

APPROVAL A COLLEGE FRESHMAN'S DEPARTURE FROM HOME AND

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ITS IMPACT ON THE FATHER LEFT BEHIND

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION  
by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Going to college has become a part of an American dream that transcends all socio-economic classes and provides countless opportunities for the economic and educational betterment of our citizens. During the last decade, there has been a trend toward more high school seniors entering college. In the state of North Carolina, those intending to go to college have increased from 52.9% of their high school graduating class to 59.5% (North Carolina Association of Institutional Research [NCAIR], 1986). Given the reality of this experience for so many young people, it could be assumed that families prepare for the day when their children actually leave home. These families have accepted the fact that their adolescents are leaving home and are moving in the direction of a life independent of their families.

What may be forgotten is that the family is a unit that exists regardless of the distance separating its members. There may be some difficulties related to the loss of a family member, even if that loss is only a temporary one and a "voluntary" one. Such difficulties may include emotional adjustment to the loss of that person around the house or they may involve the assignment of household tasks previously assumed by the adolescent to another family

member. Either of these situations (or others unique to a family) could affect family members left behind in ways that are unknown or even misunderstood. The family has a history of shared experiences, a present reality, and future expectations that all come into play during any period of transition. It is this balance that may be upset by an adolescent's departure from home.

What does this passage of an adolescent from home to college mean to the family? What is its real impact on family members still at home, especially the parents, and more specifically, the father? What kinds of problems related to this passage exist and what kinds of coping strategies are adopted to deal with the problems?

All of these questions seem to imply that the adolescent's passage from home to college may create added stress in the family environment. In fact, Jay Haley (1980), director of the Family Therapy Institute in Washington, D. C., contended that when a family member either enters or leaves the family, there is a period of change and stress. The significance of adolescent-parent separation has been noted for some 25 years, but studies have not investigated the parents' reaction to that process. The current research literature features the adolescents, their problems, perceptions, and subsequent development. Further, most research studies focused on clinical populations, many of whom had been forced into separation from their parents due to emotional and psychological

reasons (Bloom, 1980; Haley, 1980; Mandelbaum, 1962; Stierlin, 1974; Stierlin, Levi, & Savard, 1971). These include delinquent adolescents as well as emotionally disturbed adolescents who were institutionalized.

A more obvious gap existing in the adolescent-parent separation literature is reference to adolescent-father separation. More attention has been given to the mother due to the cultural expectations that accompany motherhood and its nurturing qualities and to mothers' easier accessibility to researchers. Popular literature such as magazines and newspapers frequently report on mothers' perspectives. The father himself has seldom been considered as a parent feeling the loss of an adolescent. A lack of attention to fathers may also be attributed in part to the cultural expectations of men as non-emotional and less attached to their children. These cultural expectations are certainly changing in contemporary society as research efforts address the changing roles of men and women of today. Again, popular media are demonstrating these gender role changes. One of the more popular examples is the recent movie "Mr. Mom."

#### Purpose of Research

There is a deficit of information regarding adolescent-parent separation in general under unforced circumstances (i.e., the adolescent's leaving home to attend college). A particular gap is the lack of focus on this separation's impact on the father remaining at home. The



purposes of this research were: (a) to investigate the family environment, as perceived by the father before and after the college freshman left home, as to whether or not change does occur; (b) to explore the extent to which fathers employ coping strategies to deal with this change (if it does occur) as they make the transition into a new family phase; (c) to assess whether exposure to a parent orientation program explains change in family environment and coping strategies; and (d) to assess whether the sex of the child entering college explains change in family environment and coping strategies.

Long-range applications of the research could provide colleges and universities with the opportunity to help fathers (and mothers) through parent orientation programs prepare more adequately for the adolescent-parent separation. A better understanding of this passage by fathers may help minimize other stresses being experienced at that time as well as to maximize the capacity to appreciate their adolescents' new horizons. Such understanding may in turn contribute to helping families manage the separation in such a way that it has minimal negative impact on the family as a whole, both emotionally and behaviorally.

In recent years, there has been an increase in participation by parents in Parent Orientation Programs on college campuses across the country (National Orientation Directors' Association [NODA], 1980; NODA, 1982;

Staudenmeier & Marchetti, 1983). Participation in these programs signals a renewed interest on the part of parents in their children's college experience. It also suggests that there may be questions and undefined needs that exist in parents' minds regarding their children's leaving home. To help parents understand the adolescent-parent separation from their own perspective would enable them to know that feeling some anxieties as their children leave home is not unusual and, in fact, is to be expected. Further, to initiate appropriate educational interventions on this subject as a part of parent orientation programs gives recognition to this significant family experience and permits parents to express their anxieties while sharing them with others who are experiencing similar emotions. Many parents would agree with family systems theorists that the whole is a sum of its parts, and when one part leaves, the whole encounters difficulties. Coping with these difficulties then becomes a known factor with which families may be better prepared to contend.

Fathers of college freshmen offer a particularly interesting perspective from which to study adolescent - parent separation. Society has taught men gender roles that encourage them to hide their emotions in the face of stress or change. Societal expectations and roles have also made it difficult to use men in research efforts related to families. They are usually at work or do not have time for activities related to their families because it is the

mother's responsibility to take care of family matters. Therefore, it is the mother's perspective that is seen most frequently in the literature. This phenomenon is particularly true in research related to adolescent-parent separation in which the separation process is frequently linked with the mother's earliest roles as nurturer and protector. Our culture has granted these roles as a priority for the mother (Mandelbaum, 1982) and has chosen to attend to children from the mother's perspective. Though these gender role expectations are changing in our society and men are assuming many more of the traditional female roles (i.e., childrearing, household tasks, etc.), there will be a deficit of research focusing on the father for some time to come given the overwhelming prevalence of mothers in past research studies. Thus, the focus of this research was on the father whose contributions to the adolescent-parent separation process have been overlooked.

#### Research Questions

There were four primary research questions asked in this research:

1. Will the father's perception of his family environment change after his adolescent leaves home to attend college? Do these differences modify the coping strategies used by the father in dealing with this transitional period?

2. Will fathers who attend a parent orientation program experience less change in their family environment perceptions than those who do not attend? Do these differences modify the coping strategies used by the father to deal with this transitional period?

3. Will fathers of daughters differ from fathers of sons in the degree to which they perceive family environment changes? Do these differences modify the coping strategies used by the father in dealing with this transitional period?

4. Are changes in family environment perceptions and coping strategies explained by sex of child, size of community, distance from college, birth order of child entering college, father's educational level, and whether or not the father attended a parent orientation program?

### Definitions

As a basis for understanding the research, the following definitions of terms are important.

Adolescent - a traditionally-aged college freshman approximately 18 years of age.

Adolescent-parent separation - an event which occurs when the adolescent leaves home to attend college as a freshman and lives on the campus.

Crisis - a decisive moment or sudden event of limited duration that brings with it stress for those exposed to it.

Family system- . . . a unified whole with members interacting and interdependent. The system is open - ended, as its members enter and leave; the family has conscious and unconscious rules which encompass individual needs and regulate the interactions between family members. (Wechter, 1983)

Intact family - the natural parents and siblings of those parents.

Step Ahead - a parent orientation program conducted at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro in June preceding their child's entrance into the University as a freshman.

Transition - an event which occurs when a crisis ends in change.

. . . the individual's emotional organization and his or her other relational arrangements must also undergo change. In addition to having to cope now with new problems, the individual must find ways of dealing with upset, tension, or fatigue, and find new sources of support for security, for feelings of worth, and for other components of well-being. Some previously maintained relationships may fade because they no longer seem appropriate while others may be modified to respond to the individual's new needs, and relationships not previously existent may now be developed. The individual's concerns and aims may change and with them the individual's sense of self. (Weiss, 1976, p. 214)

achievement of particular goals within the family. These may be challenged as the boundaries are extending. Yet operating around these subsystems is a defined hierarchy which determines the patterns of family behavior (Wedemeyer & Grotevant, 1982). Typically, parents will oversee the behavior of children (hierarchy) who have come together on a given issue (subsystem) in an effort to gain access to some activity beyond the family's defined boundaries. A specific example might be the children's wish to see an R-rated movie at a local theatre which has a questionable reputation and their subsequent request of their parents to allow them to see it. The parents may rule by saying "No."

Once a family structure has evolved, the question of process emerges. Just how permeable are these boundaries? Are they rigid or can they be penetrated given appropriate justification? The second question lends itself well to the process characteristic of adaptability defined as the "ability to make appropriate structural changes in response to developmental growth or situational stress while maintaining system definition and self-regulation" (Wedemeyer & Grotevant, 1982, p. 186). Relating these characteristics to the example given above, the parents may determine that viewing the movie as a family could offer some educational and developmental opportunities of value to the family as a unit. An appropriate change has been made to allow for a previously unacceptable event.

As individual family members come and go, the family unit undergoes change. This change could signal individual crises in both adolescents and parents. As the adolescents depart for college, they are encountering a new independence with its accompanying responsibilities. While they are experiencing this form of identity crisis, their parents may be realizing that they are entering their middle age years which often bring a renewed identity crisis (Wechter, 1983). Kerckhoff (1976) called this period "middlescence" and equated it to adolescence in the sense that during both developmental periods, participants are asking similar questions: Where am I going? Who am I?

#### Adolescent-Parent Separation

Adolescent-parent separation and the transition or stress often associated with it bring with them challenges to all of the characteristics of a family system previously mentioned: boundaries, subsystems, hierarchy, permeability, adaptability. Separation becomes

. . . a process whereby parents and child [adolescent] learn to differentiate themselves from each other and to part gradually, a process made possible by the satisfactions experienced by each individual in the family which bring a sense of growth, achievement, and contentment. (Mandelbaum, 1962, p. 26)

When the adolescent goes away to college, a series of changes is set off in the family marking a beginning of change for both adolescents and parents. Boundaries and subsystems change, which may open the door for challenges to the family hierarchy. Permeability and adaptability are

perhaps the first to experience change as the college freshman is increasingly becoming aware of a larger world arena in which the family is a very small spectator.

#### Stages of Adolescent-Parent Separation

The problems of the adolescent in adolescent-parent separation have been studied. Though many of these research efforts have focused on clinical populations, the findings have been carefully related to the adolescent in general, though such correlations are questionable (Bloom, 1980; Blos, 1967; Bowlby, 1977; Haley, 1980; Stierlin, 1974; Stierlin et al, 1971; Wechter, 1983). Some researchers have focused specifically on the college freshman population (Moore, 1984; Moore & Hotch, 1981; Kurash, 1979). All of these findings support the idea that adolescents move through several stages of a separation-individuation process that result in the establishment of personal autonomy for the adolescent (O'Connell, 1972; Stierlin, 1974).

Stierlin (1974) defined five such stages. Stage One is "control of the impulse to remain attached." During this stage, adolescents are uncomfortable being children or adults. They may test their limits with their parents, while at the same time they are unconsciously asking for help. This stage is a time of general ambivalence for both adolescents and parents, but it is a move toward the adolescents' independence.

"Cognitive realization of the adolescent-parent separation" is Stage Two. During this period adolescents



accept the inevitability of separation. While still testing their limits at home, they are more involved in activities away from home, such as part-time jobs or spending more time with their peers. They are gradually breaking the tie.

Stage Three is the "affective response to the separation" when both parents and adolescents have feelings of nostalgia for the past. They realize that the child - parent relationship has changed and may even mourn its loss. In this process they are seeking meaning to their new relationship as they reach Stage Four, "identification." The adolescents have achieved separation and are responsible for themselves. They have begun to demonstrate that their parents' values are, in part, their own and they are their own individuals.

Stage Five recognizes this individuality and is the "attenuation of the child-parent relationship and the corresponding development of a new relationship." The parent - child interactions are now adult - adult interactions and the young adult now begins to open to other relationships that may involve new meanings: intimacy, commitment, and stability (Stierlin, 1974).

Kurash (1979) described similar stages in her description of the late adolescent's transition to college. She called them subphases, and the first is the anticipatory subphase. Characterized by distancing and anxiety, the ambivalence described by Stierlin (1974) can also be applied in this subphase. The adolescent pulls away from parents

and becomes increasingly attached to their peers, in the process disengaging from the previous parent-child relationship.

Leavetaking is the second subphase and involves the actual physical separation and distance between freshman and parents. During this subphase, the freshmen realize that college is not as frightening as they may have expected. They become attached to their new "home" and its constituents.

The third subphase "settling in" brings about a renewed attachment to parents. "The separation has been made and an increased affiliation with those who most threaten psychological separateness, the parents, can be resumed without fear of engulfment" (Kurash, p. 77). The fact that freshman and parent are still living apart serves as insurance for the established separateness.

#### The Adolescent's Coping with Separation

Through the entire separation process, the adolescents' perceptions of this separation can be defined in terms of specific behaviors and thoughts that make the process more realistic and easy to address in anticipation of the changes, crises, and transitions that could occur. Knowing what behaviors to expect can facilitate training in appropriate coping strategies to ease the crisis at hand. Adolescents receive this training in a variety of ways. They learn from their peers what to expect by observing them

in this separation process. More specifically, college freshmen participate in orientation programs that address the potential problems accompanying separation.

Research has identified specific behaviors and thoughts that help adolescents recognize their independence. Examples are: "The dorm is the center of my life now;" "My family is not here;" "I must do things for myself now;" "I can make my own decisions;" "I have my own job and money 'now';" "Everything I own is here with me" (Moore, 1984; Moore & Hotch, 1983). These statements reflect behavioral and thought changes that signal the beginning of the recognition that adolescents have of the separation process and its ultimate completion.

Parental problems in the adolescent - parent separation process have been referenced in the literature in quite a different manner. Because behavioral changes that occur in parents are not as obvious, there are no specific research efforts addressing such changes. Stierlin (1974) began to address behavioral changes in his discussion of the stages of adolescent - parent separation, but since his focus was on the adolescent, he leaves the parent wanting more. One example he cited was that a father can learn to go fishing with friends rather than with his children as he sees his children establishing their own independence. He can learn alternative ways of meeting the needs previously filled by a child. Specific strategies for addressing the emotional and behavioral problems of parents resulting from their

separation from their children need further attention and clarification.

### Parental Crisis During Middlecence

Previous mention has been made of the crisis associated with middlecence. This crisis has received considerable attention in the literature (both popular and research oriented), but it is a crisis that can stand apart from that associated with adolescent - parent separation. Though discussions of adolescence and middlecence can be found together (Bloom, 1980; Douvan & Axelson, 1966; Haley, 1980; Scherz, 1967; Stierlin, 1974; Turner, 1970), middlecence can also occur in childless families and even in unmarried individuals and can only be complicated further by the presence of children and crises that occur associated with the children.

It has been noted that parents experiencing the adolescent - parent separation are frequently left out when discussions center on adjustment to this transition for the adolescent. Adjustment needs also exist for parents and can be identified only after a better understanding of the changes they are experiencing is accomplished. Achieving this transition successfully can not be equated or generalized to middlecence or the middle age crisis, for the crisis involves many more precipitating events or stressors than simply an adolescent leaving home. For women there is the biological stage of menopause which frequently brings with it emotional ups and downs. It is

a time when parents may die or when jobs are no longer challenging.

Separating the crises of middlecence and a child leaving home is a difficult task because of the reality that parents of adolescents entering college typically are middle aged and in the "caught generation" (Vincent, 1972), caught between the demands of their children and the needs of their elderly parents. Individual stressors are difficult to sort out. Many of them are questioning their own identity, as are their peers (married and unmarried alike). They have reached the "stage of reassessment, doubt, and sometimes despair regarding the goals that have shaped their lives in the two to three decades since they made their own adolescent choices" (Turner, 1970, p. 397). They are struggling with these realities as their own adolescents are making the decisions that will affect their middle age years. Therefore, limiting this research effort to parents, and more specifically, to fathers of adolescents, will allow for the discovery or rediscovery of coping behaviors that can be used to achieve successful completion of the adolescent - parent separation.

#### The Father's Role in the Separation Process

Though parents have clearly been neglected in research efforts related to voluntary adolescent - parent separation, a more protrusive omission is related to the father in particular. When fathers are mentioned specifically (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980), the results relate to the

adolescent's adjustment as opposed to the parents', and especially the father's, adjustment. Other references to the father are difficult to find and generally occur in research findings involving clinical populations and referencing parents in general (as opposed to mother and/or father) (Mandelbaum, 1962; Scherz, 1967; Stierlin et al 1971). These findings offer little, if any, support for voluntary adolescent - parent separation experiences.

#### Summary

The literature overwhelmingly comes out on the side of the adolescent when considering adolescent-parent separation. Stages of separation have been identified and programs have been developed to help adolescents adjust to transitional periods such as entry into college. What has not occurred is a similar look at the parents' side of the process. Whether stages of separation exist for parents or support for this transition is needed is not clear. What is clear is that the process involves two (and more) parties, both of whom have needs worthy of consideration.

## CHAPTER III

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This quasi-experimental research effort represents a nonequivalent control group design in which a pretest and posttest were conducted. The dependent variables were family environment and family coping. The major independent variable was attendance at a summer orientation program for parents of freshmen with selected demographic variables used as independent variables.

Sample

The sample consisted of 143 white fathers in intact families who had a child entering the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as a residence hall freshman in the fall of 1986. Table 1 provides demographic data describing the sample. Twenty-six percent of fathers had sons entering the University, while 74% had daughters. These percentages approximate the enrollment of males at the University which was 31% male at the undergraduate level.

Representing communities of fewer than 10,000 in population (35%) to those of more than 50,000 (39%), the majority of fathers lived less than 250 miles from the University campus. The fathers themselves had some exposure to the college experience (30% were college graduates and 54% had some college or community college experience).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Fathers  
in the Total Sample (N=143)

Characteristic	N	%
Fathers of Sons	37	25.9
Fathers of Daughters	106	74.1
<hr/>		
Distance lived from UNCG		
Less than 50 miles	32	22.4
50-100 miles	46	32.2
100-250 miles	30	21.0
More than 250 miles	35	24.5
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North Carolina Residents	101	70.6
Non-residents of North Carolina	42	29.4
<hr/>		
Size of Community in Which They Live		
Unreported	2	-
Less than 10,000 (rural)	49	34.8
10,000-50,000 (town/small city)	37	26.2
More than 50,000 (urban)	55	39.0
<hr/>		
Number of Children in the Family		
One	8	5.6
Two	72	51.0
Three	40	28.0
Four	16	11.2
Five	2	1.4
Six	2	1.4
Seven	1	0.7
Eight	1	0.7
<hr/>		
Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG		
Only Child in Family	8	5.6
First Child of Several	62	43.4
Middle Child (2nd, 3rd...etc.)	21	14.7
Last Child	52	36.4



Table 1 (con't)

Demographic Characteristics of Fathers  
in the Total Sample (N=143)

Characteristic	N	%
Father's Educational Level		
Less than High School	3	2.1
High School Graduate	20	14.0
Community College	36	25.2
Some College	41	28.7
College Graduate	9	6.3
Some Graduate School	34	23.8

Financial Support Parent's Provide

Their College Freshmen

Unreported	1	-
Less than 25% of their Expenses	11	7.7
25-50%	7	4.9
50-99%	50	35.2
All of their expenses	74	52.1

The majority were providing at least half of the financial support required by their freshmen to meet college expenses.

For 49% of the fathers, this was their first child to enter college and for 36% their last child to enter college. The average number of children per father was 2.6 with 51% of the sample reporting two children.

### Instruments

The four instruments were two demographic questionnaires (Appendices B and F) developed by the researcher, the Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974), and the F-COPES Family Coping Strategies Scale (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1982).

The Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974) served as a measure of the father's perception of his family environment. It was used to describe and compare this perception at two points in time before and after the child left for college. Definitions of the six subscales used in the analysis and sample true-false statements measuring each are:

Cohesion - the degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another.  
 ("Family members really help and support one another."  
 "There is a feeling of togetherness in our family."  
 "There is very little group spirit in our family.")

Expressiveness - the extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings directly. ("Family members often keep their feelings to themselves." "There are a lot of spontaneous discussions in our family." "We say anything we want to around home.")

Conflict - the amount of openly expressed

anger, aggression, and conflict among family members. ("We fight a lot in our family." "Family members hardly ever lose their temper." "Family members often try to one-up or out-do each other.")

Independence - the extent to which family members are assertive, self-sufficient, and make their own decisions. ("We don't do things on our own very often in our family." "We come and go as we want to in our family." "We think things out for ourselves in our family.")

Achievement orientation - the extent to which activities (e.g., school and work) are cast into an achievement-oriented or competitive framework. ("We feel it is important to be the best at whatever you do." "Getting ahead in life is very important in our family." "We always strive to do things just a little better the next time.")

Control - the extent to which set rules and procedures are used to run family life. ("There are very few rules to follow in our family." "There is one family member who makes most of the decisions." "There is a strong emphasis on following rules in our family.") (Moos, 1986, p. 2)

Raw scores ranging from one to 72 were converted to standard scores for analysis purposes. Of statistical interest is the fact that the Moos' subscales have acceptable internal consistencies ranging from .64 to .78, show good eight week, test-retest reliability ranging from .68 to .86, and show low to moderate subscale inter-correlations ranging from .27 to .44 (p. 8). This reflects the reality that though the subscales are related, they do measure in part distinct views of family social environment.

The F-COPES Scale (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1982) was used to identify changes in the fathers' coping strategies that may have been used in response to the adolescent-parent separation. In this context, coping

strategies are defined as "effective problem-solving approaches and behaviors used by families in response to problems or difficulties" (McCubbin et al, p. 101). Using a five-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), respondents were asked: "When we face problems or difficulties in our family, we respond by. . . ." Sample responses were: "sharing our difficulties with friends;" "having faith in God;" "facing problems head-on and trying to get solutions right away;" "believing if we wait long enough, the problem will go away;" and "seeking advice from relatives." The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the total scale is .86 while test-retest reliability over four weeks is .81 (McCubbin et al). Scores used in the data analysis were the total raw scores with a range from 0 to 145.

### Limitations of Instruments

#### Family Environment Scale

The Family Environment Scale (FES) has been used frequently in research studies over the last ten years. It has primarily been used to describe and compare families. A typology of family environments was developed for use by clinicians in their work with families. A family incongruence score is often used in clinical settings by comparing within-family perceptual differences.

When reviewing the more important applications and

findings from the FES as presented by Moos (1986), it became apparent that the scale has more often been used in clinical or therapeutic settings. Examples of research samples were abusive families, families with disturbed adolescents, families of substance abusers, and families with members in therapy. Other efforts focused on childhood adjustment to parental divorce, eating disorders among children, chronic childhood diseases and mental retardation. More recent efforts have examined the family environment's influence on cognitive and social development and adolescent behavior and on adult's stress-resistance and depression, adult nutrition and health.

The use of the FES in this study differs from the ways in which it has been previously used. Though divorce and chronic illness, for example, produce life transitions and crises, the adolescent-parent separation studied here is an expected transition for which adolescents and parents alike can prepare. Such preparation may temper perceptual changes as the fathers have prepared for the separation.

A normal family sample, upon which the scores used in this research were based, was drawn from across the country, from single parent and multi-generational families, from different ethnic groups, and from families of all age groups. The sample used in this research was white fathers from the Southeast who were in intact families. The generalization of these results to the normative data used by Moos must be considered.

F-COPES

The Family Coping Strategies Scale (F-COPES) "was created to identify effective problem-solving approaches and behaviors used by families in response to problems or difficulties" (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1982, p. 101) Because it was a relatively new instrument, published research did not offer the wealth of applications seen for the FES. Its structure however lends itself best to small group or family interpretations as they explore effective problem-solving behaviors. Its use in this research was not to identify effective problem-solving approaches but rather to assess the extent to which fathers used coping strategies to deal with the changes brought on as the adolescent left home. The total score of the instrument was interpreted to represent a level of strategy use that could be compared over time. Such an interpretation may limit the generalization of the findings to other settings and populations.

A further limitation was realized as the sample on which norms were based was not clearly identified in the materials available on the F-COPES. A test-retest reliability study used students of psychology and family studies to administer the questionnaire to friends and family. The derived sample had a mean age of 23, was two-thirds female, and three-fourths unmarried (McCubbin et al, 1982). The fathers in the current research obviously did not match this profile. However, norms were given for

adults (male and female) and adolescents (male and female) and were those used in this research study. On what the adult male norms were based was not clear. Thus, generalization must be made with caution.

## VARIABLES

### Independent Variables

Five demographic variables were identified as possible predictors of the dependent variables to be analyzed in this research. These variables and their levels were:

1. Sex of Child (labeled as SEX)
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
2. Birth Order of Child Entering College
  - a. First and Only Child to Enter College  
(no other children at home) - COLLEGE
  - b. First Child to Enter College (other children still at home) - COLLI
  - c. Middle Child to Enter College (2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. child to enter college, but not the last) - COLLII
  - d. Last Child to Enter College (no other children left at home) - COLLIII
3. Population of Home Community
  - a. Less than 10,000 - POPUL
  - b. 10,000-50,000 - POPULI

- c. More than 50,000 - POPULII
- 4. Distance from Home to University - DISTANC
  - a. Less than 250 miles (collapsed from three categories on the demographic questionnaire: less than 50 miles, 50-100 miles, 100-250 miles)
  - b. More than 250 miles
- 5. Socioeconomic Class (as determined by father's educational level)
  - a. High School Graduate or Less - SES
  - b. Some college or community college - SESI
  - c. College Graduate or more - SESII

A sixth predictor used was the father's attendance at the University's summer orientation program for parents called Step Ahead - ATTEND.

#### Dependent Variables

The score for the dependent variables were the difference scores (posttest minus pretest) on the six subscales of the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the total score on the F-COPES. These scores represented the amount of change that occurred on each scale from time one to time two. These variables were labeled as follows:

1. DIFFC - difference between posttest and pretest scores on the Cohesion subscale of the FES
2. DIFFEX - difference between posttest and



- pretest scores on the Expressiveness subscale of the FES
3. DIFFCON - difference between posttest and pretest scores on the Conflict subscale of the FES
  4. DIFFIND - difference between posttest and pretest scores on the Independence subscale of the FES
  5. DIFFAO - difference between posttest and pretest scores on the Achievement Orientation subscale of the the FES
  6. DIFFCTL - difference between posttest and pretest scores on the Control subscale of the FES
  7. DIFFT - difference between posttest and pretest scores on the Total score of the F-COPES

### Procedures

#### Sample Selection and Data Collection

In order to identify the sample, the University's Office of Admissions generated a computer listing of all entering freshmen who indicated an intention to live in University residence halls. Since the admissions data file could not provide information specific enough to identify only those freshmen who live in intact families, the listing included freshmen living in single parent and reconstituted families as well. The list totaled 1581 students.

Given the availability of only 1400 Family Environment Scales, a systematic random sample was created by eliminating every eighth name on the list. All students living outside the United States were also eliminated. This created a list of 1386 students' addresses to which were mailed an introductory letter (Appendix A) and research instruments, Questionnaire #1 (Appendix B), FES and F-COPES in early May 1986. Also included in the packet were an "Informed Consent" form (Appendix C) and a stamped, return addressed envelope. The packets were addressed "To the parents of . . ." each student, and the introductory letter was addressed to the father. The letter described briefly the purpose of the research and encouraged the father's participation. Readers were also asked to return the contents of the packet if there was no father in the home or if they chose not to participate in the research.

All respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their results in both the cover letter and the "Informed Consent" form. This confidentiality was maintained as the Administrative Assistant in the Office of Student Affairs coded all outgoing packets and received all incoming packets. The researcher received only the questionnaires and instruments after the consent forms were separated and stored. These were then coded for data entry.

Of the 1386 packets mailed, 750 were returned, a return rate of 54.1%. A post card reminder (Appendix D) was also sent to all from whom a packet was not returned.

after ten days. Of the 750 returned, 427 declined to participate or were not qualified for participation; 137 did not qualify because they were either single parents or were part of a reconstituted family. Others did not have a father in the home. A few fathers were eliminated because their child was not going to live on campus or because their child had previously been away from home for an extended period at a boarding school. The age of the child did not become a factor, because it is typically the traditionally aged adolescent (18 years of age) who lives in the University's undergraduate residence halls.

The final pretest sample was 323 fathers who returned all fully completed materials in a timely manner. Because a comparison was to be made between those fathers who attended the University's Step Ahead program and those who did not, no questionnaires received after the beginning of that program in mid-June were included in the sample. This allowed a period of approximately six weeks for the return of the packets.

#### Step Ahead Program

The Step Ahead Program and its Parent Orientation component provided fathers with a day and a half orientation program in late June that was designed to familiarize parents with the University, its programs and its services. It was during this program that the parents participated in a one and one-half hour session called "Expecting the Unexpected."

Led by the researcher, this sensitizing session was designed to share with the parents changes that may occur in the family during the transition that occurs as their freshmen departs for college. Topics ranging from sibling rivalry to increased independence of the freshman on his/her return home, to parent nostalgia for the "old days" were discussed among the parents in small group settings. The researcher encouraged the parents to nurture open communication lines in the family and to talk about how their child's departure from home was going to affect the family as a whole.

Sharing among and between parents during this session was very productive and thought-provoking. Program evaluation forms gave the session the highest possible rating with written comments noting their "thanks" for this type of discussion. A primary message sent by the University in Step Ahead's parent component was that the entire family has a stake in the freshman's experience and that the University cares about the whole family, not just the student.

Because parents chose to come or not to come to the Step Ahead program, the researcher had two groups of fathers participating in the research study - those who came to Step Ahead (called a treatment group) and those who did not come (called a control group). These groups were obviously self-determined by the fathers themselves as they made their choice to attend or not to attend. There were 69

fathers who attended the Step Ahead Program.

#### Posttest Phase

In mid-October 1986, the posttest phase of the research was conducted. Mid-October (six to eight weeks into the fall semester) was selected as the posttest period and paralleled the second of three phases encountered by college freshmen and identified by Kurash (1979).

Each subject in the pretest sample of 323 fathers was mailed a packet that included a follow-up letter (Appendix E), a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F), the Family Environment Scale, and the F-COPES. The fathers were also asked if they would be willing to talk by telephone to an interviewer who would talk with them generally about their separation experiences. If willing, they were to return a form indicating times and telephone numbers at which they could be reached. Ninety-six of the subjects did return these forms.

As during the pretest phase, a post card reminder was mailed to fathers who had not responded after ten days. Packets were accepted for a period of approximately six weeks after the initial mailing. To insure continued confidentiality, the packets were received by an Administrative Assistant who separated the questionnaires from the forms of those fathers who indicated their willingness to be interviewed. The questionnaires were then given to the researcher for coding and data entry.

Of the 323 fathers in the pretest sample, 213 returned

their packets for a return rate of 65.9%. Of these, 11 were incomplete and 10 were eliminated either because their child did not move into the residence halls or their child decided not to attend UNCG. This left 190 completed questionnaires.

Because the research questions focused on changes in the family environment that occurred as the result of the adolescent-parent separation, it was necessary to eliminate those fathers whose families had experienced other types of stresses during the time period covered by this research, such as a death in the immediate family or divorce. Black fathers were also eliminated because of a low number (14) which did not distribute well over the predictor variables. This brought the final research sample down to 143 fathers, 69 of whom had attended the Step Ahead Program (See Table 2). Of the 74 who did not attend, about half of them said they could not get off from work; however, 57 said they would have attended if they could have.

The final step in the data collection phase was the telephone interview that was conducted with twelve fathers randomly selected from the returned forms and who volunteered their time. These qualitative data were gathered by two student service professionals who themselves were involved in the Step Ahead Orientation program. The purpose of these telephone interviews was simply to provide fathers the opportunity to say anything about the adolescent-parent separation that they wished.

Table 2

Characteristics of Fathers by Step  
Ahead Attendance (N=143)

Characteristic	N	%
Attendance at Step Ahead		
Yes	69	48.3
No	74	51.7

If you did not attend Step Ahead,  
would you have attended if you  
could have?

Unreported	1	-
Could not take off work	36	49.3
Knew enough about UNCG	10	13.7
My child could not attend	5	6.8
Attended another Parent Program	5	6.8
Other	17	23.3

Would you have attended Step  
Ahead if you could have?

Unreported	1	-
Yes	57	78.1
No	16	21.9

The interviewers used a very simple interview form in the collection of these data (Appendix G) which were gathered in mid-December 1986 to early January 1987.

### Statistical Procedures

Using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) and the SAS User's Guide: Statistics (Sas Institute, Inc., 1985),  $t$  tests and stepwise multiple regression procedures were used to test each of the hypotheses, using the variables described earlier in this chapter. Reported statistics include mean scores, difference scores, regression coefficients ( $b$ ), and coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ). The  $F$  statistic was the test of significance for the procedures. A Pearson correlation was run and confirmed the independence of the dependent variables (See Appendix H).

### HYPOTHESES

- H1. Fathers' scores on selected subscales of the Family Environment Scale (FES) will change from pretest to posttest.
- H2. Fathers' scores on the F-COPES will change from pretest to posttest.
- H3. Fathers who attended the Parent Orientation Program Step Ahead will change on the FES scores from pretest to posttest more than fathers who did not attend.
- H4. Fathers who attended Step Ahead will change on the



F-COPES score from pretest to posttest more than fathers who did not attend.

- H5. Fathers of daughters will change on the FES scores from pretest to posttest more than fathers of sons.
- H6. Fathers of daughters will change on the F-COPES score from pretest to posttest more than fathers of sons.
- H7. The FES difference scores (posttest-pretest) on each subscale for all fathers can be explained by sex of child, distance lived from UNCG, size of community, birth order of child entering UNCG, father's educational level, and whether or not the father attended Step Ahead.
- H8. The F-COPES difference score for all fathers can be explained by sex of child, distance lived from UNCG, size of community, birth order of child entering UNCG, father's educational level, and whether or not the father attended Step Ahead.

## CHAPTER IV

## RESULTS

Data for 143 fathers are reported in this chapter.

Using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS), the researcher ran  $t$ -tests to determine if the changes occurring in difference scores were significant and a stepwise multiple regression to determine the best predictors of family environment and coping strategies difference scores among the independent variables. The difference scores came from the pretest and posttest scores on the Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Family Coping Strategies Scale (F-COPES). A significance level of .05 (F statistic) was required to accept the hypotheses related to the F-COPES total scores. A significance level of .01 was required to accept the hypotheses related to the scores of the six subscales of the FES because of the large number of  $t$ -tests being computed.

#### Family Environment

Family environment was measured using six of the ten subscales of the FES. These were cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, achievement orientation, and control. When considering the total sample of 143 fathers, two of the six FES subscales produced significant ( $p < .01$ ) changes from pretest to posttest - cohesion and expressiveness (see Table 3); therefore, hypothesis 1

?

Table 3

Comparison of Total Sample  
on Selected Subscales of  
Family Environment Scale

Subscales	Pretest Means	Posttest Means	Difference Score
Cohesion	56.19	59.18	2.99 **
Expressiveness	49.64	52.10	2.46 **
Conflict	43.80	42.18	-1.62 *
Independence	53.29	54.52	1.23
Achievement Orientation	52.94	54.08	1.14
Control	52.01	51.69	-0.32

\*  $p < .05$ \*\* $p < .01$

was supported. From pretest to posttest, fathers indicated that their families were more cohesive, providing more support for family members; and that family members were more expressive, expressing their feelings more openly.

When comparing fathers who attended Step Ahead to those who did not attend, there were no significant changes (see Table 4). Additionally, when comparing fathers of daughters to fathers of sons, there were no significant changes (see Table 5). Thus, hypotheses 3 and 5 which predicted change on the FES were not supported.

While considering the statistical significance of changes that occurred on the cohesion and expressiveness subscales for the total sample, one must note that the difference scores were only 2.99 and 2.46, respectively. Recognizing that these subscales have ranges of 67 and 58 points, the researcher noted that these difference scores were not as important as was implied in the t-test results.

Further analysis of the mean scores data by independent variable for the total sample (see Appendix J-1) provided findings of interest regarding fathers of only children. These fathers (n=8) had difference scores at least three points higher on both the expressiveness and independence subscales than did fathers of first, middle or last children to enter college. These findings could indicate that the parents left at home as their only child entered college expressed themselves and their feelings more openly and more directly than did fathers in

Table 4

Mean Scores of Fathers  
 on Selected Subscales of  
 Family Environment Scale:  
 Attended vs. Not Attended  
 Step Ahead

Subscales	Pretest Means		Posttest Means		Difference Scores	
	Attended (N=69)	Did Not Attend (N=74)	Attended	Did Not Attend	Attended	Did Not Attend
Cohesion	55.80	56.55	59.65	58.74	3.85	2.19
Expressiveness	50.78	48.57	51.51	52.65	0.73	4.08
Conflict	44.30	43.34	42.65	41.74	-1.65	-1.60
Independence	53.94	52.68	55.12	53.96	1.18	1.28
Achievement Orientation	54.39	51.58	54.16	54.01	-0.23	2.43
Control	50.77	53.18	51.25	52.11	0.48	-1.07

p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

Table 5

Comparisons of Total  
 Sample on Selected Subscales  
 of Family Environment:  
 Fathers of Sons vs.  
 Fathers of Daughters

Subscales	Pretest Means		Posttest Means		Difference Scores	
	Sons (N=37)	Daughters (N=106)	Sons	Daughters	Sons	Daughters
Cohesion	57.78	55.63	60.49	58.73	2.71	3.10
Expressiveness	51.51	48.98	54.41	51.29	2.90	2.31
Conflict	44.70	43.49	43.73	41.64	-0.97	-1.85
Independence	54.46	52.88	57.35	53.53	2.89	0.65
Achievement Orientation	53.84	52.62	53.78	54.19	-0.06	1.57
Control	49.92	52.75	50.24	52.20	0.32	-0.55

\* p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

other categories. They also might be self sufficient and might think things out for themselves rather than depending on others for support.

When examining the mean scores comparisons of fathers who attended Step Ahead vs. those who did not attend (see Appendices J-2 and J-3), the researcher found that only two of the subscales produced greater changes for fathers who attended. These were cohesion and conflict. Differences were too small however to be statistically significant.

Upon a closer review of the mean score comparisons by independent variables of fathers who attended Step Ahead vs. those who did not attend, two observations were made about the subscales of Achievement Orientation and Control. Fathers of middle children and who attended Step Ahead (n=6) lost 4.17 points on Achievement Orientation (see Appendix J-2). Fathers of middle children and who did not attend Step Ahead (n=15) gained 8.07 points on Achievement Orientation (see Appendix J-3). Since Achievement Orientation was a measure of competition within the family, the lower score of fathers who attended Step Ahead may indicate a better understanding of the college experience and a lesser threat to the competitive flow of the family environment.

The second observation was derived from the Control subscale and concerned those fathers who had a high school degree or less. Those who attended Step Ahead (n=7) gained 5.29 points on this subscale, while those who did not

attend (n=16) lost 1.87 points (a difference of 7.16 points). This difference reflected "the extent to which set rules and procedures are used to run family life" (Moos, 1986, p. 2). Fathers who attended Step Ahead were operating in a more structured manner since the adolescent-parent separation had occurred. Though small numbers of fathers account for these differences, the two groups were so similar demographically that the results were worthy of notation (see Appendix I).

Looking at the family environment as perceived by fathers of daughters vs. fathers of sons, three subscales showed greater differences in scores for fathers of daughters and three for fathers of sons (see Appendices J-4 and J-5). Fathers of daughters showed greater differences on cohesion, conflict, and achievement orientation. Fathers of sons showed greater differences on expressiveness, independence, and control. None of these differences were, however, statistically significant. Though it appeared that fathers of sons who are only children show major changes in their scores on the expressiveness and independence subscales, interpretation of these differences was not practical since there were only two fathers in this group.

When considering family environment perceptions by the fathers as a total sample or as divided by attendance at Step Ahead or sex of child, there was no significant change from pretest to posttest. When comparing appendices J-2 & J-3 and J-4 & J-5, when change did occur (little as it may



have been), it was noted that change generally occurred in the same direction on all mean score comparisons by independent variables. A lack of change confirmed the existence of a homogeneous sample as was realized in the sample selection procedures.

### Coping Strategies

Coping strategies were measured using the total score of the F-COPES scale. Higher difference scores (posttest-pretest) indicated the use of a greater variety of coping strategies or the increased use of the same coping strategies. The differences that did occur were not found to be statistically significant when a t-test was used. There was a range of 0 to 145, therefore it was apparent without conducting the t-tests that with a maximum change in score of 2.19 points (Fathers of sons - see Table 6) among all groups studied, there was no support for hypotheses 2, 4, and 6 which predicted that change would occur.

Of interest however was a mean scores comparison by independent variables between fathers who attended Step Ahead and those who did not (see Tables 8 and 9). Though the differences between posttest and pretest scores were small, the directions in which they moved were, for the most part, in opposite directions. For example, fathers who attended Step Ahead and who had daughters showed an increase in score. Fathers who did not attend and who had daughters

Table 6

Mean Scores on F-COPES for Selected Groups

Sample	Pretest Means	Posttest Means	Difference Score
All Fathers (N=143)	93.15	92.67	-0.48
Fathers who attended Step Ahead (N=74)	91.77	92.84	1.07
Fathers who did not attend Step Ahead (N=69)	94.45	92.51	-1.94
Fathers of Daughters (N=106)	92.39	92.50	0.11
Fathers of Sons (N=37)	95.35	93.16	-2.19

Table 7

Mean Scores on F-COPES By  
Independent Variables (N=143)

Independent Variables	Pretest	Posttest
Gender of Child		
Sons (N=37)	95.35	93.16
Daughters (N=106)	92.39	92.50
Distance from UNCG		
Less than 250 miles (N=108)	95.76	94.42
More than 250 miles (N=35)	85.11	87.29
Size of Community		
Less than 10000 (N=49)	94.24	94.10
10000-50000 (N=37)	92.41	89.81
More than 50000 (N=55)	92.96	93.04
Unreported (N=0)	--	--
Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG		
Only Child in Family (N=8)	88.75	90.00
First Child of Several (N=62)	92.77	92.00
Middle Child (N=21)	94.10	92.48
Last Child (N=52)	93.90	93.96
Father's Educational Level		
High School or less (N=23)	99.13	100.39
Some College (N=77)	93.62	92.27
College Graduates (N=43)	89.12	89.26
Attendance at Step Ahead		
Yes (N=69)	91.77	92.84
No (N=74)	94.45	92.51

Table 8

Mean Scores on F-COPES By  
 Independent Variables for Fathers  
 who Attended Step Ahead (N=74)

Independent Variables	Pretest	Posttest
Gender of Child		
Sons (N=14)	92.79	88.93
Daughters (N=55)	91.51	93.84
Distance from UNCG		
Less than 250 miles (N=53)	94.17	94.06
More than 250 miles (N=16)	83.81	83.81
Size of Community		
Less than 10000 (N=23)	94.78	93.39
10000-50000 (N=18)	93.67	90.88
More than 50000 (N=26)	88.27	93.39
Unreported (N=2)	85.50	100.50
Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG		
Only Child in Family (N=5)	88.40	91.80
First Child of Several (N=31)	90.84	91.42
Middle Child (N=6)	91.33	93.17
Last Child (N=27)	93.55	94.59
Father's Educational Level		
High School or less (N=7)	99.14	99.14
Some College (N=38)	93.03	93.29
College Graduates (N=24)	87.63	90.29

Table 9

Mean Scores on F-COPES By Independent  
Variables for Fathers who did not  
Attend Step Ahead (N=74)

Independent Variables	Pretest	Posttest
Gender of Child		
Sons (N=23)	96.91	95.74
Daughters (N=51)	93.33	91.74
Distance from UNCG		
Less than 250 miles (N=55)	97.29	94.76
More than 250 miles (N=19)	86.21	86.00
Size of Community		
Less than 10000 (N=26)	93.77	94.23
10000-50000 (N=19)	91.21	86.42
More than 50000 (N=29)	97.17	94.97
Unreported (N=0)	--	--
Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG		
Only Child in Family (N=3)	89.33	87.00
First Child of Several (N=15)	94.71	92.58
Middle Child (N=15)	95.20	95.20
Last Child (N=25)	94.28	93.28
Father's Educational Level		
High School or less (N=16)	99.13	100.94
Some College (N=39)	94.21	91.28
College Graduates (N=19)	91.00	87.95

showed a decrease. Fathers from rural areas who attended showed a decrease while those who did not attend showed an increase. Fathers from urban areas who attended showed an increase while those who did not attend showed a decrease. Regardless of the birth order of the UNCG freshman, fathers who attended showed an increase. Those who did not attend showed a decrease. Fathers with some college experience or more who attended showed an increase while fathers of comparable educational experience and who did not attend showed a decrease.

Similar findings were realized when comparing mean scores by independent variables of fathers of daughters and fathers of sons. Changes in scores moved in opposite directions (see Tables 10 and 11). This method of comparing data results demonstrated a difference in coping strategies between subgroups that was a step beyond the hypotheses presented. While one group was showing an increase in the use of coping strategies, its comparison group was showing a decrease.

Coping strategies used by the fathers in all five groupings of the data proved to be similar. No significant changes were realized.

#### Predictors of FES and F-COPES Using Total Sample

When examining the total sample of fathers, none of the independent variables proved to be significant (at the .01 level) as predictors for any of the FES subscales or the

Table 10

Mean Scores on F-COPES By Independent  
Variables for Fathers of Daughters (N=106)

Independent Variables	Pretest	Posttest
Distance from UNCG		
Less than 250 miles (N=84)	94.50	94.02
More than 250 miles (N=22)	84.32	86.68
Size of Community		
Less than 10000 (N=37)	92.76	93.62
10000-50000 (N=26)	93.00	89.31
More than 50000 (N=41)	92.00	93.12
Unreported (N=0)	--	--
Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG		
Only Child in Family (N=6)	88.33	91.50
First Child of Several (N=47)	91.06	91.70
Middle Child (N=14)	94.21	91.14
Last Child (N=39)	93.95	94.10
Father's Educational Level		
High School or less (N=18)	98.89	98.11
Some College (N=61)	92.44	92.28
College Graduates (N=27)	87.93	89.26
Attendance at Step Ahead		
Yes (N=55)	91.51	93.84
No (N=51)	93.33	91.06

Table 11

Mean Scores on F-COPES By Independent  
Variables for Fathers of Sons (N=37)

Independent Variables	Pretest	Posttest
Distance from UNCG		
Less than 250 miles (N=24)	100.17	95.79
More than 250 miles (N=13)	86.46	88.31
Size of Community		
Less than 10000 (N=12)	98.83	95.58
10000-50000 (N=11)	91.00	91.00
More than 50000 (N=14)	95.79	92.79
Unreported (N=0)	--	--
Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG		
Only Child in Family (N=2)	90.00	85.50
First Child of Several (N=15)	98.13	92.93
Middle Child (N=7)	93.86	95.14
Last Child (N=13)	93.77	93.54
Father's Educational Level		
High School or less (N=5)	100.00	108.60
Some College (N=16)	98.13	92.25
College Graduates (N=16)	91.13	89.25
Attendance at Step Ahead		
Yes (N=14)	92.79	88.93
No (N=23)	96.91	95.74



F-COPES (see Tables 12 and 13). These predictor variables were sex of child, distance from home, size of community, birth order of child entering UNCG, father's educational level, and attendance at Step Ahead. While three of the FES subscales showed predictors with significance less than .05, these were not acceptable with the previously determined  $p < .01$ . Thus, hypotheses 7 and 8 were not supported as none of the predictors were significant.

In an effort to understand the sample better, the researcher conducted separate multiple regressions on the pretest and posttest data as well as on the two comparison groups under study, i.e. fathers who attended Step Ahead vs. those who did not attend and fathers of daughters vs. fathers of sons. These results will be discussed briefly with reference made to tables in Appendices K - N.

#### Predictors of F-COPES for Selected Groups

##### Sex of Child

Sex of child became a significant predictor (at .05 level) of F-COPES for fathers who attended Step Ahead (see Table L-1). Fathers of daughters and who attended had a difference score of 2.33 as opposed to -3.86 for fathers of sons. This means that fathers of daughters showed an increase in the use of coping strategies while fathers of sons showed a decrease. Still, only 6% of the variance in F-COPES scores could be attributed to sex of child.

When considering the total sample, sex of child was

Table 12

Regression for the Total Sample on  
 Subscales of the Family Environment  
 Scale on Predictor Variables (N=143)

Subscales	Predictor	Unstandardized b	R-Squared Cumulative	R-Squared Change
Cohesion	POPULIa	-4.04 *	0.03	0.03
Expressiveness	ATTENDb	-3.36 *	0.03	0.03
	COLLIc	-3.82	0.04	0.01
Independence	SESIId	4.39 *	0.03	0.03
Achievement Orientation	COLLI	-4.02 *	0.04	0.04
	POPULII	3.03	0.06	0.01
	ATTEND	-2.49	0.07	0.02
Control	POPULII	-2.26	0.02	0.02

Note:  $p < .01$  was set as the level necessary  
 for supporting the hypothesis.

\* $p < .05$

a-Size of Community.

b-Attendance at Step Ahead.

c-Birth order of Child Attending UNCG.

d-Father's Educational Level.

Table 13

Regression for Total Sample on F-COPES  
for Predictor Variables (N=143)

Predictors	Unstandardized Beta	R-Squared Cumulative	R-Squared Change
DISTANCa	-3.51	0.02	0.02
ATTENDb	3.10	0.05	0.02
POPULc	-3.14	0.06	0.02

a-Distance from UNCG.

b-Attendance at Step Ahead.

c-Size of the Community.

significant (at .05 level) when predicting pretest scores on the F-COPES (see Table M-1). Two percent of the variance on the pretest scores of the F-COPES were attributed to this variable.

#### Distance from UNCG

For the total sample, distance from UNCG was a significant predictor for both the pretest and posttest of the F-COPES (See Table M-1). It was not a significant predictor of the difference score. In the pretest, distance accounted for 13% of the variance and in the posttest, 6%. Fathers who lived more than 250 miles from UNCG had lower scores on F-COPES than did those who lived closer.

When examining regressions of separate pretest and posttest F-COPES scores (see Appendix M), distance was also significant accounting for as much as 24% of the variance in the pretest scores for fathers of sons (See Table M-5). It was significant for both pretest and posttest scores for fathers of daughters (see Table M-4) and for fathers who did not attend Step Ahead (see Table M-3) and for the pretest scores of those fathers who attended Step Ahead ( $R^2=.13$ ) (see Table M-2).

#### Attendance at Step Ahead

Whether or not the father attended Step Ahead was a significant predictor only for fathers of daughters on the F-COPES scale. That is, fathers who attended Step Ahead and who had a daughter entering UNCG had a mean score on the

posttest that was a 2.33 difference from the pretest score (see Table 8) indicating their increased use of coping strategies. Fathers who did not attend Step Ahead and who had daughters had -2.27 as a difference score indicating a decrease in their use of coping strategies. Attendance accounted for 6% of the variance (see Table K-2) in coping strategies for fathers of daughters. No other significant results were found.

Given these findings, the researcher noted that sex of child, distance from UNCG, and attendance at Step Ahead were significant predictors for the level of use of coping strategies.

#### Predictors of FES for Selected Groups

##### Size of Community

Size of community became significant for fathers who did not attend Step Ahead on the pretest of the Cohesion subscale and accounted for 9% of the variance (see Table N-3). Fathers from urban communities (>50,000) scored 9.03 points lower than fathers from rural areas and 6.85 points lower than did fathers from communities of 10,000 to 50,000. This indicated that fathers from urban communities perceived their family environments as less cohesive and family members as less supportive of each other than the other groups.

When looking at fathers of daughters, size of

community was also significant on two occasions (see Tables M-4 and N-4). Accounting for 6% of the variance, fathers of daughters and who lived in communities of 10,000 to 50,000 had F-COPES difference scores of -3.69, whereas fathers from rural and urban areas showed differences of .86 and 1.12, respectively. When predicting posttest scores on the Cohesion subscale of the FES, it was found that these same fathers from communities of 10,000 to 50,000 scored 9.61 and 5.22 points lower than did fathers in rural and urban areas.

#### Birth Order of Child Entering UNCG

Birth order of the child entering UNCG became a significant predictor for several subscales of the FES when examining pretest and posttest groups. Fathers of last children to enter college scored 2.88 to 6.40 points lower on the pretest of the Conflict subscale of the FES than did other fathers (see Appendix J-1) accounting for 7% of the variance (see Table N-1). This lower score demonstrated that as the last child left home, there seemed to be less anger and conflict expressed in the family as only mother and father are left home. Fathers of first children to enter college scored as much as 5.07 points lower on the pretest of the Independence subscale (extent to which family members make own decisions) and fathers of middle children scored as much as 9.12 points lower on the pretest of the Achievement Orientation subscale (extent to which competition enters family activities).

When considering fathers who attended Step Ahead, those of first children to enter college scored as much as 11.23 points higher on the pretest of the Achievement Orientation subscale (see Appendix J-2) accounting for 11% of the variance (see Table N-2). Fathers of middle children scored as much as 13.71 points lower on the posttest of the Achievement Orientation subscale.

Fathers who did not attend Step Ahead and whose last child was entering UNCG scored lower on the pretest of the Conflict subscale (see Appendix J-3). The differences ranged from 8.49 points when comparing them to fathers of first children to 2.85 points when comparing them to fathers of only children ( $R^2=.11$ ) (see Table N-3).

Finally, two predictors were significant for fathers of daughters on the pretest of subscales of the FES (see Table N-4). Fathers of daughters who were first children to enter college scored as much as 7.73 points higher on the Conflict subscale ( $R^2=.01$ ). Fathers of daughters who were middle children entering college scored from 4.81 to 9.26 points lower on the Achievement Orientation subscale ( $R^2=.08$ ).

#### Father's Educational Level

Father's educational level was not significant when considering difference scores of any group studied. When examining pretest and posttest regressions, there were

several significant findings.

The first finding was on the posttest of the Conflict subscale of the FES for the total sample ( $n=143$ ). Fathers who were college graduates scored 7.47 points higher than high school graduates or less and 4.04 points higher than fathers with some college experience ( $R^2=.05$ ) (see Appendix J-1 and N-1). Similarly, college graduates who attended Step Ahead scored as much as 8.24 points higher on the Conflict subscale than other fathers ( $R^2=.09$ ).

On the posttest of the Control subscale of the FES, college graduates who did not attend Step Ahead scored 10.33 points higher than fathers with high school or less and 5.25 points higher than fathers with some college experience (see Appendix J-3) accounting for 3% of the variance (see Table N-1). As measured by the Control subscale, rules and procedures seemed to be more important in the homes of college graduates after their children departed.

College graduates who had sons ( $n=37$ ) had a higher score (by 10 points) on the posttest of the Control subscale of the FES than fathers with high school or less. They also had higher score by eight points than fathers with some college experience (see Appendix J-5). If the college graduate had a daughter entering UNCG, he scored as much as 9.1 points higher on the posttest of the Conflict subscale ( $R^2=.11$ ) (see Table N-4).

The subscales of Conflict and Control presented an interesting picture of fathers who themselves had



graduated from college. Significant increases in these scores indicating more conflict and increased significance of rules and procedures have posed an opportunity for future research to explore why this happened. However, when only 5% to 11% of the variance is explained, the remaining variance is due to other variables.

Significant differences were also noted on the F-COPES scale. College graduates (N=143) scored as much as 10.01 points lower on the F-COPES pretest than did the other fathers ( $R^2=.03$ ) (see Table M-1). Fathers with high school or less scored as much as 11.13 points higher on the posttest than other fathers but only 4% of the variance was explained. These low percentages explained little variance being accounted for by using father's educational level as a predictor for levels of usage of coping strategies.

As realized by regressions of FES subscales on predictor variables (pretest vs. posttest), family environment perceptions could be predicted by size of community, birth order of child entering college, and father's educational level for certain groups. These were not predictors of F-COPES.

#### Interview Findings

Telephone interviews were conducted with twelve fathers who volunteered their time for an interview by returning a form enclosed with the posttest mailing (see Appendix E).

These forms were randomly filed in a folder from which two interviewers received the names of those fathers whom they would call. Calls were made according to the specified availability of the fathers and were completed when twelve fathers had been successfully reached. Using a brief interview form (Appendix G), the interviewers asked several questions. The main question asked was whether the separation between father and child had been easier or more difficult than expected. They were also asked how frequently they were in contact with their child during this period of separation and how often their child came home.

These interviews were conducted in order to allow fathers the opportunity to verbalize their feelings about their separation from their children. Pen and paper measures often do not allow research participants to say what they may really want to say. These interviews provided that opportunity for the fathers contacted.

The results of the telephone interviews confirmed the lack of support for the hypotheses presented in this research. Regardless of whether or not the father attended Step Ahead, the general experience was that the separation was easier than was expected.

Fathers who attended the Step Ahead program responded with comments such as:

It (the separation) is what I expected. . .  
I feel better prepared than my parents were.  
(Child came home twice a month. Telephone  
contact - three times per week)

(It was) easier (than I expected). Everything went nicely. She was ready to go to school and we were ready to have her leave. Everybody had a good attitude.

(Child came home once a month. Telephone contact - every other week)

(It was as I) expected. The first few months were expected to be and resulted in an adjustment period.)

(Child came home weekly. Telephone contact - three times per week)

Fathers who did not attend the Step Ahead program reported similar results:

(The separation was) easier. My daughter was happy about school, so I didn't worry about her as much.

(Child came home twice a month. Telephone contact - weekly)

(The separation) was what we expected.

(Child came home every week. Telephone contact - daily)

(It was) easier. I feel no anxiety and feel she is secure here (at UNCG).

(Child came home once a month. Telephone contact - twice a week. Wife attended Step Ahead)

(It was) a little easier than expected. A good adjustment on my daughter's part helped us.

(Child came home twice during the fall semester. Telephone contact - weekly)

(It was) easier. I expected it to be real bad. My daughter adjusted real well which helped me.

(Child came home weekly. Telephone contact - every other week in addition to weekly visits home)

#### Summary of Findings

The researcher found no support for seven of the eight hypotheses as posed in Chapter III. The interview findings corroborate the statistical findings. There was significant

change from pretest to posttest on the cohesion and expressiveness subscales of the FES (when considering the total sample) providing some support for Hypothesis 1. There was no significant change from pretest to posttest on the F-COPES. When the sample was divided by attendance at Step Ahead and sex of child, there were no significant findings on either FES subscales or the F-COPES. Since no significant changes in scores were found, it would follow that these particular independent variables would not serve as significant predictors of variance. This was supported in the regression analyses conducted on the difference scores.

Of some significance were the findings stemming from regression analyses conducted within certain groups on the pretest scores and on the posttest scores. This step was taken when procedures related to the stated hypotheses yielded no significance. Essentially, sex of child, distance from home, size of community, birth order of child entering college, and father's educational level are variables to consider when studying the effect of a child's entering college.

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Previous research efforts have focused on the adolescent-parent separation and its effect on the adolescent (Bloom, 1980; Blos, 1967; Bowlby, 1977; Kurash, 1979; Haley, 1980; Moore, 1984; Moore & Hotch, 1981; Stierlin, 1974; Stierlin et al, 1971; Wechter, 1983). In many cases, the research noted above involved a forced adolescent-parent separation, such as the institutionalization of adolescents who have emotional problems. These results can not easily be generalized to voluntary adolescent-parent separation situations, such as an adolescent entering college or the armed services. Those studies involving voluntary adolescent-parent separation have focused only on the adolescents' adjustment. Overall, however, the findings do support the idea that adolescents move through a separation-individuation process that results in the establishment of the own personal autonomy.

What the literature did not offer was a description of what happens to the parents during this process. Increasing attention has been given to the period of middlecence in adulthood (Kerckhoff, 1976). Adults in this period are asking questions similar to those of adolescents: Where am I going? Who am I? Given the popular notion of and attention to menopause as a stimulus of both physical and emotional change in women during this middlecence period, the

researcher was most interested in how fathers adapt to change, and more specifically, to the adolescent-parent separation as the adolescent enters college.

The purposes of this research were: (a) to investigate the family environment, as perceived by the father before and after the college freshman left; (b) to explore the extent to which fathers employ coping strategies to deal with any changes as they make the transition into a new family phase; (c) to assess whether exposure to a Parent Orientation program explains changes in family environment and coping strategies; and (d) to assess whether the sex of the child entering college explains changes in family environment and coping strategies.

#### Discussion of Results

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that fathers' scores on selected subscales of the Family Environment Scale (FES) and on the F-COPES would change from pretest to posttest. Statistically significant change occurred on only two subscales of the FES, but not for the F-COPES. Therefore hypothesis 1 was partially supported and hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predicted that fathers who attended Step Ahead (a Parent Orientation Program at UNCG) would change more on their FES and F-COPES scores from pretest to posttest than would fathers who did not attend Step Ahead. Once again, significant change did not occur. Thus,

hypotheses 3 and 4 were not supported.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 predicted that fathers of daughters would change more on the FES and F-COPES scores from pretest to posttest than would fathers of sons. Yet again, significant change did not occur. Hypotheses 5 and 6 were not supported.

With no significant change occurring in any of these comparisons, it followed that hypotheses 7 and 8, which offer explanations or predictors for change, were not supported. Expected changes in family environment perceptions and in the use of coping strategies were simply not found. What may account for this lack of change? What can explain the variation in FES and F-COPES scores within the groups of interest, fathers of daughters or sons and fathers who attended or did not attend Step Ahead?

The adolescent-parent separation under study had two dimensions. The first of these was the physical separation that occurred as the adolescent actually moved out of the house into a university residence hall. The second was the emotional separation that occurred as the parent-child relationship attenuated. As this occurred, the adolescent opened to other relationships involving intimacy and commitment. They found other sources of emotional support, especially from friends.

The physical separation has occurred. The adolescent is now living in a residence hall on campus. Some might argue that the emotional separation between parent and

adolescent has occurred before the adolescent leaves for college. Societal pressures exerted on high school youth today may have accelerated the separation-individuation process so that it is complete before the adolescent enters college. Thus, father-child interactions may have become adult-adult interactions, and the "new" adult's departure from home was not experienced as stress-producing.

On the other hand, some might argue that the emotional separation between adolescent and father has not occurred after only six to eight weeks apart. Time together has not been long enough or frequent enough to realize new differences or conflict which might trigger changes in the family environment. At the same time, the freshman may not have fully established that social network which eventually competes for family time. This would allow the family routine to continue as it did before the freshman left home.

The interview findings offered further support for the possibility that an emotional separation between adolescent and parent had not yet occurred. There appears to be very frequent contact between freshmen and their families. Ranging from telephone conversations every night to every other week to return home visits every week-end to every other month, contacts are frequent enough to argue that separation may not be complete. Levels of dependence are not understood, however, given the limitations of these interview data.



This question then is raised, when does the emotional separation between adolescent and father actually occur? This was not determined in this research.

Family systems theory argues that adapting to change (in this case, separation) is an integral part of family process. Adaptability is defined as the "ability to make appropriate structural changes in response to developmental growth or situational stress while maintaining system definition and self-regulation" (Wedemeyer & Grotevant, 1982, p. 186). However, this research showed another way to look at the maintenance of the family system.

The researcher made an early decision to study six of the ten subscales of the Family Environment Scale. These were Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, Independence, Achievement Orientation, and Control. The FES subscales make up three dimensions: relationship dimension, personal growth dimension, and system maintenance dimension. All three subscales of the relationship dimension (Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict) were used in the analysis. Only two of five subscales for the personal growth dimension were analyzed. These were Independence and Achievement Orientation; the remaining three on this dimension were Intellectual-cultural orientation, Active-recreational orientation, and Moral-religious emphasis. Control was the subscale analyzed from the system maintenance dimension, while the other subscale Organization was not used.

When looking at the mean scores comparison of the total

sample of fathers on the six subscales analyzed (see Appendix J-2), it was obvious that the greater change occurred on those subscales that comprised the relationship dimension. The other subscales revealed no statistically significant differences. Since there were changes occurring on two of the subscales of the relationship dimension, it became clear that this dimension was that most affected by the adolescent-parent separation.

Adaptation to this separation was occurring while the family was maintaining the system already established. This was supported by the finding that there were no significant changes on the Control subscale (the extent to which rules are used to run family life) which was a measure of system maintenance. The interview data supported the ease of this transition. All fathers found the separation to be what they expected or easier than they expected. This indicated that these families prepared well for the transition and adapted to the separation smoothly.

There is yet another view that may have affected the results. Though not supported by research, there is a perception that the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is a "safe place" to send one's child. This may be interpreted by many parents as a place where their children can get a good education without being exposed to extreme ideas and events. This might indicate that families who send their children to UNCG place greater value on the traditional side of family life and maintain closer contact

with their children. They seem to be secure in their thoughts that the University supports these traditional values and will transmit these to its students. Emotional separation between father and child has not likely occurred if such is the case. Though speculative in nature, this perception may warrant additional study.

Finally, consideration must be given to the nature of the sample. As volunteers for this research, the fathers demonstrated a real interest and commitment to their families. The time involved in completing the research instruments was time they were willing to take from their family and other obligations. Obviously, the separation between them and their adolescents was a significant life experience and they wanted to be a part of understanding it better. Their participation made them a unique group of men with similar interests in their families. These similarities created in part a homogeneous sample.

The homogeneity of the sample was a true advantage when comparing these fathers by attendance at Step Ahead or by sex of child. The comparison was real and not being made between two very different types of fathers. There were no significant differences between these groups either before or after data were analyzed. Their ability to cope as well before as after with the adolescent-parent separation was likely a function of their family structure and communication patterns coupled with their previous family experiences. They knew how to cope with change.

The results proffered in this research indicate that for many fathers, an adolescent's departure from home to college is not as traumatic for fathers as it may be for the adolescent. The support provided by these fathers to their adolescents (as evidenced by their willingness to participate in this research study and by their interest in the Step Ahead program) should mean that their adolescents may not have as difficult a transition to the college experience as may others who lack support from home. Such a deduction warrants further research and offers an opportunity to understand better the transitional difficulties experienced by so many college freshmen.

#### Limitations of the Research

The first limitation of the study was the nature of the sample. Because it was voluntary and self-selected, heterogeneity similar to the population could not be assumed. Therefore, results could not be generalized to a larger population. To participate in such a research effort, a father was most likely interested in the family and the changes that can take place within the family. He was most likely supportive of his children and secure in his relationship with them. In reality, this limitation probably was an advantage in that the control and treatment groups were very similar. This made the comparisons between groups more meaningful. The fact that 78% of the fathers in the control group would have

attended Step Ahead if it had been possible supported this similarity. It also addressed the possibility that it may be the family type rather than the Step Ahead program (treatment effect) that accounts for a smooth adjustment to the adolescent-parent separation.

A second limitation to the study may be the choice of research instruments. Beyond the limitations of the instruments, there are other points to consider. The Family Environment Scale (FES) measures perceptions of the family environment, but it does not preclude the possibility that respondents will answer as they wish things were as opposed to the way things are. Given this inventory by mail, respondents were not reminded of the need to be realistic and honest in their responses. Though there are not reasons to believe respondents were less than honest, there is no way to insure complete accuracy.

The choice of the F-COPES also presented some interpretive dilemmas. Like the FES, the F-COPES asks for personal assessment. Being human, respondents may have responded as they wish things were as opposed to the way things were. Both the FES and F-COPES are probably most useful in small group or family discussions as opposed to large group comparisons. If there were some standardized scores for well functioning families, maybe the mean scores could have been interpreted better.

The timing of the posttest assessment offered yet another limitation. Questions remain as to when the actual

emotional separation occurs. It is this transitional period that would show actual family environment changes. A longitudinal research design could address this limitation.

A fourth limitation of this research was the failure to consider the mothers' participation in the Step Ahead program. Her participation in this program without her husband's participation could still have triggered the type of family discussions that were encouraged by the program leader. These discussions would have focused on how the family would adjust to the separation and could have eased the transitional pangs for everyone. The telephone interviews revealing easier than expected transitions from fathers who did not attend Step Ahead also revealed that their wives did attend. This could account for the smaller differences between the control and treatment groups than was expected.

Failure to measure "contacts" between fathers and their children during the first six to eight weeks of the fall semester was yet another limitation. As mentioned earlier, frequent telephone calls or home visits could impede the separation process and account for the smaller differences realized in the research. Timing of the measurement becomes a factor in this respect also.

The total research design itself became a possible limitation. When addressing emotion-laden concerns, a researcher may question whether these can accurately be measured by a paper and pencil approach alone. Or is an

interview or case study approach going to be more revealing? There are arguments on both sides of this issue, and it remains as a dilemma for many researchers.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

While this research study has addressed eight major hypotheses, there are many more dimensions of the adolescent-parent separation that could be addressed. The data collected and analyzed by way of the statistical procedures used could be put to further use to study many of these dimensions.

The regressions conducted on the pretest and posttest data provide many opportunities for future research. There were some significant findings that warrant further study. One that was most noticeable was the higher posttest scores of fathers who were college graduates on the Conflict and Control subscales of the FES. Why <sup>w</sup> could college graduates experience these changes so much more than fathers with less education? Further exploration is needed to understand this.

Further comparisons between fathers of first and only, first, middle, and last child to enter college would provide valuable information that could be used to prepare differential orientation programming for parents. Such programming could be tailored to address issues related to a particular life stage or transitional period.

Of additional interest would be further comparisons

of pretest and posttest scores among groups of fathers. One might find for example that fathers with no college experience and who live in rural areas perceive their family environment quite differently from fathers with a college degree and who live in urban areas. Or fathers who live a great distance from the campus and who themselves have no college experience may not understand the changes occurring in their adolescent to the point where a visit home could create total chaos. Their needs may be very different when dealing with the separation process. Again, differential programming may become important.

A closer look at the subscales of the F-COPES, as opposed to the total score, may reveal shifts in coping strategies of significance. These shifts can not be recognized when looking only at the total score. These subscales are acquiring social support (seeking advice or support from others), reframing (knowing the family can solve the problem somehow), spiritual support (receiving support from church and God), mobilizing family to acquire and accept help (seeking community help, such as counseling), and passive appraisal (escaping by watching television or waiting the problem out). A shift in emphasis from one to the other would be most revealing.

Similarly, consideration of the four remaining subscales of the FES could become significant. What may be even more valuable would be to study the three dimensions defined by the subscales and to compare these as opposed to



comparing the individual subscales. There was some evidence that the relationship dimension was experiencing change during the separation process. However, without using all the subscales of the personal growth and system maintenance dimensions, it is not possible to say that this is the only dimension experiencing change.

Of obvious importance is the need to conduct research related to this separation process on a longitudinal basis. While the research study conducted here showed little change in family environment perceptions at this point in time, this does not mean that change does not occur. It becomes a question of when it occurs, and whether it is more dramatic for some groups than others. A most important need is to determine when the emotional separation actually occurs between father and child. This separation may occur at one of many different times in a family's existence, and it is this separation that may produce the environmental changes predicted in this research. Identification of this transition period will involve extensive research.

Fathers, as participants in parent orientation programs, have said that the separation from their child is difficult for them. Perhaps there is no instrument currently available to assess the problem adequately. Perhaps the case study or interview approach would provide data more revealing of the problems and how fathers cope with them. From these pursuits, additional instruments could be designed.

Then, there is a real need to examine what happens in the families of those students whose fathers and/or mothers do not take an interest in their departing adolescent and who do not support their freshman by attending orientation programs. It may be this group of college freshmen who are experiencing a more difficult transition to college. A comparison of freshmen from seemingly supportive families and from seemingly uninterested families may offer a greater understanding of why some freshmen encounter little, if any, difficulty in the transition to college and others experience great distress and trauma in the same transitional period.

Finally, there are the single parent families and the reconstituted families. How does this separation affect them? How does it affect a father? How does it affect a mother? How does it affect the freshman? The questions could go on and on.

#### Conclusion

New basic questions are now clear. How do families (of all types) deal with the separation of a family member from the whole? How do they change and how do they cope? Research has been conducted and continues to be done on how families deal with the final separation - death. It is also growing on how families deal with separation caused by divorce. What is lacking is how the family as a whole, and especially the father, deals with a separation that

occurs as regularly as a child grows up.

It is significant to note that there is a certain level of comfort that students and parents alike express about their experience at UNCG. Those fathers who chose to participate in this research represented a group committed to families and especially to their freshmen at UNCG. The support of Step Ahead was indicative of their appreciation for what the University offered them and their families. A primary program goal remains to help students and their families through this transitional period as easily as possible.

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