductions of the NMUs) in words other than those used by the subjects so as to clearly express the intended meaning.

STEP 3: SEEKING PERSPECTIVES

The researcher looked and considered the various ways in which the different participants experienced the phenomenon. This process was made possible by marking (coding) data that is relevant to one or more themes.

STEP 4: CONSTRUCT A COMPOSITE

The researcher used the various meanings identified to develop an overall description of the phenomenon as the participants typically experienced it.

3.7 RESUME

This chapter described research methodology used in the study. The study required purposive sampling procedure. The following chapter will focus on data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents themes identified from the stories through the phenomenological method, as described in the methodology chapter. The identified themes from the respondents' description of the experience are outlined for the reader's meaningful understanding of the study. Extracts/examples are quoted where necessary to justify the researcher's findings.

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The participants in the study consisted of six African students (3 males and 3 females) and four Indians students (2 males and 2 females) of the University of Zululand in the main residences as well as some of the off-campus accommodation established by self and/or university. The sample included students from various faculties and levels of study, and the distribution of age among them were under 20 (3), under 25 (5) and under 30 (2). All students who participated in the study consented to participate, and consistent with this study each of the 10 students of University of Zululand had undergone the experience of transiting from high school to university.

4.3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.3.1 THEMES ELICITED FROM THE RESPONDENTS

The table below displays the themes found in the stories. Main themes are bolded, and are considered to be those found in four or more of the stories.

NO	THEMES	ILLUSTRATION
a.	Registration period	This theme was present in three stories. The experience of the registration process was described as unpleasant. Most of the participants put more emphasis on the stress of having to join the long queues during the registration time.
b.	Lecturing Methods/Style	Two respondents agreed that the lecturing methods were of a challenge to them. Moving from being spoon-fed to self-feeding was not easy for them. It was also evident that the lecture to student relationship mattered to him, as he mentioned that the lecturers seem not to pay much if not enough attention to them.
c.	Academic Workload	This theme was present in several stories. The difference in the workload and the time frame as

		compared to that of high school, posed a challenge to the respondents.
d.	Crowded lecture halls	Two respondents mentioned the overcrowded lecture halls as a point of concern to them.
e.	Diversity	Almost all respondents found the differences in culture, behaviour, and language of other students to be challenging. Of note, the respondents' stories elicited their effective way of coping with this challenge.
f.	Strange/New environment	Adapting to a new environment if not a strange one, was one of the many challenges that the respondents faced.
g.	Friendship	A theme of making new friends was found in many stories. Respondents seemed to have a healthy way of coping with this challenge.
h.	Decision Making	Decision making calls for taking the responsibility of the consequences that may follow the decision made. Respondents appeared to have insight to

		such.
i.	Independence and Autonomy	Most of the students felt a need to start being independent, because being at the university means they can no longer rely on their parents for structure, rules, or academic motivation. All of these are now in their hands
j.	Communication/Language	Communication was also highlighted as a theme. It seemed to be a tool that was needed to effectively survive socially and academically. Language (IsiZulu) was found to be an example of a barrier in communication especially for Indian students.
k.	Peer pressure	This is also a theme that came up in the responses from the participants. Students need one another in order to integrate themselves into the university life. Sometimes in so doing they may end up having to compromise their values in order to get along with their peers.
l.	Administration	The participants showed dissatisfaction with the running of the administration office of the university. They felt that the administration office

		of the university is not well organized.
m.	Housing	From the response of particular participant it was evident that there is a shortage of rooms in the university residences and that the management of the university seems not be helping in solving the problem when they accept too many students whereas the rooms are few.
n.	Study methods	Some of the participants found that the instructional methods at the university varied from that of high school therefore they has to adapt their study methods accordingly.
o.	Socio-economic status	Was mentioned by one participant
p.	Romantic relationship	Only one respondent mentioned this theme as his challenge.

4.3.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The identified themes (which are outlined in the above table) from the stories of the respondents are going to be justified and discussed in greater detail in relation to the literature. Many themes overlap, but for the sake of this study they will be discussed separately.

4.3.2.1 EMERGING THEMES

A. REGISTRATION

The registration (the procedure to become a university student) seemed to be of great concern to the respondents. The three participants described their experience of the registrations as complicated, draining and frustrating. This was concluded from the following extracts:

Extract 1

“I had to queue long horrifying lines all day to be accepted and qualify to be a student in the institution.”

Extract 2

“The registration period at UZ (University of Zululand), it complicated & draining. There are always long ques that lead nowhere.”

Extract 3

“And how can I forget registration time, those are the most frustrating days in this university, high school was a lot easier, we didn’t have such long ques.”

What is worth noting is the fact that the participants were not concerned about registration as a financial problem but their concern lied on the procedure thereof. In all the extracts they mentioned the issue of long queues which sometimes were not benefiting them. In extract 3, the participant even mentioned that high school was better because they didn’t have such long queues.

Extract 2 and 3 were taken from the stories of the participant who were in their third and fourth level of study, therefore it became evident that they had been re-experiencing the frustration of the registration process throughout their years in this university.

Extract 4

“The first challenge was to find acceptance in the university. Because I hadn’t applied the previous year and the universities were ful.”

This extract showed that failure to apply to the universities in time may result in distress of its own.

It is important to note that this theme was not found in any literature available for the current researcher.

Perseverance and patience happened to be the common themes that were present in the coping mechanisms used. One respondent said that the registration process still traumatizes her. This is more likely to be psychologically impacting on this participant's life of not dealt with on time.

B. LECTURING METHODS/STYLE

The respondents found it challenging to move from the environment of teaching to that one of lecturing. They found the experience to be a bit inhuman, as lecturers seemed to be more interested in covering a certain amount of workload more than being interested also in their well being. As far as help is concerned the responsibility of contact lied with them, meaning that they are the ones who have to initiate the trip to go and consult their lecturers. This was deducted from the following comments:

Extract 5

"I had to adapt to an environment where lectures are the to lecture & not teach."

Extract 6

"Lecturers not giving us enough attention, they just lecture."

Extract 7

"Lecturers style of lecturing. Sometimes they use Zulu when making examples. And they are also too fast for me".

University of Zululand has mainly students who are pre-dominantly Zulu, and as it is illustrated in the above extract, lecturers sometimes find themselves resorting to using IsiZulu in class in order to try and make the students to understand the concepts that are being discussed. The participant who mentioned this is an Indian student who does not know IsiZulu, and such a practice posed a problem for him.

Establishing a working relationship with their lecturers and consulting with senior students, seemed to be the coping mechanisms that effectively worked for them.

C. ACADEMIC WORKLOAD

The theme of academic workload refers to the amount of work that students are given, and was present in few stories.

Extract 8

“Passing mark rate was another challenge, because I was used to 40% passing mark in high school.”

Extract 9

“cope with work load through giving myself enough time to study”

Extract 10

“Then came the modules, assignments and the pressure that came with them, and the days were passing really fast”

Extract 11

“Work overload, classes to attend & assignments to do.”

Extract 12

“Having to do 16 modules a year was hard as high school I was doing semester.”

From the above extracts one may hypothesize that it can get very frustrating for the students to adapt to the change in the workload, because like Cattell and Sharp (1970) puts it, a college student is expected to accomplish a minimum of twice the amount of work given in high school in about the same amount of time.

For some students, protecting self-worth is of paramount importance. In the academic context, students' self-worth is most threatened when they fail to perform successfully at a given task and there is a risk that they may be seen to have low ability, (Covington, 1984) as cited by (Martin, Marsh & Williamson, 2003).

The respondents appeared to have adopted a healthy and effective way of coping with the challenge. They mentioned ways like breaking the modules into sections, forming group studies, spending more time with ones books, avoiding time-wasting activities.

One respondent said that she was still struggling with coping with the work load.

D. CROWDED LECTURE HALLS

This theme did not appear in many stories, but is equally important. This is what the respondents had to say about this theme:

Extract 13

“Overcrowding of the lecture halls”

Extract 14

“The number of students per lecture was too much to control.”

Crowded lecture halls might be intimidating and students might encounter the degree of impersonality which represents a major change from high school. But greater size also increases the likelihood that a diverse array of backgrounds and interests will be represented, among the student body (Fischer, 2007).

One respondent said that he coped the overcrowding in the lecture halls by sitting on the first in class, and the other said that he coped by coming early to class. The two methods used appear to be effective.

E. DIVERSITY

Living in a multi-cultural environment can be very stressful and difficult. Attending a higher education or training institution and being confronted for the first time with the diverse cultures of our country can be quite a challenge (van Heerden, 2005).

The theme of diversity appeared in many stories and it refers to all the ways we differ as individuals. It includes visible differences such as age, gender, ethnicity and physical appearance; as well as underlying differences such as thought styles, religion, nationality, socio-economic status, belief systems, sexual orientation and education. It means respecting, valuing and harnessing the richness of ideas, backgrounds and perspectives that are unique to each individual.

The theme of diversity as a challenge was deducted from the following five of the many extracts given by the respondents.

Extract 15

“Meeting new people from different backgrounds”

Extract 16

“Different people with different culture”

Extract 17

“Accepting other peoples culture and behaviour”

Extract 18

“Different kinds of people to live with”

Extract 19

“Having to live with gay people while there are rejected from many black communities.

Coping mechanism: familiarizing oneself with other people, accepting others without passing judgment on them, and being open.

F. STRANGE/NEW ENVIRONMENT

As with many major life changes, beginning university requires a process of adjustment, and that includes adjusting to a new if not a strange environment. How students adjust to college involves not only the students' behavior but also the environment to which they are responding (Fischer, 2007).

Extract 20

“Second challeng was adapting to the new environment”

Extract 21

“No familiar people”

Extract 22

“Change of environment”

Entering an unfamiliar social environment where one is confronted with new values, norms and role structures is an experience which normally involves pressures to unlearn certain past values, attitudes and behavior patterns and can be coupled with pressures to participate in the new social structure, (Van Zijl & Van Aarde, 1977). The respondents seemed to have coped well with this challenge

G. FRIENDSHIP

A friendship is a type of relationship between people who enjoy being with each other, (Merki, 1996).

The respondents experienced the effect of the endeavor to make new friends as giving their lives personal meaning and vitality. The following extracts demonstrate how the respondents valued making friends:

Extract 23

“Finding good friends”

Extract 24

“Friendship – I struggled to make friends but I never gave up”

Extract 25

“Making new friends”

The common coping mechanism that they used to deal with this type of challenge was to mingle with other students and communicate with them.

H. DECISION MAKING

The decisions that one makes and the actions one takes during his/her first year of college will have a major impact on the rest of his/her university experience.

Two of the respondents agreed that decision making was one of their challenges, and this was evident in the description they gave as quoted in the following extracts:

Extract 26

“I had to make my own choices without any adult around and being corrected”.

Extract 27

“Decision making – deciding whether or not to go to class.”

One respondent said that in dealing with this challenge she had to know that every choice she made had a consequence. The other mentioned that he made friends with people who motivated him to go to class.

I. INDEPENDENCE and AUTONOMY

Independence is the absolute freedom to do what one wants, and not to be held back by any rules or laws of government or man. A number of respondents agreed that independence was one of the challenges they had in association with the transition from high school to university. The absence of parents and their authoritative advises on what to or not to do was mentioned several times, and once parents are removed from the equation, one is left with himself and his choices. The following extracts illustrate their experiences.

Extract 28

“Taking responsibility for my own life.”

Extract 29

“Adjusting to not having parents around.”

Extract 30

“Independency – being away from home and parents.”

Extract 31

“Freedom from parents. There are always parties on campus & no parents to tell you not to go or what to do. That was good but hard.”

Extract 32

“Adjusting to the independent life where no parents were around and I had to make my own choices without any adult around and being corrected.”

Extract 33

“Learning to be independent.”

The coping mechanisms that they reported to have used did not seem detrimental, for example one of the respondents said that he coped with the challenge by allowing himself to grow and to reflect on the reason why he came to the university.

J. COMMUNICATION/LANGUAGE

Communication is the process involved with the exchange of any kind of information or data. Languages of many kinds are being used in order to exchange information. Indian students in particular experienced communication as a challenge. This was concluded from the following descriptions:

Extract 34

“Unizulu students mostly communicate in Zulu which is a language that I don’t understand very well.”

Extract 35

“Language mostly spoken is Zulu, and most people do not understand very well.”

Extract 36

“Language – students here speak mostly Zulu.”

Extract 37

“Communication – I do not know how to speak Zulu.”

Extract 38

“Meeting people is something I enjoy doing but the challenge of communication was a problem.”

Competent communication requires the ability to see the world as others see it, or at least to recognize that other people do have their own perceptions. From the above extracts it is evident that the Indian students are somewhat restricted and at a disadvantage because they do not know how to communicate in Zulu.

Referring back to extract 7, it is worth noting that this challenge of communication/language affects the Indian students. In an attempt to cope with this

challenge one of the respondents said that he tried attending classes for basic IsiZulu, another one said that he found friends who were willing to speak English, another one reported that she befriended a black girl who helped her and is still helping her; the one whose experience of the challenge was stated in extract 7 said that in coping with the challenge he went to see his lecturers during their consultations hours.

Extract 39

“Ensuring that I use English language all times for communicating.”

The above extract showed the willingness of this IsiZulu-speaking respondent to be accommodative in as far as communication is concerned. One can hypothesize that this respondent had insight to the fact that his environment was diverse and that means there are different people who most probably speak other languages different to his, hence he found the common ground and resorted to using English as a medium of communication.

K. PEER PRESSURE

It is not always easy to stand up against negative peer pressure. If one does not go along with the group, s/he may feel that no one will like her/him, (Merki, 1996). But one of the respondents that experienced peer pressure as a challenge, reported that he was assertive enough to say no to things he did not like doing. Another respondent stated that he had to remind himself to be honest to himself about who he is and also having his big brother around helped him cope with the challenge of peer pressure. This showed that the contribution of siblings can help in coping with peer pressure, in particular a negative one.

L. ADMINISTRATION

This theme was not found in any literature available to the researcher, but will be discussed using the raw information from the respondents.

The respondents said that they were not happy with the disorganization of the administration office, and that posed as a challenge to them. The following extracts illustrate such:

Extract 40

“Unorganized things on campus.”

Extract 41

“Disorganized faculty procedures, no one in my department knew what was happening.”

Extract 42

“The time table took long.”

M. HOUSING

This theme was also not found in any literature available to the current researcher.

One respondent stated that one of his challenges was that fact in the university they accommodate more than require people in a room, and he said that he coped with the challenge by getting along with the situation.

N. STUDYING METHODS

The following extract of a challenge and its coping mechanism is an example of the experience of one of the respondents.

Extract 44

“Study methods changed.”

“Consulting my lectures & studying helped to cope with the change of studying.”

O. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Extract 45

“Not being equal with other students in terms of fanancial background.”

This respondent said that his way of coping with this challenge was to try not to worry about what the person next to him which he does not have.

P. ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

Extract 46

"Not having a girlfriend while people around me had more than one."

"I just told myself that I am here at the university to study & nothing more."

4.3.2.2 EXPERIENCES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The responses given by the participants in an attempt to relate their experiences of the transition from high school to university seemed to be correlating with the literature that is available on the researches done on the transition in question. Although the challenges were mostly experienced as negative, the respondents seemed to have coped with them effectively. The following extracts are examples of the challenges and the coping mechanisms that the respondents shared.

- *“Meeting different people with their different cultures.”*

“Accepting them, the way they are and learning more about their cultures.”

- *“Being in an environment with many people, and adjusting to not having parents around.”*

“The coping mechanisms I used were; to be patient, learning only the positive from this new environment and doing my best to grow.”

- *“Overcrowding of the lecture halls.”*

“I come to class early so that I can at least get a sit.”

- *“Study methods changed.”*

“Consulting my lectures & studying helped to cope with the change of studying.”

4.3.2.3 PARTICIPANTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

With the challenges that the respondents faced during the transition from high school to university and the coping mechanisms they used in dealing with such, the respondents still had no suggestions for improvement.

4.3.2.4 NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES FROM THE RESPONDENTS

The university registration process, overcrowding in lecture theatres and the language of instruction were pointed out as some of the factors that need to be addressed.

4.4 RESUME'

This chapter was a detailed discussion on the results of the research study. The main themes were identified and discussed. The next chapter will discuss the conclusions that were drawn from the findings of the study followed by the recommendations for further investigation.

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to extract meaning of the experience of the challenges associated with the transition from high school to university and the coping mechanisms used to deal with the transition in question. The discussion that follows is concerned with the findings as they pertain to avenues for further investigations, methodological limitations, and recommendations.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Research around overcrowding in lecture theatres, orientation programmes and timing for implementation are strongly indicated
- ❖ Student counselors are recommended to conduct psycho-educational programs aimed at facilitating students' adjustment to university life, discussion because failure to adjust well to the transition may (at least partially) cause the adjustments difficulties for these students later in their lives.
- ❖ Given the number of challenges that are significantly associated with the transition from high school to university, it would be important for the counselors working with distressed university students to assess their level of coping skills – so that they can provide much needed emotional support for them as they make the transition to university.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

- ❖ The present study is limited in terms of generalisability of the sample included. Firstly, the sample consisted of students who voluntarily signed up to participate in psychological research. Students attracted to such a study may not be representative of the general population of university students. Second the sample was small and did not include all the race groups present in the University of Zululand.
- ❖ The experiences from phenomenological viewpoint make it difficult to generalize findings to a large population.
- ❖ While the attempts were made to bracket out any biases, it is not possible to ensure this was achieved completely. Therefore, the researcher's biases may have coloured the findings to some extent.

5.4 AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- ❖ The findings that were not validated by the literature are worthy of future research.

- ❖ Future research needs to explore a larger and more diverse sample in order to increase generalisability.
- ❖ Future researchers should further investigate the influence of the challenges faced during the transition from high school to university on academic performance.
- ❖ In line with some of the limitations mentioned above, future university adjustment research should conduct a quantitative study in this area to verify the findings further.

5.5 RESUME'

Notwithstanding potential methodological and sampling limitations, the present study made important advances in the understanding of the challenges that university students face as they transit from high school to university and also inform us of the kinds of coping mechanisms that they use to deal with such challenges. It is important to note the significant role played by language in the institution of higher learning and how students have worked around it for their own benefit.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY.

Dear Participants

The purpose of this research is to investigate the challenges and coping mechanisms associated with the transition from High School to University. if you participate, you will be asked to share your experiences of the challenges you faced and the mechanisms you used to deal with the transition from High School to University. You will be asked to write the information that you will give, and there is no time limit. If you have any question or concern about your participation in this study, you may contact me as follows: 0721786670 and my name is Adelaide Tsholofelo Molapisi.

I have read the description of the research and voluntarily agree to participate. I understand that I be asked to share my personal experiences and this might include the very sensitive material. I understand that I can withdraw from participating at any time without penalty and the record of my performance will be kept strictly confidential.

QUESTIONNAIRE

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Marital status
- Level of study

Signature _____
Date _____

Kindly relate the different *challenges* you had with the transition from High School to University. Relate also the *coping mechanisms* that you used to deal with the transition in question. Relate as many as you can in the space provided below.

Challenge

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Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

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Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

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APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

MALE PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT 1
AGE : 22
GENDER : MALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : FIRST YEAR

fæ Challenge

I had to queue long horrifying lines all day to be accepted and qualify to be a student in the institution

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Patience played a big role during that time

fæ Challenge

The time table took long

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Student assistance and meetings of the departments

fæ Challenge

The accommodation of more than required people in a room

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Got along with the situation

fæ Challenge

The number of students per lecture was too much to control

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Had to sit on the first row in front at class.

PARTICIPANT 2

AGE : 25
GENDER : MALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : FOURTH

fæ Challenge

I had to adapt to an environment where lecturers are the to lecture & not teach, cope with work load through giving myself enough time to study

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I had to distress through training, managing time, aquire good communication skills, accepting that I was in an institution of higher learning and consulting for modules.

fæ Challenge

Work overload, different kinds of people to live with, taking responsibility for my own life & ensuring that I use English language all times for communicating.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Accepting & live with a situation, involving myself in group studies & avoid time waisting activities.

fæ Challenge

Having to live with gay people while there are rejected from maney black communities

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Understanding that all people are the same & it not right to reject one because of something he or has no power to control.

fæ Challenge

Not having a girlfriend while people around me had more then one

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I just told myself that I am here at the university to study & nothing more.

fæ Challenge

Finding good friends

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Take every one as my friend but not take everything that they had to say.

fæ Challenge

Not being equal with other students in terms of fanancial background

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I tried so much not to worry about what a person next to me has & that I don't have.

PARTICIPANT 3

AGE : 25
GENDER : MALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : MASTERS

fæ Challenge

Being in an environment with many people and adjusting to not having parents around.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

The coping mechanisms I used were; to be patient, learning only the positive from this new environment and doing my best to grow.

fæ Challenge

Coming straight from high school, only 18years of age, having to cope with peer pressure.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Doing my best to remind myself to be honest to myself into being myself.

Also having an older brother who was there at all times.

PARTICIPANT 4
AGE : 18
GENDER : MALE
RACE : INDIAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : SECOND

Challenge

Meeting different people with their different cultures.

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Accepting them the way they are and learning about their cultures.

Challenge

Communication ;V I do not know how to speak Zulu

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I tried to attend classes for basic Zulu

Challenge

Friendships

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I made friends through the work-groups that were established in class

Challenge

The freedom to attend lectures or not

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I decide to attend as many lecturers as I could

Challenge

Peer pressure

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I had to be assertive and learn to say no to things I do not like doing

PARTICIPANT 5

AGE : 22
GENDER : MALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : FIRST YEAR

Challenge

Language

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I found friends who were willing to speak English

Challenge

Overcrowding of the lecture-halls

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I come to class early so that I can at least get a seat

Challenge

Lecturers style of lecturing. Sometimes they use Zulu when making examples; and they are too fats for me.

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I go and see the lecturers during their consultation hours

Challenge

Unorganized things on campus

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I am still dealing with the challenge

Challenge

Decision making ;V deciding whether or not to go to class

Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I made friends with people who motivated me to go to class.

FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT 1

AGE : 24
GENDER : FEMALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : THIRD

fæ Challenge

The first challenge was to find acceptance in the university. Because I hadn't applied the previous year and the universities were full.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I wouldn't say I coped with that situation very well because it was really frustrating going from institution to institution but I would say persistence worked for me.

fæ Challenge

Second challenge was adapting to the new environment and making new friends and learning to be independent.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

By taking one day at a time and allowing myself to grow up and learn that people are different and need to be treated differently.

fæ Challenge

Then came the modules, assignments and the pressure that came with them, and the days were passing really fast

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Well to this moment I still struggle with that one so I wouldn't say I've managed to deal with it but I'm trying.

fæ Challenge

And how can I forget registration time, those are the most frustrating days in this university high school was a lot easier, we didn't have such long queues.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I just told myself that I have to get used to it and persistence also helped and contributed a lot in my being here now.

PARTICIPANT 2

AGE : 24
GENDER : FEMALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : FOURTH YEAR

fæ Challenge

Study methods

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Consulting my lecturer & studying helped to cope with the change of studying.

fæ Challenge

Meeting new people from different backgrounds

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Not being judgemental & more open to others was helpful in dealing with new people.

fæ Challenge

Having to do 16modules a year was hard at high school I was doing semester.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Breaking the modules into section/parts.

fæ Challenge

Work overload, classes to attend & assignments to do.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Forming group studies & meeting everyday to study & spending more time with my books.

fæ Challenge

Freedom from parents. There are always parties on campus & no parents to tell you not to go or what to do. That was good but hard.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I had to do a lot of growing up, choose friends wisely & have a strong backbone.

fæ Challenge

The registration period at UZ, it complicated & draining. There are always ques that lead nowhere.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

I am still not used to the registration process, it still traumatizes me.

PARTICIPANT 3
AGE : 18
GENDER : FEMALE
RACE : INDIAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : FIRST YEAR

fæ Challenge

Change of environment

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Gotten use to it because it is one of the challenges that should or is faced daily.

fæ Challenge

Making new friends

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Meeting people is something I enjoy doing but the challenge of communication was a problem.

fæ Challenge

Communication

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Unizulu students mostly communicate in Zulu which is a language that I don't understand very well.

PARTICIPANT 4

AGE : 23
GENDER : FEMALE
RACE : AFRICAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : MASTERS

fæ Challenge

Adjusting to the independent life where no parents were around and I had to make my own choices without any adult around and being corrected.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Accepted it because it was the way things were and didn't have control over it. I actually learned to be independent and knowing that every choices we make has a consequence.

fæ Challenge

Passing mark rate was another challenge, because I was used to 40% passing mark in high school.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Putting more effort and studying harder helped me a lot though @ first I was a bit nervous.

PARTICIPANT 5

AGE : 18
GENDER : FEMALE
RACE : INDIAN
MARITAL STATUS : SINGLE
LEVEL OF STUDY : FIRST YEAR

fæ Challenge

Medium of communication

Language mostly spoken is Zulu, and most people do not understand

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Befriended a black girl, who helped me and is still helping me.

fæ Challenge

No familiar people

I did not know anyone on campus on my first day.

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Began walking around and looking for familiar faces and found one or two

people I knew, Amanda Ntombela

fæ Challenge

Disorganized faculty procedures

No one in my department know what was happening

fæ Coping mechanism used to deal with the above challenge

Search the entire university for faculty administrator