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Assessing Students' Plans for College

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Based on a contemporary cognitive-psychoanalytic theory (control-mastery theory; J. Weiss, H. Sampson, & Mount Zion Psychotherapy Research Group, 1986), this study proposed that college students have plans for college that consist of conscious and unconscious goals and obstructions to be overcome in meeting those goals. The construct of unconscious guilt was used to mediate the dual goals of autonomy and attachment. The idiographic plan-formulation method was adapted to derive plans for 12 sophomore women. Acceptable interjudge reliabilities and criterion validity were demonstrated, and several themes in the goals and obstructions were illustrated. Students worried more about mothers than about fathers, particularly when they perceived the mother as weak or needy. The potential of the method for generating inferences about unconscious process for normative development is discussed.

It is commonplace to note that the college years represent an important developmental opportunity for many American young adults. Yet there has been little attention devoted to factors contributing to why a particular student does or does not make use of the opportunities the college environment offers. The cognitive-psychoanalytic theory of Weiss and colleagues (Sampson, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992a, 1992b; Shilkret & Shilkret, 1993; Weiss, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993; Weiss, Sampson, & Mount Zion Psychotherapy Research Group, 1986) proposes that people have a significant degree of control of their unconscious and conscious processes and that they desire to master their conflicts (thus, the name *control-mastery theory*). From this general theory, we proposed that students enter college with a "plan for college," significant parts of which are unconscious; this plan includes an individual's goals for the college years and the psychological obstructions that must be overcome to reach those goals. Derived from Freud's later works, the theory of Weiss and colleagues further assumes that mental life is regulated in accordance with appraisals of the relative safety or danger associated with the pursuit of various developmental goals. Individuals modify or even abandon goals because of their belief that by accomplishing their goals, they would be endangering themselves or their loved ones.

On the basis of control-mastery theory, we assumed that students want to use the college years to make progress toward accomplishing their goals, even though they may be unaware of certain aspects of their goals. For example, a student may be aware of wanting to do well academically (although not working efficiently) but unaware that a part of his or her goal is to be academically successful and simultaneously to enjoy the success without feeling guilt about surpassing a parent. Embedded in this example is the idea that students may be impeded in accomplishing goals by specific "pathogenic beliefs" (Weiss et al., 1986) of imaginary harm to themselves or their loved ones that might ensue from accomplishing their goals. We use the term *guilt* to refer to the anxiety developed from the potential of developmental strivings to have harmful consequences to oneself, to loved ones, or to both (Bush, 1989; Friedman, 1985; Glover, 1994).

The vicissitudes of *separation guilt* among college students are well known. For many students, an important developmental goal involves not simply separating physically from parents but establishing autonomy as well. Achieving autonomy usually occurs relatively smoothly if an individual's parents have responded in an encouraging or at least an unbothered way to earlier moves toward independence. But if a parent has, for example, consistently seemed upset or threatened by the child's bids for autonomy, the child may have developed the unconscious belief that his or her own independence endangers the parent. If sufficiently strong, such a belief may interfere with the student's success in college; the student may, in effect, renounce the developmental goal of succeeding in college without realizing that the failure is an attempt to protect the parent.

Students may also suffer from *survivor guilt,* or anxiety about making parents or other loved ones feel surpassed or

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outdone, often coupled with the belief that one's success comes at the expense of a loved one. If a child's earlier accomplishments are met with praise and encouragement, success is accompanied by pride and a sense of satisfaction. But if earlier accomplishments or attempted initiatives have been discouraged or shamed, the child might develop the belief that success is dangerous to the parents' well-being and to the relationship. Later, if success is experienced in college, it might be accompanied by a vague sense of anxiety, minimization of success, or even undoing of the accomplishment or failure in other aspects of life. The dynamics of survivor guilt are often clear in the case of students whose parents did not have the opportunity to attend college themselves. Some students are painfully aware of having moved into a world foreign to their parents, who perhaps have made considerable sacrifices for the child. Such students may believe that they do not deserve the opportunities they now have, and they may be so endangered by unconscious beliefs about how these opportunities may threaten parental relationships that they are unable to take advantage of opportunities at college.

Recently there has been renewed interest in the development of autonomy during the college years. Much of the work in this area has been influenced by two theoretical viewpoints, a separation–individuation view and an attachment view. The separation–individuation view traces its immediate influence to Mahler (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975), particularly as interpreted for late adolescence by Blos (1979), who proposed that separation is a primary developmental task of this period. Psychological separation from parents has been shown to increase during the college years (Rice, 1992), to be related to adjustment (Hoffman, 1984; Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990), and to be more difficult when there is marital conflict between parents (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987).

According to attachment theory, separation–individuation is a major issue, but the focus is on the use of the attachment figure as a secure base from which to move toward greater autonomy. In some studies, students have reported generally warm and positive relations with parents and have used parents as a source of support, with security of attachment related to independence and career maturity (Kenny, 1987, 1990; see also Pipp, Shaver, Jennings, Lamborn, & Fischer, 1987). Quality of attachment has been related to psychological well-being (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), and insecure attachment, along with parental marital conflict and family anxiety concerning separation, has been related to difficulties in social competence and the presence of symptoms, particularly for a sample of college women who were more attached to their families than were college men (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991).

The contemporary version of these views also involves a rapprochement of sorts, in that separation and attachment are seen as dual goals of late adolescence (e.g., Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996; Rice et al., 1990). This rapprochement is ironic because Mahler et al.'s (1975) original formulations included a dual-goal notion, although for toddlers rather than for teenagers. Some recent work has included both variables, although occasionally with mixed results, at least for career exploration (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Palladino Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994).

What is less clear theoretically is how the two variables, autonomy and attachment, are related. In both separation–individuation and attachment theories, the young adult is required to overcome a loss to achieve autonomy: loss of a source of comfort or supplies or loss of a secure base. In control-mastery theory, however, although loss is seen as an important theme for some individuals, especially in conscious experience, the primary obstructions to be overcome in achieving autonomy have to do with beliefs about the consequences of achieving autonomy for loved ones and for oneself. Particularly when those beliefs involve imagined negative consequences for others, such beliefs can be viewed as obstructions to be overcome in achieving autonomy. Rather than emphasizing separation anxiety (implying loss for the self), the control-mastery viewpoint emphasizes separation guilt (imagined harm to a valued other). Thus, we view the college student as engaged in the task of developing autonomy while maintaining and deepening relationships with important others and hoping to overcome what for some are the imagined crimes (Engel & Ferguson, 1990) of differentiation.

Because we proposed that important aspects of young adults' beliefs about the consequences of autonomy are unconscious, we turned to contemporary psychotherapy process research. There has been considerable recent activity generating formulations of individual cases, including inferences about individual unconscious dynamics (Barber & Crits-Christoph, 1993; Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1988; S. Perry, Cooper, & Michels, 1987; J. C. Perry, Luborsky, Silberschatz, & Popp, 1989; Persons, 1991; Persons, Curtis, & Silberschatz, 1991). The control-mastery group has developed its own plan-formulation method (Curtis, Silberschatz, Sampson, & Weiss, 1994; Curtis, Silberschatz, Weiss, Sampson, & Rosenberg, 1988; Silberschatz & Curtis, 1993; Silberschatz, Curtis, Sampson, & Weiss, 1991; Silberschatz, Fretter, & Curtis, 1986). These methods have several common elements, including the use of clinicians' judgments, assessment of reliability and validity of inferences, and a focus on individuals. In psychotherapy research, reliable case formulations are needed to study, for example, the appropriateness and effectiveness of various therapist interventions, the general classes of therapist interventions that are most effective for patient progress, and the relation of process to outcome. Our goals were different: We sought to develop a method that could be useful in articulating the subtle developmental dynamics of particular college students and that would go beyond both traditional narrative and interpretive methods. In our modification of the plan-formulation method for a nonclinical population, we were also not interested in noting symptomatic behaviors (e.g., as defined in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders;* American Psychiatric Association, 1994) that might be included in psychotherapy case-formulation procedures.

The purpose of this study was to develop a methodology

for assessing college students' plans for college, thereby operationalizing the constructs of goals and obstructions and illustrating how control-mastery theory would conceptualize typical issues faced by college students. The method is an idiographic one that uses inferences of skilled clinicians in a way that reliability and validity can be assessed. In the psychotherapy research literature, methods such as these are applied to single cases or to very small numbers; our goal was also to accumulate a sufficient sample so that we could perform fundamental criterion validity statistics. We developed a theory-specific measure to assess severity of obstructions, which we proposed would be related to college adjustment. We also examined a group of college students' goals and obstructions for particular themes (e.g., What kinds of beliefs do students seem to have about the consequences of their autonomy for their parents? Are there certain characteristics of parents or of family situations that seem to be associated with particularly obstructing beliefs?).

Method

Participants

College students. Twelve sophomores from a women's liberal arts college in the Northeast constituted the sample. Sophomores were more suitable to the study's aims than were first-year students or seniors, who may have been more involved with the transitions of entering and leaving college than with the psychological work of using the college experience itself. Sophomores were past the initial transition to college yet were relatively early in their college experience; we thus could make an initial assessment that could be compared with changes later.

Eleven of the women were White; one was African American. Median age was 19 years 7 months (range: 19 years 0 months to 20 years 0 months). Four participants had parents who were divorced; the father of 1 participant was deceased; the remaining participants came from intact two-parent families. Seven had mothers and 9 had fathers who had obtained at least bachelor's degrees. We assessed social class by using Hollinghead's Two-Factor Index of Social Position, which places participants in one of five social classes based on occupation and level of educational attainment (Myers & Roberts, 1959). Using this procedure, which we modified to include mothers as well as fathers (taking the higher of the two parents' occupation/education, which resulted in a change for only 1 participant), there was 1 participant in Class 1 (the highest); 8 in class 2; 3 in Class 3; none in Classes 4 or 5. Mean grade point average (GPA) after the first college year was 3.21 (range: 2.60–3.81), which was comparable to the mean GPA of the entire class.

Judges. Judges were four experienced clinicians (three women and one man), all of whom were White. Average age was 41.75 years (range: 39–48 years, SD = 4.19 years), with an average of 13.00 years of postterminal degree clinical experience (range: 7–20 years; SD = 4.35 years). They had an average of 8.00 years using control-mastery theory in their clinical work (range: 3–12 years, SD = 4.69 years).

Measures

Interview protocol. We used a detailed semistructured interview, about 1½ hr in length, which had been developed with 10 pilot participants. The interviewer asked the student for her perceptions of her college experiences and her family relationships; the interview was designed to generate discourse from which inferences might be made concerning developmental strivings and impediments to reaching goals. The first part of the interview focused on the developmental strivings of late adolescence and early adulthood often characteristic of the college experience. Most questions in this section had three parts: The student was first asked for her own perception of a particular aspect of her life at college; then for her perception of her mother's feelings about the student's choices, behavior, or attitude in relation to this particular aspect of her life; and then for her perception of her father's feelings about these issues. Several questions asked for perceptions of the feelings of siblings. We included similar questions about the student's perceptions of the feelings of stepparents or grandparents for students who indicated the importance of these relationships.

The range of questions in this section attempted to include various aspects of college life pertinent to the student's developmental strivings. Examples of areas addressed included: the decision to attend college; the choice of this particular college; relationships with friends and other classmates; choice of major; possibility of leaving school or transferring; postcollege aspirations; importance of grades; nature of ongoing contact with family; how she imagined things might have changed at home since leaving for college; attitude toward the religion, if any, in which she was raised; cost of education; sacrifices made by the family; and so on.

The second part of the interview inquired about the student's perceptions of aspects of the family in which she grew up; we selected these aspects for their presumed relevance to current developmental goals. Our assumption was that salient developmental strivings for many college students represent the late-adolescent version of strivings that have been operating in less mature ways throughout earlier development. The interview contained questions designed to permit inferences concerning, for example, development of autonomous thinking and behavior (e.g., questions about earlier disagreements with mother, father, or both); potential conscious and unconscious envy, competitiveness, and survivor guilt in relation to parents and siblings (e.g., "What was mother's/father's life like when your age?" "What was mother's/father's greatest accomplishment?" "What was mother's/father's greatest disappointment?" "How does mother/father feel about supporting you financially in college?"); and her potential separation guilt in relation to family members, especially parents (e.g., questions about each parent's own goals in relation to the student's and about the general affective tone of the family while the student was growing up). This material, when combined with the first part of the interview that dealt more specifically with decisions and feelings about college life, provided sufficient information to permit a unique dynamic formulation of conscious and unconscious developmental goals for a particular student, as well as of the conscious and unconscious obstacles that made the student's pursuit of those goals conflictual.

College adjustment. We assessed adjustment to the college environment with the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1986, 1989). This is a 67-item self-report questionnaire, widely used in counseling research and assessment. The student is asked to rate the extent to which each item applies to her, using a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*applies very closely*) to 9 (*doesn't apply at all*). The SACQ yields a Full Scale score, as well as four subscales, which reflect the measure's multicomponent view of adjustment: Academic Adjustment; Social Adjustment; Personal–Emotional Adjustment; and Attachment/Goal Commitment. Internal consistency coeffi-

cients range from .81 to .90 for the Academic Adjustment subscale, from .83 to .91 for the Social Adjustment subscale, from .77 to .86 for the Personal–Emotional Adjustment subscale, from .85 to .91 for the Attachment/Goal Commitment subscale, and from .92 to .95 for the Full Scale (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Intercorrelation data for 34 samples using the SACQ at 21 different colleges (Baker & Siryk, 1989) showed large enough correlations to indicate that the subscales were measuring a common construct but small enough correlations to justify the subscales as separate (ranging from .39 to .55). Criterion validity was indicated in several ways across many samples: for example, Academic Adjustment was associated with GPA and election to Phi Beta Kappa; Social Adjustment was correlated with amount of extracurricular activity and success in application for dormitory assistant positions; Personal–Emotional Adjustment was associated (negatively) with use of counseling services; and Attachment/Goal Commitment was associated (negatively) with attrition (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Relevance and severity ratings. We presented master lists of each student's goals and obstructions to judges for rating in Step 3 (see the *Procedure* section). Each item in the master lists was rated by each judge on a 5-point scale for its relevance or pertinence to that particular student (0 = *not relevant,* 4 = *very highly relevant*). These ratings constituted the primary data used to assess the reliability of the method and to derive subsets of items for each student's final plan for college. We did not tell judges that some items (fillers) were not from the student under consideration. For the lists of obstructions, we also asked judges to rate each item for severity. The severity rating reflected the extent to which, in the judge's opinion, the student was impeded developmentally by that particular obstruction; judges made these ratings on a 5-point scale, ranging from 0 (*not impeded*) to 4 (*very highly impeded*). We included this severity measure for two reasons. First, it is often not apparent from the content of an obstruction how serious it is or how much of an obstacle it might present for the student. For example, an obstruction such as "She underestimates what she is capable of because she believes that her mother can't do without the sense of closeness that comes from their shared pessimistic attitudes toward themselves" might be considered to interfere seriously with a particular student's academic achievement or it might be considered to interfere only minimally (and in both instances it might be judged as highly relevant to the student). But our pilot study suggested that it was usually possible to make such an inference about severity from the transcript material. Second, the severity ratings provided an independent, theory-derived quantitative measure of degree of impededness, which could be compared with the SACQ scores. As well as asking judges to rate each obstruction separately for severity, we also asked judges to make a single, comprehensive rating (on a 7-point scale, 0 = *not impeded,* 6 = *very highly impeded*) for each student of the overall extent to which the judge thought that student was impeded by her obstructions (this gave us a global severity score).

We also administered a demographic questionnaire (e.g., age, major, parents' occupation, and education).

Procedure

Ellen E. Nigrosh recruited participants from their introductory psychology class for a study of college experiences and relations with family; the course required 2 hr of research participation or an alternative exercise. She conducted interviews in a private interview room, using an interview protocol that listed areas to be explored and questions to be asked. She followed the same order of topics and questions for all interviews; there was opportunity for follow-up inquiry on any point. Interviews were recorded on audiotape. Confidentiality was assured, informed consent to all procedures obtained, and debriefing accomplished.

We transcribed interviews verbatim and removed all identifying information; judges were unaware of the students' SACQ results. We asked each member of a panel of four clinical judges (one of whom was Ellen Nigrosh) to read the interview transcripts and to analyze the material in terms similar to the first two categories of Silberschatz and Curtis's (1993) plan-formulation method: the goals of the student for her college experience and the obstructions (pathogenic beliefs) that potentially prevent her from reaching her goals. The full plan-formulation method as applied to psychotherapy interview transcripts includes four categories: goals, obstructions, tests, and insights. The last two of these categories (i.e., tests the client is likely to present to the therapist and insights the client will find useful) were not relevant to nontherapy data and were not used in this study.

Step 1. We asked each judge to read each transcript independently and to generate for each participant a list of the student's goals and a list of the student's obstructions (we prepared detailed written instructions for judges so that all received identical instructions and training). For consistency of subsequent judgments and other analyses of the items, we instructed judges to write their inferences in a standard form: They were to cast goals in the form of infinitives ("To [thought, feeling, behavior]," where the underlined element was the judge's inference) and obstructions in the form of simple causal sentences ("She does [or does not do] [thought, feeling, behavior] because she believes that [pathogenic belief]"). We asked judges to include alternative items in each list, or items that they thought were pertinent to the student but less relevant to her. The purpose of this request was to generate items that were less relevant but not obviously irrelevant for each student and each category (goals and obstructions); Step 3 of the procedure would therefore involve a true choice among competing, plausible items rather than an endorsement of obviously applicable items and a rejection of equally obvious "straw people." We instructed judges to include in their lists, for example, items about which they had doubts or had changed their minds.

Step 2. We then combined the judges' lists for each student into 2 master lists (1 for goals and 1 for obstructions) for that student. We distributed each judge's items randomly throughout the master lists and did not identify items as to their authorship (although individual judges might have recognized some of their own items). In the few instances when two judges contributed virtually identical items, we included the item only once; when two judges contributed items that were very similar in content, we included both items in the master lists. In a few instances, we edited items slightly for clarity, but we kept this editing to a minimum. For each list, we added 5 or 6 filler items, which we distributed randomly; we drew these items from other students' master lists. These items seemed to be of low relevance to the student for whom they would be filler items (even though they were of high relevance to the student for whom they were generated). We chose filler items to present judges with a genuine test: Filler items were always plausible for the student in whose list they were included; we did not include obviously irrelevant items as fillers (e.g., if an inference involved poor academic performance, we did not include that item for a student who was doing well academically). In the study there were thus 24 master lists, each containing some 35–50 items: a list of goals and a list of obstructions (plus filler items) for each of the 12 students.

Step 3. We then asked judges to reread each interview (at least 1 month, and usually several months, had passed between Step 1 and Step 3 for a given transcript) along with the master list of goals

and the master list of obstructions for that student (once again, we prepared detailed written instructions for judges). We asked judges to make a relevancy rating for each goal and obstruction, a severity rating for each obstruction, and a global severity rating for obstructions generally for each student.

For each student, we derived subsets of goals and obstructions to include only those items that had an average rating of highly relevant or better (3 or more on the 0–4 scale). The lists of goals and obstructions consensually agreed upon by judges to be very relevant to the student constituted each student's plan; these lists (goals and obstructions for each student) were the bases of subsequent qualitative analyses, following Miles and Huberman's (1984) methods for "cross-site" (cross-case) analyses. Because we conducted this qualitative analysis on inferences rather than on more typical narrative material, we did not want to add yet another level of inference. Rather, we used Miles and Huberman's method to derive a straightforward description of themes clearly apparent from the language of the items and to examine possible relationships among themes. (Robert Shilkret performed this analysis and Ellen Nigrosh checked it for accuracy.)

Results

Reliability

To assess interjudge reliability, we performed intraclass correlations for each of the four categories of judgments (goals, obstructions, severity, global severity). The appropriate measure of reliability was the estimated reliability of the mean of k judges' ratings, r_k, or coefficient alpha (termed ICC [3,K] by Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). The intraclass correlations for the four judges were as follows: goals (566 items), .75; obstructions (493 items), .71; severity scores (493 items), .63; and global severity scores (12 cases), .68. Thus, the reliability of judges' ratings was acceptable for goals and obstructions but marginal for both severity ratings.

Another aspect of the reliability of this method has to do with whether judges could accurately discriminate between "real" goals and obstructions generated for a particular student versus filler items, which were items generated for other students' transcripts and included in each master list (with different filler items for each list). To determine whether judges could make these discriminations, we performed t tests for each judge's ratings of goals and obstructions across all 12 cases. Only three of the four judges participated in this analysis because one of the judges (Ellen Nigrosh) had selected the filler items; thus, there was a total of six t tests performed (three judges rated goals and obstructions). For goals, there were 490 real items and 75 fillers across the 12 cases. Each judge made this discrimination reliably, and the difference was in the expected direction for each, with real items rated more relevant to the particular student than were fillers: for Judge 1, $t(564) = 8.10$, $p < .0001$, M (real) = 3.11, M (filler) = 2.08; for Judge 2, $t(563) = 7.78$, $p < .0001$, M (real) = 2.92, M (filler) = 1.89; for Judge 3, $t(564) = 7.90$, $p < .0001$, M (real) = 2.80, M (filler) = 1.85. For obstructions, there were 423 real items and 70 fillers across the 12 cases. Again, judges each made this discrimination reliably and in the expected direction: for Judge 1, $t(491) = 6.49$, $p < .0001$, M (real) = 2.75, M (filler) = 1.94; for Judge 2, $t(491) = 6.90$, $p < .0001$, M (real) = 2.96, M (filler) = 1.94; for Judge 3, $t(491) = 8.55$, $p < .0001$, M (real) = 2.88, M(filler) = 1.74.

Validity

Because the average of the severity ratings and the global severity ratings correlated significantly, $r(11) = .67$, $p < .05$, only results for global severity are reported here. Global severity correlated significantly with Full Scale SACQ scores, $r(11) = -.76$, $p < .01$, in the expected (negative) direction. Global severity also correlated inversely with GPA, $r(11) = -.78$, $p < .01$, suggesting that more severely impeding obstructions are related to a specific measure of academic functioning.

Goals and Obstructions

For each student, we derived lists of goals and obstructions that were regarded as "highly relevant" (i.e., those for which the judges' ratings averaged 3 or better). For goals, there was a range of 17–34 items ($M = 24.75$, $SD = 4.83$); for obstructions, there was a range of 11–29 items ($M = 18.58$, $SD = 6.24$). Thus, it was possible to create substantial lists of relevant goals and obstructions that were consensually agreed upon for each student (these constituted the students' plans for college).

Although students stated many goals directly or indirectly (examples from different students included "To do well in college," "To go to a top law school," "To feel in control of [my] weight," "To be financially independent, self-supporting, secure," "To learn to budget [my] time," "To study abroad [my] junior year"), the majority of goals involved some degree of inference by the judges (e.g., "To feel less driven," "To make an independent career decision," "To take herself and her plans more seriously and not act flighty," "To be truthful and direct with her family"). Given the way we conceptualized goals and obstructions, the majority of goals were tied to one or more specific obstruction (e.g., corresponding to the examples of inferred goals above: "She drives herself, because she believes that she has no right to feel satisfied with how much she's done when neither of her parents does"; "She moderates her career goals because she believes that if she aims high she harms her father by competing with him"; "She acts flighty because she believes that if she takes herself seriously it threatens her father, whose self-esteem depends on seeing men as superior to women"; "She hides information about grades and other important things from her family because she believes that to share this information would burden them"). Because obstructions usually contained goals, descriptions of themes focus on obstructions.

Academic work and careers. All students in the sample had obstructions dealing with career planning and academic work. Even those who were doing well academically (higher GPAs, by a median split) had one or more such obstruc-

tions, but these often dealt with the stress of work rather than with academic performance (e.g., "[Gail] feels compelled to slave away at her studies and be stressed out by them because she believes it would be disloyal to enjoy extracurricular activities while being financed by her mother's life"; "[Leslie] gets 'stressed out' about her schoolwork because she believes that if she did not, she would rob her mother of a face-saving rationale for remaining dependent and neglecting her own career"). The students with higher GPAs also frequently had obstructions relating to career planning and development (e.g., "[Alison] keeps her career goals vague because she worries that if she has a rich, rewarding career it will make her father's career stagnation more obviously painful to him"; "[Alison] limits her graduate school expectations because she believes that if she goes to a top professional school she will be depriving her parents of a scarce resource"; "[Beth] fails to be expansive in her plans because she believes that if she is too adventurous, her mother's sense of wasting her own potential will be increased"; "[Beth] stops herself from expressing high aspirations for herself, especially in traditionally male areas, because she believes that to do so would make her mother feel shown up"; "[Leslie] keeps herself from having higher ambitions for herself because she believes that to do so would be disloyal to her mother, who is not ambitious for her"; "[Leslie] keeps herself from having clear career plans because she believes that if she did, she would surpass her mother, who was never committed to a career"). Students who were doing poorly academically had some of the same kinds of obstructions involving careers, but they also had obstructions directly related to academic inhibitions, failures, or both (e.g., "[Ivy] inhibits herself academically because she believes that if she is successful in this area, her mother will feel shown up"; "[Ivy] makes academic work difficult for herself by failing to concentrate on it, because she believes that her academic success would further reduce her father's self-esteem"; "[Kathy] holds herself back academically because she believes that if she excelled, her mother would feel shown up and humiliated"; "[Jackie] undercuts her academic performance because she believes that if she does well and leaves home her mother would be unprotected from her father").

Closeness to others. A theme of closeness to others appeared for over half of the sample. Judges inferred and agreed, for example, that "[Alison] does not establish a new network of friends because she believes this would make her mother feel betrayed"; "[Gail] limits her romantic horizons to her high school boyfriend because she believes her mother would feel left out if a male over whom she has no control enters the picture"; "[Hope] stays in a relationship with her boyfriend, although she doesn't want to get married, because she believes it would make her mother feel betrayed if she were to pursue a single life"; "[Jackie] avoids social involvement at school because she believes that if she didn't, she would be disloyal to her family"; "[Kathy] keeps herself from having a deep relationship with a girlfriend because she believes that would be disloyal to her mother." The majority of these obstructions are examples of separation guilt in that new or deeper friendships involved some perceived psychological distancing on the student's part from the family.

Independence. The majority of the sample (9 of 12) had some obstruction(s) dealing with a theme of independence, and the students' concerns about the consequences of independence were more often directed toward the mother than the father. For example, judges inferred and agreed that "[Francine] exerts very little control over what happens to her because she believes that by not doing so, she restores her mother, whom she sees as very weak and submissive"; "[Ivy] feels anxious about living far away from her mother because she believes that if she enjoys feeling independent her mother will feel rejected"; "[Ivy] doesn't express opinions that are different from her mother's views because she believes her mother would be humiliated if she did"; "[Jackie] feels extremely anxious about being away from home because she believes that by doing so, she gives herself the punishment she deserves for abandoning her mother." Themes included independence of thought as well as physical separation; for 4 students, explicit homesickness was part of an obstruction, and 3 of those who felt homesick had concerns about their mothers (e.g., "[Carol] feels homesick because she believes that to feel self-sufficient away from home hurts her mother by making her feel rejected"). At the extreme on the issue of independence were 3 students who perceived their mothers as intensely involved with them: "[Elsa] maintains intense involvement with her mother because she believes that her mother would suffer and be emotionally bereft without her"; "[Gail] shares too much of the intimate details of her life, because she believes that her mother would feel abandoned if the details of her daughter's life were not known to her"; "[Kathy] tells her mother more than she wants about her life because she believes that her mother would not feel parental if she couldn't tell [Kathy] what to do."

Parental weakness. Concerns about parental weakness were most pointed when the student was directly worried about a parent's perceived depression, anxiety, fears, or some other specific parental difficulty. For example, "[Alison] suppresses her ambitions because she believes that being independent causes her mother to feel depressed"; "[Elsa] acts in a dependent fashion because she believes that if she makes her own way with confidence, she deprives her mother of vicarious fulfillment and increases her mother's depression"; "[Francine] fails to experience her own emotions as important because she believes that if she fails to cheer her mother at all times, her mother will be depressed and perhaps take drugs"; "[Gail] is unable to think critically about relationships because she believes that if she does not accept the family myth of absolute happiness, her mother's tenuous emotional stability will unravel"; "[Hope] is overtalkative because she believes that if she doesn't keep up a continuous cheerful patter with her mother, her mother will be lonely and depressed"; "[Ivy] feels compelled to accept her mother's naively optimistic view of life because she believes that if she doesn't, her mother's hidden depression will emerge"; "[Kathy] limits her enjoyment of life by anticipating disaster, because she believes that if she felt secure, she would be abandoning her mother to her fears and

paranoia"; "[Leslie] avoids planning to enter a more competitive field and seeking financial reward because she believes that if she did, she would harm her mother by exposing her mother's insecurity." Much less frequently and somewhat more indirectly (2 students vs. 8), such a concern was expressed about a father: "[Ivy] makes academic work difficult for herself by failing to concentrate on it because she believes that her academic success would further reduce her father's self-esteem"; "[Beth] spreads herself too thin because she believes that if she relaxes and appreciates her accomplishments, she abandons her father to his own chronic self-critical dissatisfaction."

Marital problems. Potential or actual marital problems appeared in the obstructions of 4 of the 11 students ([Kathy], with a single parent and no paternal figure, was not included). Judges inferred that "[Carol] does not become more independent of her parents because she believes that if she leaves home, her father would hurt her mother and she'd be responsible"; "[Debbie] gets homesick because she believes that by leading her own life, she neglects her parents' relationship and leaves them to hurt each other"; "[Hope] doesn't think/feel/act independently because she believes that if she's more independent of her parents, their self-esteem and marriage will suffer"; and "[Jackie] undercuts her academic performance because she believes that if she does well and leaves home, her mother would be unprotected from her father." In all these instances, judges inferred and agreed that the students felt excessively responsible for the parents' well-being and that the parental relationship would deteriorate, in some cases to the point of physical abuse, if the daughters were not directly involved. It should be noted that the parents of other students might have been experiencing marital difficulties, but we surmised that these parents had somehow conveyed to their daughters that the daughters were not responsible for the parents' marital difficulties.

Idealization of parents. Another theme characteristic of late adolescence is idealization of the parents, and this theme was apparent for half the sample. For example, "[Alison] idealizes her father because she believes he would be hurt if she were to think critically of him"; "[Debbie] idealizes her father because she believes that if she didn't, his self-esteem would suffer"; "[Elsa] suppresses her powers of observation because she believes that if she thinks critical thoughts about her parents, she will magically injure their self-esteem"; "[Hope] doesn't express her critical feelings about her parents because she believes that [doing so] would be experienced by them as disloyal"; "[Kathy] refrains from thinking critically about her mother because she believes if she did, it would make her mother even more depressed"; "[Leslie] prevents herself from seeing disappointment and being critical of her mother because she thinks that would hurt her." From a control-mastery viewpoint, we expected that idealization would be particularly apparent when the student perceived the parent as weak; in this sample 5 of the 6 students for whom idealization was a theme did perceive the parent as weak in some way.

Siblings. Five (of the 12) students had some obstruction(s) related to a sibling, often representing a concern about surpassing the sibling, a form of survivor guilt. For example, judges inferred that "[Alison] stops herself from enjoying her intellectual achievements in order to restore her brother"; "[Beth] overextends herself in school because she believes that if she were easily to do well academically, she would humiliate her younger sister"; "[Kathy] feels overly dependent on men to make decisions because she believes that if she does not elevate the importance of men, her brothers will be hurt by her ingratitude"; "[Gail has the goal] of worrying less about her brother."

Mothers versus fathers. As noted above, for several categories of analysis, the mother appeared more frequently than the father as an object of concern in these students' obstructions. When we excluded one participant, [Kathy], whose father had died when she was very young and who did not have a subsequent father figure, the mean number of obstructions regarded as highly relevant or above was 17.64. Of these, considering all obstructions with *mother* or *father* explicitly mentioned (not *parents*), the mother appeared in a mean of 9.27 obstructions (range: 3–19) in contrast to the father, who appeared in a mean of 3.00 obstructions (range: 1–5; repeated measures $t(10) = 3.973$, $p < .01$). Despite the greater frequency in the mention of mothers as compared with fathers in this set of obstructions, it would be incorrect to overcharacterize this finding, given the small size and nonrepresentativeness of the sample. There were a small number of obstructions involving the father that seemed to be particularly severe obstructions (e.g., "[Jackie] doesn't assert herself because she believes if she did so it might kill her father").

In summary, these young women were in a struggle to achieve autonomy while being concerned, consciously and unconsciously, about the effects of their autonomy on their loved ones. They were particularly concerned about the effects on their mothers, and this concern seemed most acute when they perceived their mothers as being weak or needy in some way.

Discussion

This study shows that it is possible to generate meaningful, reliable, and predictive inferences about individual college students' unique goals for their college experience and the psychological impediments to be overcome in meeting their goals. Because we assumed that significant parts of such goals and obstructions are not in the students' awareness, we adopted a method, borrowed from contemporary research on psychotherapy process, to generate such inferences and assess their reliability and validity. There is evidence, even with this relatively small sample, that supports the criterion validity of the plan for college method; judges' assessments of how severely students were impeded by individual obstructions was related, as expected, to a traditional index of college adjustment. The analysis of real versus filler items demonstrates that the inferences generated were neither "generic" inferences that might be made simply by being familiar with college students' developmental issues nor ones applicable to college students in

general. Judges discriminated between inferences that were specific to the student and plausible inferences that were actually made for other students.

The levels of interjudge reliability achieved here, although acceptable, might have been higher if details of the procedure had been modified. First, we minimally edited and deleted the items that judges generated in Step 1; thus, there were many similar items in the master lists. Interviews with judges later indicated that they regarded similar items differently: Some said that they gave similar ratings to largely comparable items, whereas others gave lower ratings to items that captured an item less perfectly than did a similar item. Second, in selecting alternative filler items, we might have been overly careful to avoid obviousness in every case (to avoid the charge of their merely being "straw persons"). Judges probably saw some fillers as somewhat relevant to the particular student; the result was a lowering of the potential range of ratings, with a general dearth of items rated very low. Finally, in contrast to similar methods used in psychotherapy research, our method involved less interview material for each case (one interview in our study vs. two or three intake or psychotherapy sessions in psychotherapy research); minimal reactions to the interviewer–therapist as a basis for inference (vs. transference inferences in psychotherapy research); and considerably more cases over a longer period of time (12 cases for approximately 1 year in this study vs. the more usual 2 or 3 cases in psychotherapy research).

The potential usefulness of the plan for college method is suggested by the finding that for all 12 cases studied here, there were sufficient numbers of inferences generated, all of which were rated as consistently highly relevant, to form a plan (a substantial list of goals and obstructions) for each student. In all cases, the plans have important components that are not obvious, that is, that do not represent a simple or direct restatement of observations the student had about herself. This is not to deny, of course, that students' statements about themselves are important in assessing their developmental issues (and many such direct statements found their way into the judges' items). But the method studied here is valuable because it allows researchers to use inferential material with some degree of confidence.

The method could also have more direct applications in the study of students' progress in counseling situations analogous to the use of case-specific methodologies in psychotherapy process research. For example, particular counselor interventions could be assessed as to how compatible they are to the student's plan; interventions that are highly compatible with the plan would be expected to be more helpful in effecting change than would those that are less compatible with the plan or that are antiplan (see Silberschatz & Curtis, 1993, for an example of such a design in psychotherapy process research). Analogously, interviews with students about their college experiences might be used to uncover which particular experiences helped them accomplish particular goals and overcome psychological obstacles.

The goals and obstructions also provide illustrations of how a control-mastery conceptualization of normal development in college highlights themes that might not be evident otherwise. The qualitative analysis of goals and obstructions indicated that all the students in this sample were seeking to change their relationships with their parents to allow for greater autonomy in thought, feeling, and action; at the same time, the students were worrying consciously and unconsciously about the imagined effects of such autonomy on their parents and were thereby maintaining ties to their parents. The plan for college method provides idiographic expression of such themes, even when the participant does not make them particularly evident or disavows them altogether. The qualitative analysis illustrates the role of conscious and unconscious guilt, or concerns about loved ones, in the conflicts of early adulthood, a theme not usually considered important in other theoretical orientations. Such guilt formulations have obvious clinical implications when working with students. For example, clinicians who ascribe to separation–individuation theory, attachment theory, as well as other points of view often interpretate conflicts between autonomy and attachment in terms of an excess of dependency; those who take a control-mastery approach often view a similar conflict in terms of guilt about independence. The former intervention (e.g., some version of "You are too dependent"), as well as often being incorrect from the control-mastery viewpoint, may also be perceived by the student as accusatory and thus as not useful.

The finding that these women were more concerned about the effects of autonomy on their mothers than on their fathers should be interpreted cautiously, given the limitations of size and representativeness of the sample. Nonetheless, the finding is suggestive. Recent work has found that adolescents perceive and relate to mothers and fathers differently. Pipp et al. (1987) found that adolescents perceived their mothers as friendlier and as evoking of a greater sense of responsibility than their fathers, who were seen as dominant but more similar to the adolescent. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) found differences in the quality of attachment of college students with mothers and fathers.

Another issue related to this study has to do with gender differences among college students. Recent studies have suggested that the college years might present different challenges for women and for men. For example, Lapsley, Rice, and Shadid (1989) found greater parental dependency among college women than among college men, and Rice (1992) cited recent studies that have found (or have not found) gender differences on Hoffman's (1984) separation measure. Chodorow's (1978) earlier theory, which modified the original Freudian view, proposed that women generally should feel closer to their mothers than to their fathers—and thus, perhaps, experience more intense guilt concerning autonomy. Whether men also experience greater concern for mothers than for fathers and whether such concerns (pathogenic beliefs) are different from women's concerns are empirical issues. From a control-mastery viewpoint, if a child has developed a sense of responsibility for a parent's (a mother's or a father's) well-being, the child's perception of the parent as weak could present psychological obstruc-

tions that the child (son or daughter) must overcome to achieve autonomy.

Because this study did not use a sample of poorly functioning students, implications for counseling center on prevention. The results of this study may help counselors and others who work with college students understand the importance of dynamics involving concerns about loved ones as students develop greater autonomy. Issues of autonomy are typically seen in terms of fears and anxieties for the self rather than as concerns about the consequences of autonomy for loved ones. But in this sample, such concerns affected many aspects of students' lives in college.

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