

Cherished possessions and place attachment: The freshman transition from home to college

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Entering college is a major transition point in a young adult's life. This particular transition may seem more significant for those students that move out of the parental home and into a new living arrangement. Moving from the parental home to college means leaving familiar places behind, including one's bedroom. Furthermore, not all possessions that the young adult cherishes will move with him or her, especially if the young adult chooses to live in a residence hall. The transition to college may be influenced by the degree of attachment the student feels to his or her parental home and bedroom and by the presence of possessions the student has brought from the old to new environment. In this chapter, an overview of the study will be presented. Studies of the significance of possessions and place attachment in individual lives will then be reviewed. This literature will be followed by statements of the research hypotheses.

Beginning in the late 1940s philosophers began to explore the impact of possessions on people. George Gusdorf's (1948) reflection was that one knows who one is by the objects one owns and by how one uses them. Researchers began examining the idea of a relationship existing between people and their possessions in the 1960s. This research was conducted from a sociological perspective analyzing the memories, thoughts, or emotions associated with possessions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Researchers specifically began exploring the meaning of things, such as art galleries, books, and theaters, and the impact of those things on people (Goodman, 1968).

In the 1970s researchers focused on a more specific type of thing, personal possessions (Becker, 1977; Sherman & Newman, 1977-1978). Personal possessions are defined as household artifacts that people mention as special, including furniture, visual art, plants, clothes, books, computers, and stereos. Possessions may also include heirlooms, souvenirs, and collections such as comics, silver spoons, or figurines (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Studies have suggested that possessions represent what has been important in one's life and who one is in the world (Rubenstein & Parmalee, 1992). Possessions may also remind individuals about past and present people, times, and symbols of key attachments. These key attachments may include an attachment to place.

More recently, some researchers have focused on the relationship between individuals and place attachment (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Chawla, 1992). Place attachment is by definition a physical structure that has been given meaning through personal processes resulting in a sense of happiness and security in the individual (Chawla, 1992; Low & Altman, 1992). Studies suggest that children most strongly attach to areas close to their home, including the home itself (Chawla, 1992). Research on elderly persons, however, suggests that the elderly person's attachment to place depends upon the elderly person's roles, relationships and life experiences in the home or place of attachment (Rubenstein & Parmalee, 1992). As a result of their attachments to their home, some elderly persons have a difficult time attaching to nursing homes that represent an institutional form of housing.

In conclusion, research has been conducted on personal possessions, place attachment, and their relationships. Findings have shown that individuals tend to convey a sense of connection to their possessions which allows the individual to express him or herself (McCracken, 1986). The sense of connection between the individual and his or her possessions may be especially strong during times of transition (Myers, 1988). One study has suggested that an individual's cherished possessions may ease the transition from an old to a new environment if those possessions accompany the individual to the new environment (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Findings have also shown that individuals develop strong attachments to specific places that promote and reflect stability, such as bedrooms or homes (Brown & Perkins, 1992). An individual experiencing a transition from an old to a new environment may feel most comfortable in a room or home which is filled with the possessions that are most important to the individual (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Children and elderly persons may have a difficult time attaching to a new environment because the relationship to their home environment is of great importance. The home represents feelings of rootedness and a sense of identity for the individual. These identities may have developed from the memories individuals have about their present home or the home where they grew up. These memories for children may include a secret hide out, the neighborhood, or the playhouse in the back yard. These memories for older adults may include the setting where they first fell in love, the house where they raised their children, or the garden in their backyard (Marcus, 1992).



Unfortunately, little research has been done on place attachment and the meaning of possessions for adolescents and young adults. These studies on place attachment and the meaning of things have consisted mostly of child or elderly samples (Chawla, 1992; Rubenstein & Parmelee, 1992). Adolescents, much like children and the elderly, experience transitions from place to place. One significant transition in the lives of young adults occurs when they enter college. A large proportion of adolescents and young adults extend their education past high school. Upon entering college, many first-semester freshman either chose or are forced by university rules to live in a residence hall. Like the elderly, these young people are moving from home to an institutional style of living.

The purpose of the present study is to learn more about possessions and attachments of incoming college students during the time of transition from home to their residence hall and more specifically, about the effect of possessions on place attachment to the dorm room.

### Literature Review

This section will include three areas in which relevant research from past studies will be discussed: (1) personal possessions, (2) the effect of possessions on transition, and (3) the effect of possessions on place attachment. Following the review of the literature will be a discussion of the goals and significance of the current study. Finally, there will be a presentation of four research hypotheses.

#### Personal Possessions

In a 1981 study by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 315 subjects from extended families (up to four generations) were individually interviewed. These researchers

stated that “to understand what people are and what they might become, one must understand what goes on between people and things” (p. 1). In this study subjects were asked to mention possessions that were special to them. Almost 31% of the sample named a piece of furniture, such as tables, chairs, dressers, or desks as a special possession. Possessions labeled as visual art, including paintings by professionals or the work of family members, were mentioned by nearly 26% of the sample. Other possessions that were special to nearly 20% of the sample were musical instruments, televisions, stereos, books, and photos.

Another study focused on elderly persons’ feelings concerning the possible loss of possessions (Rubenstein & Parmalee, 1992). This study found that possessions remind elderly persons about past and present people, times, and places, and represent symbols of key attachments. These possessions state what has been important in one’s life and who one is in the world. Therefore, loss of such possessions may have had a devastating effect on the elderly.

### Cherished Possessions

Some researchers suggest that individuals singularize objects through the mutual transfer of meaning between the object and the individual (McCraken, 1986). The individual conveys a sense of connection to the possession, which allows the individual to express himself or herself. Singularization allows the object to become more than a gift or easy purchase. Through singularization, the object becomes a cherished possession.

Studies have suggested that men and women may be equally likely to have cherished possessions, although these possessions tend to differ by gender (Bryce & Olney, 1991;

Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Sherman & Newman, 1977-78; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Sherman and Newman (1977-78) analyzed differences among the elderly in regard to their most cherished possessions. The study included 94 subjects aged 60 to 95 years. The subjects were asked to identify their most cherished possession. Nearly 27% of the women selected photographs, while 26% of the men selected consumer items such as televisions and radios as a most cherished possession. This study concluded that cherished possessions seem to be significant in the lives of the elderly, as 81% of the elderly sample were able to quickly identify a specific possession that they cherished above all others.

In the Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) study mentioned above, subjects were asked to name their favorite possessions. Approximately 29% of the men selected televisions. More than 28% of the men selected stereos and nearly 18% selected sports equipment as favorite possessions. On the other hand, 23% of the women selected plants, 30% selected photographs, and nearly 26% selected sculptures as their most favorite possession.

Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) conducted a study with 300 Americans and 45 Nigerian adults. Results suggested that men and women tend to differ on the possessions they cherish the most. With respect to the American sample, men were most likely to select a functional item such as a chair or an entertainment item such as a television as their most cherished possession. Women were also likely to select an entertainment item as a most cherished possession. However, women were also very likely to choose personal items such as knick knacks as a most cherished possession.

In another study of 50 American students and 50 New Zealand students suggested that men tend to cherish possessions that permit control over place or possessions, and that represent accomplishments, such as sports equipment, or trophies (Bryce & Olney, 1991). Men are also guided by goals of self-assertion, mastery, and self-achievement. Women, however, cherish possessions that allow nurturing and emotional expression such as photographs and sculptures. These possessions not only represent differences that exist among men and women, they also provide a special meaning to each particular individual.

The special meanings of possessions to the different genders are particularly evident in the Nigerian sample from the Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) study. The Nigerian men selected religious books, charms, and swords as most cherished possessions. These possessions are said to symbolize instrumental values as a spiritual link with the divine or as an object of protection against evil spirits. The Nigerian women selected jewelry and tapestries as most cherished possessions. These possessions symbolize cultural ideals of beauty, notions of prestige, and association with senior female relatives. Therefore, these items represent the women's connection to women, both through kinship and informal politics.

#### Effects of Possessions on Transition

It is possible that individuals may transition more easily from an old to a new environment if cherished possessions or objects are with the individual during the transition. Possessions that tend to ease transition are known as transitional possessions (Myers, 1988). Transitional possessions are possessions invested by an individual that assist in the

negotiation of any developmental stage (Myers, 1988). These transitional possessions are emotionally invested objects, and tend to gain or have significance for individuals at points of change in their lives.

Myers' (1988) study of transitional possessions with an elderly sample suggested that even individuals who said possessions were not important to them were still found to have some possessions of emotional significance. The strong attachment to such possessions suggests the possibility that possessions serve a purpose in the lives of individuals. The purpose may be the symbolic meaning the possessions hold for the individual, which may in turn assist the individual during a time of transition.

Rubenstein and Parmalee (1992) stated that possessions represent what has been important in one's life and who one is in the world. Losing or parting with possessions may be experienced as tragedy by some individuals (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Individuals may differ on the degree of loss that is experienced. The severity of the individual's reaction usually reflects the severity of disruption or degree of loss (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Reactions such as feelings of loss are not uncommon when cherished possessions such as furniture, collections, or photographs are no longer with an individual (Belk, 1987).

The severity or reaction to loss of possessions may be even greater when assessing degree of choice in the disruption process. Some individuals may experience a greater sense of loss if they involuntarily give up or are forced to give up their possessions, compared to individuals that voluntarily or temporarily give up their possessions (Brown & Perkins, 1992). The degree of disruption and the individual's perceived amount of choice in leaving

possessions behind can be a short-term or long-term disruption process. Short-term disruption may be experienced by those individuals that voluntarily give up certain possessions or decided to store possessions for a short amount of time. Long-term disruption may effect those that lost possessions due to a fire or burglary. Long-term disruption may also effect those that lost or gave up possessions permanently, because of relocation. This circumstance especially applies to elderly persons who move from home to an institutional form of housing, such as a nursing home.

Findings from these studies were drawn from elderly samples, but can also extend to include individuals from any age group, particularly those who may be affected by a significant transition resulting in a loss or limitation of possessions as may be experienced by college students. In Myers' study (1988) of 12 subjects it was suggested that an individual entering a transition may not realize the significance of a particular possession until a transition occurs. College students may have this realization as they transition from home to college. One positive aspect for college students is that the young adult usually knows in advance that he or she will be attending college, and therefore has time to prepare for the transition (Brown & Perkins, 1992).

It is possible that even with time to prepare for the transition, difficulties may arise. Time does not change the size of the dorm room, which may place limitations on the size or number of possessions brought from home to college. Time also does not change space limitations due to sharing one's dorm room with another individual. These limitations may

result in a student's lack of attachment to his or her dorm room, which may in turn effect the level of attachment to the university.

The information from these studies suggests that possessions are significant in the lives of individuals, and some possessions may help or hinder in the transition from home to college. The presence of some possessions in a student's dorm room may also affect the level of attachment to the dorm room.

#### Effect of Possessions on Place Attachment

As noted above, possessions may not only affect the transition from home to college, but also the feelings of place attachment to one's bedroom and current dorm room. Space restrictions in the residence halls are likely to exist because of the size of the room and the possibility of sharing one's room with a roommate. These space restrictions may place limitations on the size or number of possessions brought from home to college.

Unfortunately, the limitations may result in feelings of loss expressed by students.

“If I am what I have and what I have is lost, who then am I ?” (Fromm, 1976, p.96). Much like people who have lost possessions due to a fire or burglary, some college students transitioning from home to college may experience feelings of loss. The feelings of loss may include leaving one's room and possessions behind for college opportunities. The number of possessions that must be left at the parental home may differ for every individual. While in-state students may be able to make several trips to college, out of state, or out of country, students may be limited in the number of items that can be transported from the parental home to college.

Possessions are not the only things that individuals leave behind when going to college. Individuals also leave behind the room with which they feel most at home. For most, this is their bedroom. The Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) study included a subsample of 79 children and young adults, of which 67% stated that they felt most at home in their own bedroom. This room that individuals call their own is significant, because the space is filled with possessions that are most important to them.

In a 1992 literature review (Chawla), children aged 2-17 were described according to place attachment behaviors. Research suggested that infants and young children had a fairly limited amount of physical territory with which to interact. Therefore, these children attached most strongly to areas close to their home, including the home itself. It was suggested that place attachment in children included attachment to playhouses, the backyard, and the child's own bedroom (Chawla, 1992).

The typical safety and security associated with one's home or one's bedroom invites individuals to develop strong attachments to their home or to a special room in the house (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). These attachments to the house or special room suggest an extension of one's self and a relationship with a particular place. These strong attachments to a specific place clearly promote and reflect stability, representing long-term bonds between people and their own bedroom, home, neighborhood, and community (Brown & Perkins, 1992).

The reflection of stability in place attachment in elderly was critically examined by Rubenstein and Parmalee (1992). These researchers noted with a sample of elderly



individuals in a nursing home setting that place attachment in the elderly depends upon the elderly's roles, relationships, and life experiences in the home or place of attachment. These researchers looked at the effects of housing such as nursing homes on the elderly. It was suggested that nursing homes represent an institutional form of housing, which carries with it negative depictions and evaluations. Because these forms of residence are not desirable, it is suggested that place attachment is less likely to occur (Rubenstein & Parmalee, 1992).

Once again, the matter of choice becomes an important factor to consider when assessing individuals and their attachment to a particular place. Many choices may affect individual's feelings of attachment to a particular place. The significance of these choices may become particularly apparent when assessing an individual's level of attachment to a new environment. Unfortunately, some individuals may have little if any choice in whether to leave their current home, when they will leave their current home, or what kind of housing they will move to from their current home, which in turn may affect their level of attachment to their new living environment.

Because of the emotional bonds people develop which link them to their secure places of attachment, the loss of these secure attachments may create a stress. Brown and Perkins (1992) note a period of disruption followed by a post-disruption phase of coping in many incoming freshman making the transition from home to college. Incoming freshmen may be more likely than sophomores, junior, and seniors to have the strongest attachments to their bedroom and to their parents' home, and may find it challenging to create new attachments in college. Becker (1977) suggested that individuals are better able to attach to their room or

home when they are able to or choose to personalize that space with possessions such as pictures or curtains. Therefore, freshmen who are able to personalize space with their own possessions may be more likely to attach to their dorm room than freshmen who were not allowed to bring personal and cherished possessions with them.

Past research has suggested that possessions may ease transition and affect place attachment in new settings (Rubenstein & Parmalee, 1992). The current study will focus on the role of possessions brought by students from home to college, particularly cherished possessions, and place attachment to their dorm room and bedroom at their parents' home. Specifically, the focus will be upon the possessions that are brought with the student from home to college, and the role of these possessions in easing student transition from home to college.

#### Significance of Study

The goal of this research to learn more about the role of possessions, particularly cherished possessions, of incoming college students during the time of transition from home to the new college dorm room. More specifically, the goal of the research is to learn whether cherished possessions affect college students' place attachment to their dorm rooms.

Based on the literature, it is predicted that: 1) men and women will differ on the possessions selected as most cherished, 2) men and women will differ on whether their most cherished possession was brought to college, 3) personal possessions brought with the student such as collections, computers, photographs, stuffed animals, and entertainment items will help ease the students' transition from home to college, and 4) those who state that a possession helps

ease their transition from home to college are more likely to be attached to their dorm room than those who state a possession does not help ease their transition.

### Summary

Although some researchers have studied place attachment and others have studied possessions, the relationship between possessions and place attachment has received little attention. While possessions may affect place attachment at any stage of the life cycle, the impact may be most noticeable at a time of transition, such as leaving one's home and entering college for the first time.

Three areas of relevant past research were discussed in order to analyze the relationship between possessions and place attachment in first-semester freshman. The areas discussed were: (1) personal possessions, (2) the effect of possessions on transition, and (3) the effect of possessions on place attachment.

The last two decades have seen an increased interest in the meaning of personal possessions and place attachment. Findings have shown that individuals tend to convey a sense of connection to their possessions, which allows the individual to express himself or herself (McCraken, 1986). The sense of connection between the individual and his or her possessions may be especially strong during times of transition (Myers, 1988). In fact, an individual's cherished possessions may actually ease a transition from an old to a new environment (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Findings have also shown that individuals develop strong attachments to specific places that promote and reflect stability, such as bedrooms or one's home (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Therefore, an individual experiencing a

transition from an old to a new environment may feel most comfortable in a room or home is filled with the possessions that are most important to the individual (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

The specific research on personal possessions suggested that men were most likely to select a functional item such as a chair or an entertainment item such as a television as their most cherished possession. Women, however, were most likely to choose personal items such as knick knacks and other mementos as cherished possessions. Research also suggested that men tend to cherish possessions that permit control over place or possessions, or that represent accomplishments, such as sports equipment or trophies. Men were guided by goals of self-assertion, mastery, and self-achievement. Women, however, cherished possessions that allow for nurturing and emotional expression, such as photographs and sculptures.

The research on effect of possessions on transition suggested that individuals may transition more easily from an old to a new environment if cherished possessions or objects are with the individual during the transition. These possessions are emotionally invested objects and tend to gain or have significance for individuals at points of change in their lives.

Finally, from the research on the effect of possessions on place attachment, it was concluded that individuals transitioning from home to other residential settings may experience feelings of loss. These feelings of loss may also apply to young adults who are leaving a room that is significant to them (usually the bedroom) and cherished possessions

behind for college opportunities. Therefore, the degree to which incoming freshmen develop attachments to their new living environments may be influenced by the cherished possessions they bring with them in the transition.

These findings suggest several hypotheses, discussed previously, about the attachment of people to possessions and places that will be the focus of this study. The methodology of the study will be presented next.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### Subjects

The sample for the study consists of 263 first-semester freshmen college students residing in Iowa State University residence halls. Iowa State University campus housing for single students consists of three residence complexes. Approximately four residential halls with five to 10 floors each make up the three residence complexes. The residential halls may or may not be separate buildings, but each operates individually.

There are several reasons why the residence halls were selected instead of sororities, fraternities, apartments, or university classrooms. First of all, the distribution of freshmen respondents is much higher in the residence halls than in other living arrangements. Incoming freshmen are the preferred respondents because these students have made the transition from home to college most recently. Freshmen most likely will recall the transition much more precisely than a sophomore, junior, or senior who made the transition perhaps two, three, or more years ago. Second, the use of residence halls for data collection allows the researcher to pinpoint freshmen college students who reside in a similar living environment within each residential hall.

One residential hall was selected randomly from each of the residential complexes. The Towers Residence Complex, built in 1967, stands approximately one mile south of the Iowa State campus. It consists of four buildings, each about 10 stories high, all with similar, light-colored exterior characteristics. In general, students are some distance away from

classroom buildings. Wallace was selected randomly to represent the Towers Residence Complex.

The Richardson Court Residence Complex stands on the east side of the Iowa State campus. The majority of the Richardson Court halls were built in 1915-1918. Three additional halls were built in 1967. The structure of these three halls is very similar to the Towers Residence Halls, and they stand separate from the older brick halls. All of the residential halls that make up the RCRH are considered to be on campus and within walking distance to most classroom buildings. Barton-Lyon-Freeman, one of the older halls, was selected randomly to represent Richardson Court Residence Halls. Both men and women live in Barton and Lyon, while only women live in Freeman Hall.

The Union Drive Residence Halls stand on the southwest side of campus, and are considered to be part of the Iowa State campus. These residence halls were built in 1927, with updating through 1964. Students residing in these halls are within walking distance to most classroom buildings. Friley was selected randomly to represent the Union Drive Residence Halls.

### Measures

A 30 question survey was developed to be filled out by first-semester freshmen students. The questionnaire was made up of four sections of questions: demographics, possession variables, transition variables, and place attachment variables.

### Demographics

The demographics section of the questionnaire included seven questions: 1) name of current residence hall, 2) who chose the particular residence hall for the student, 3) where the student lived prior to coming to Iowa State, 4) student's gender, 5) marital status of the student's mother, 6) marital status of the student's father, and 7) approximate size of the student's high school senior class (see Appendix).

### Possessions

Students' possessions were assessed by ten items from the Residence Halls Questionnaire, developed specifically for this study. Students were asked 1) to identify one or more household possessions that were brought with them from home to college from a ten-item list: furniture, appliances, clothes, computers, collections, photographs, plants, stuffed animals, entertainment items (such as stereos, TVs, and CD players), and other. From this list, students were then asked 2) to select their most cherished possession, 3) why this possession was so cherished, and 4) if they brought their cherished possession with them to college.

The six remaining items assessed several areas related to possessions and the new college environment. These items asked: 5) if the students had left any favorite possessions at their parents' home because of limited dorm space, 6) if yes, which favorite possession (from the ten-item list) was left at their parents' home because of limited dorm space, 7) if there were any favorite possessions that were left at the parents' home because a roommate had brought a similar possession, 8) if yes, which favorite possession (from the ten-item list)



was left at their parents' home because a roommate brought a similar possession, 9) whether there were any possessions the student now wished that he or she would have brought to college, and 10) if yes, which favorite possession (from the ten-item list) they left at their parents' home but now wish that they had brought to college (see Appendix).

### Transition

Transition from home to college was assessed with three items on the Residence Hall Questionnaire: 1) whether any one possession helped ease the transition from home to college, 2) if yes, which possession helped ease his or her transition from home to college from the ten-item list, and 3) if yes, why the student believed the possession helped ease his or her transition (see Appendix).

### Place Attachment

Place attachment was assessed with six items reflecting place attachment and four items related to room sharing. The place attachment items consist of questions related to: 1) the current level of attachment to the student's parents' home, 2) the current level of attachment to the student's room at their parents' home 3) the level of attachment the student felt to his or her bedroom during his or her senior year in high school, 4) the level of attachment to parents' home during senior year in high school, 5) the current level of attachment to student's dorm room, and 6) current level of attachment to residence hall. Each of the six questions had five response categories: not at all attached, not very attached, neutral, somewhat attached, and very attached (see Appendix).

Four additional questions in this section assessed 7) whether the student shared a bedroom with a sibling during his or her senior year in high school, and if so, 8) whether the student liked sharing a room with their sibling. Students were also asked if 9) they currently share their dorm room with a roommate, and if so, if 10) they like sharing a room (see Appendix).

### Procedure

First-semester freshmen were selected for this study because these students have most recently made the transition from home to college. Secondly, residence halls not only house many first-semester freshmen, they also tend to be more space restrictive than other living arrangement options. Space restrictions may limit the number or size of possessions that a student can bring to college. The absence of these possessions may make place attachment to the new college environment even more difficult for first-semester freshmen.

A pilot study including 27 freshmen was completed in order to determine if any questions on the survey were confusing, misunderstood, or needed to be changed. The pilot study also allowed the researcher to determine how long the survey took to complete. The results from the pilot study allowed the researcher to conclude that the survey was easy to understand, and took subjects approximately ten minutes to complete.

An area sampling procedure was followed for this study. After three residential halls were selected randomly, the researcher went door to door on each floor, asking only first semester freshmen to complete the questionnaire. If two freshmen lived in one dorm room, the freshmen with the birthday closest to the date of survey distribution completed the

questionnaire. The survey took approximately 10 minutes for each individual to complete. The questionnaire was delivered face to face and took a short amount of time and therefore provided an incredibly high response rate. Of the 265 freshmen that were approached only two declined, giving a response rate of 99.2%. Names and dorm room numbers were not recorded. The respondents were assured, through use of a modified consent form, that all of their answers would remain confidential.

For convenience and to reduce data entry error, subjects were asked to use bubble sheets when answering survey questions. The bubble sheets were then taken to a test and evaluation center at Iowa State University, where they were scanned and formatted into an SPSS file for ease of analysis. Results were analyzed through the use of frequencies, cross-tabulations, logistic regression, and other statistical procedures.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

Results reported in this chapter include frequencies and percentages, cross-tabulations, likelihood ratios, and logistic regression analyses.

#### Demographics

Frequencies and percentages for the demographics of this study are presented in Table 1 for men and women. With respect to dorm residence, 14% of freshman men lived in Richardson Court Halls, 53% lived in the Towers Residence Halls, and 33% lived in the Union Drive Residence Halls. Freshman women were more evenly distributed, with 37% in Richardson Court Hall, 37% in the Towers Residence Halls, and 27% in the Union Drive Residence Halls.

With respect to residence hall selection, 46% of the men made the selection on their own, and 46% allowed ISU to select their residence hall. On the other hand, 57% of the women selected their residence hall on their own, and 37% had ISU select their residence hall. The other 8% of men and 6% of women stated that their parents or another person had selected their residence hall for them.

The majority of both men and women lived in Iowa in the year prior to coming to Iowa State, with 63% of the men and 64% of the women claiming in-state residence. An additional 35% of the men and 33% of the women lived out of state and 2% of the men and 3% of the women lived in another country in the year prior to coming to Iowa State.

Table 1. Percentages and (frequencies) for study sample demographics, by gender.

Demographics	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
<b>Residence Halls</b>		
Richardson Court Halls	14% (21)	37% (42)
Towers Residence Halls	53% (78)	37% (42)
Union Drive Residence	33% (49)	27% (31)
<b>Who Chose This Hall for Student?</b>		
Self	46% (68)	57% (65)
Parents	1% (02)	2% (02)
ISU	46% (68)	37% (43)
Other	7% (10)	4% (05)
<b>Residence in Year Prior to ISU</b>		
In state	63% (93)	64% (73)
Out of state	35% (52)	33% (38)
Out of country	2% (03)	3% (03)
<b>Mother's Marital Status</b>		
Married	79% (117)	72% (83)
Widowed	1% (01)	2% (02)
Separated/Divorced	11% (17)	7% (08)
Remarried	3% (04)	10% (12)
Other	6% (09)	9% (10)
<b>Father's Marital Status</b>		
Married	79% (117)	72% (83)
Widowed	0% (00)	0% (00)
Separated/Divorced	8% (12)	5% (06)
Remarried	6% (09)	12% (14)
Other	7% (10)	10% (12)
<b>Senior Class Size</b>		
< 50 students	12% (18)	13% (15)
51-150 students	34% (50)	39% (45)
151-300 students	16% (23)	16% (18)
301-500 students	28% (42)	25% (29)
501-1000 students	10% (15)	5% (06)
1000+ students	0% (00)	2% (02)

Of the 148 men respondents, 79% were from intact parent homes, 11% had mothers who were presently separated or divorced, 8% had fathers who were presently separated or divorced, 3% had mothers who were presently remarried, 6% had fathers who were presently remarried, 1% had a widowed mother, and 6% of mothers and 7% of fathers were listed as other.

Of the 115 women respondents, 72% were from intact parent homes, 7% had mothers who were presently separated or divorced, 5% had fathers who were presently separated or divorced, 10% had mothers who were presently remarried, 12% had fathers who were presently remarried, 2% had a widowed mother, and 9% of mothers and 10% of fathers were listed as other.

The majority of students came from smaller high schools, with 46% of the men and 52% of the women stating that their senior class consisted of one to 150 students. In addition, 44% of the men and 41% of the women were from senior class sizes consisting of 151-500 students. Only 10% of the men and 7% of the women were from senior class sizes of 500 students or more.

### Possession Variables

#### Cherished Possessions

Table 2 presents frequencies and percentages for subjects' most cherished possession, what makes the possession so cherished, and whether the cherished possession was brought with the student to college.

Table 2. Percentages and (frequencies) for cherished possessions, by gender of respondent.

Cherished Possessions	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
<b>Cherished Possessions</b>		
Furniture	2% (03)	3% (03)
Appliances	0% (00)	0% (00)
Clothing	5% (07)	12% (14)
Computer	15% (22)	3% (03)
Collections	11% (16)	4% (05)
Photographs	12% (18)	46% (53)
Plants	1% (01)	0% (00)
Stuffed Animals	1% (02)	10% (12)
Stereo, TV, CD player	30% (44)	10% (12)
Other	23% (34)	11% (13)
<b>Why is Possession Cherished?</b>		
Reminded of someone	15% (22)	49% (56)
Reminded of event	8% (11)	10% (11)
Hobby	30% (43)	4% (05)
Provides physical comfort	19% (28)	18% (21)
Other	28% (40)	18% (21)
<b>Was Cherished Possession Brought to College?</b>		
Yes	66% (97)	92% (106)
No	34% (50)	8% (09)

For women, 46 percent stated that photographs were their most cherished possession. Items such as appliances (0%), plants (0%), computers (3%), and furniture (3%), were least likely to be stated by women as a most cherished possession. Entertainment items such as stereos, TVs, and CD players, were selected as the most cherished possession by 30% of the

men. Items such as appliances (0%), plants (1%), stuffed animals (1%), and furniture (2%) were least likely to be stated by men as a most cherished possession.

Respondents were also asked to state why their possession was so important to them. Nearly half of the women (49%) stated that their most cherished possession reminded them of someone. Women were least likely to state that their most cherished possession represented a hobby, as only 4% made this selection. Men, on the other hand, tend to cherish their possession because it represented a hobby, with 30% giving this response. Men were least likely (8%) to state that their possession reminded them of an event.

The final variable assessed whether or not men and women brought their most cherished possession with them to college. A majority, 92% of women and 66% of men, stated that they brought their most cherished possession with them to college. Women were noticeably more likely than men to bring their most cherished possession with them to college.

The second set of possession characteristics (see Table 3) show results for whether possessions were left at the parental home because of limited dormitory space or because a roommate had brought a similar possession such as a stereo or television. Results show that 65% of the men and 67% of the women stated that they left a favorite possession at their parents' home because of limited dorm space. The three most frequently listed items that women left behind were furniture (29%), clothing (14%), and collections (13%). For males, furniture (23%), appliances (12%), and collections (12%) were the most commonly listed possessions left behind because of limited dorm space.



Table 3. Percentages and (frequencies) of favorite possessions left at parental home, by gender of respondent.

Lack of Possessions	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
<b>Were Possessions Left at Home Due to Lack of Space?</b>		
Yes	65% (95)	67% (77)
No	35% (51)	33% (38)
<b>If Yes, What was Possession?</b>		
Furniture	23% (22)	29% (22)
Appliances	12% (11)	4% (03)
Clothing	7% (07)	14% (11)
Computer	5% (05)	3% (02)
Collections	12% (11)	13% (10)
Photographs	6% (06)	8% (06)
Plants	1% (01)	4% (03)
Stuffed Animals	1% (01)	10% (08)
Stereo, TV, CD player	10% (09)	5% (04)
Other	23% (22)	10% (08)
<b>Were Possessions Left at Home Due to Roommate Substitution?</b>		
Yes	44% (64)	40% (45)
No	57% (83)	60% (67)
<b>If Yes, What Was Possession?</b>		
Furniture	18% (11)	16% (07)
Appliances	13% (08)	20% (09)
Clothing	3% (02)	2% (01)
Computer	5% (03)	0% (00)
Collections	2% (01)	0% (00)
Stereo, TV, CD player	49% (31)	62% (28)
Other	11% (07)	0% (00)

Only 44% of the men and 40% of the women stated that they had left a possession at their parents' home because a roommate had brought a similar possession to college. The three most frequently listed items left behind because a roommate had already brought a similar possession to college were entertainment items, selected by 49% of the men and 62% of the women; furniture, selected by 18% of the men and 16% of the women; and appliances, which were selected by 13% of the men and 20% of the women .

Table 4 shows results for possessions the student now wishes that he or she would have brought to college and what that possession is. Results show that 58% of the women and 59% of the men wished they now had a favorite possession that was left at their parents' home. The three most frequently listed possessions that women wished they now had were furniture (28%), clothing (10%), and computers (10%). Men most frequently listed furniture (23%), entertainment items (12%), and computers (11%).

Table 5 presents household possessions that were brought by college freshman when making the transition from home to college. The freshmen were allowed to choose all items that applied to them from the list of the ten choices seen previously. The household possessions most frequently brought by men were clothing (76%), entertainment items (70%), and furniture (58%). The household possessions least likely to be brought by men were plants (7%), stuffed animals (16%), and collections (22%). The household possessions most frequently brought by women were clothing (91%), photographs (83%), and entertainment items (79%), least likely were plants (25%), computers (26%), and collections (32%).

Table 4. Percentages and (frequencies) of possessions wished for, by gender of respondent.

Wish for Possession	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
<b>Wish of Now Having a Certain Possession?</b>		
Yes	59% (85)	58% (67)
No	41% (60)	42% (48)
<b>What Would Possession?</b>		
Furniture	23% (19)	28% (19)
Appliances	8% (07)	9% (06)
Clothing	4% (03)	10% (07)
Computer	11% (09)	10% (07)
Collections	4% (03)	5% (03)
Photographs	10% (08)	8% (05)
Plants	0% (00)	5% (03)
Stuffed Animals	0% (00)	6% (04)
Stereo, TV, CD player	12% (10)	5% (03)
Other	29% (24)	15% (10)

Table 5. Percentages and (frequencies) for household possessions brought to college, by gender of respondent. <sup>a</sup>

Household Possessions	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
<b>Household Possessions Brought to College</b>		
Furniture	58% (87)	72% (83)
Appliances	49% (73)	69% (79)
Clothing	76% (112)	91% (105)
Computer	34% (50)	26% (30)
Collections	22% (33)	32% (37)
Photographs	54% (80)	83% (96)
Plants	7% (10)	25% (29)
Stuffed Animals	16% (23)	58% (67)
Stereo, TV, CD player	70% (103)	79% (91)
Other	53% (79)	53% (61)

<sup>a</sup> Percentages do not total 100, as this was a multiple response item.

Transition Variables

Table 6 presents three items, each related to transitional possessions and ease of transition. Almost half of the men (47%) and 57% of the women stated that bringing their possessions to college helped ease their transition from home to college.

Table 6. Percentages and (frequencies) for ease of transition, by gender of respondent.

Ease of Transition	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
Did Possessions Ease Transition ?		
Yes	49% (71)	57% (63)
No	51% (74)	43% (48)
If Yes, What Was Possession?		
Furniture	7% (05)	2% (01)
Appliances	3% (02)	3% (02)
Clothing	4% (03)	2% (01)
Computer	21% (15)	3% (02)
Collections	4% (03)	5% (03)
Photographs	16% (11)	43% (26)
Plants	1% (01)	0% (00)
Stuffed Animals	4% (03)	14% (09)
Stereo, TV, CD player	24% (17)	13% (08)
Other	14% (10)	15% (09)
If Yes, Why Did Possession Help?		
Reminded of someone	20% (14)	50% (31)
Reminded of event	4% (03)	5% (03)
Hobby	26% (18)	3% (02)
Provides physical comfort	26% (18)	27% (17)
Other	23% (16)	15% (09)

Those who stated that possessions helped ease their transition were then asked to list one favorite possession that helped in easing their transition. Photographs (43%), stuffed animals (14%), and entertainment items (13%) were most frequently listed by women as possessions that help ease transition from home to college. Men were most likely to select possessions such as entertainment items (24%), computers (21%), and photographs (16%) as possessions that helped ease their transition.

With regard to why the possession helped ease their transition, half of the women respondents (50%) stated that the possession reminded them of someone, and 27% stated that the possession provided them with a sense of physical comfort. With regard to men's responses 26% indicated that the possession represented a hobby, 26% indicated that the possession provided them with a sense of physical comfort, and 20% indicated that the possession reminded them of someone.

#### Place Attachment Variables

Place attachment is represented by six items. These items include the student's feeling of attachment to his or her bedroom at his or her parents' home as well as attachment to the parents' home, both during the student's senior year and currently. The last two items are the feeling of place attachment to the dorm room, and to the residence hall.

T-tests, which test for independence among variables, were calculated to assess the differences between gender for the six areas of attachment, and are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Mean/*standard deviation* for place attachment, by gender of respondent.

Attachment	Men mean ( <i>sd</i> )	Women mean ( <i>sd</i> )	t-value	p-value
Level of Attachment to Bedroom, Senior Year	3.22 (1.19)	3.62 (1.17)	9.55	.050
Level of Attachment to Bedroom, Now	2.63 (1.25)	3.01 (1.20)	6.67	.154
Level of Attachment to Parents' Home, Senior Year	3.50 (1.13 )	3.86 (1.09)	7.89	.096
Level of Attachment to Parents' Home, Now	3.32 (1.18)	3.50 (1.15)	2.04	.729
Level of Attachment to Dorm Room	3.35 (.97)	3.45 (1.06)	3.81	.432
Level of Attachment to Residence Hall	3.21 (1.11)	3.25 (1.10)	.659	.956

Only attachment to bedroom during the student's senior high school year differentiated between men and women for the variable, with women being more attached than men to their bedroom during their senior year in high school. Gender differences on the other five variables were not statistically significant. However, even though the other relationships were not significant, the means for women for all items were higher than the men's means, suggesting women are slightly more attached to places than men.

## Results for Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis is that the most cherished possessions of men and women are different. This hypothesis was examined through the use of contingency table analysis. Table 8 provides results that support this hypothesis. As seen in the table, nearly one-half of the women (46%) selected photographs as their most cherished possession, compared to 12% for men, while one-third of the men (30%), selected entertainment possessions as their most cherished possession, compared to 10% of women (Likelihood Ratio = 77.34,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 8. Percentages and (frequencies) for types of cherished possessions, by gender of respondent. <sup>a</sup>

Cherished Possessions	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
Cherished Possessions		
Furniture	2% (03)	3% (03)
Appliances	0% (00)	0% (00)
Clothing	5% (07)	12% (14)
Computer	15% (22)	3% (03)
Collections	11% (16)	4% (05)
Photographs	12% (18)	46% (53)
Plants	1% (01)	0% (00)
Stuffed Animals	1% (02)	10% (12)
Stereo, TV, CD player	30% (44)	10% (12)
Other	23% (34)	11% (13)

<sup>a</sup> Likelihood Ratio = 77.34,  $p < .001$

### Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis states that females are more likely than males to bring their most cherished possession with them to college (see Table 9). The second hypothesis is also supported (Likelihood ratio = 27.88,  $p < .001$ ). All but nine women in the sample stated that they brought their most cherished possession with them to college. Of the men, however, 50 out of 147 did not bring their most cherished possession with them.

Table 9. Percentages and (frequencies) for cherished possessions brought to college, by gender of respondent. <sup>a,b</sup>

Possessions Brought to College	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
Brought Cherished Possession to College	66% (97)	92% (106)
Cherished Possession Not Brought to College	34% (50)	8% (09)

<sup>a</sup> Likelihood ratio = 27.88,  $p < .001$

<sup>b</sup> Somer's d = -.307,  $p < .001$

Table 10 shows differences between men's and women's possessions that are most frequently brought to college. Clothing and items of entertainment were listed most often by men and women as items brought to college. Men (34%) were much more likely than women (26%) to list computers as a possession brought to college. Women, however were much more likely to list stuffed animals (58%) and photographs (83%) as possessions brought to college, than were men (16% and 54% respectively).



Table 10. Percentages and (frequencies) for household possessions brought to college, by gender of respondent. <sup>a</sup>

Household Possessions	Men % (n)	Women % (n)
Household Possessions Brought to College		
Furniture	58% (87)	72% (83)
Appliances	49% (73)	69% (79)
Clothing	76% (112)	91% (105)
Computer	34% (50)	26% (30)
Collections	22% (33)	32% (37)
Photographs	54% (80)	83% (96)
Plants	7% (10)	25% (29)
Stuffed Animals	16% (23)	58% (67)
Stereo, TV, CD player	70% (103)	79% (91)
Other	53% (79)	53% (61)

<sup>a</sup> Percentages do not total 100, as this was a multiple response item.

### Hypothesis 3

Results for the third hypothesis, that one's possessions help ease the transition from home to college, was tested with logistic regression analysis. Separate models were estimated for men (Tables 11 and 13) and for women (Tables 12 and 14), to follow up on the suggested gender-specific differences contained in Table 10.

Table 11 includes results from a logistic regression model for men only. Table 11 includes two different values of  $-2 \log$  likelihood. The first (200.95) was calculated before any models were formed. This calculation was labeled as the total variation. Total variation equals the sum of squared prediction errors that would be obtained if the observed values of

the independent variable were not used to predict the observed values of the dependent variables.

The second -2 log likelihood value (196.34) was calculated after the logistic regression model was completed. This calculation was labeled as the amount of unexplained variance. Unexplained variation equals the sum of squared prediction errors that is obtained when the observed values of the independent variable are used to predict the observed values of the dependent variable.

Table 11. Logistic regression for possessions and their effect on transition, for men.

Variable	Score	df	Sig.
Furniture	.0905	1	.7635
Appliances	1.9989	1	.1574
Clothing	.0205	1	.8861
Computer	.0327	1	.8565
Collections	4.5605	1	.0327
Photographs	.5976	1	.4395
Plants	.5233	1	.4694
Stuffed Animals	.1126	1	.7372
Stereo, TV	1.5588	1	.2118
Other	.0097	1	.9214
-2 Log Likelihood	200.95 (Total Variance)		
-2 Log Likelihood	196.34 (Unexplained Variance)		
Model Chi-Square	4.62 (Explained Variance) $p = .0317$		

Table 11 shows that taken together, possessions do have significant influence (chi-square = 4.62,  $p < .05$ ) for men on ease of transition. In addition, results show that collections make a significant contribution to ease of transition above and beyond all other possessions that contribute to ease of transition for men (chi-square = 4.56,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 12 includes results from a logistic regression model on ease of transition from possessions for women only. Similar to Table 11, this table includes two different values of -2 log likelihood. The first value (151.85) was calculated before any models were formed. This calculation was labeled as the total variation. The unexplained variance (145.71) was calculated when the model was completed. Table 12 shows that taken together, possessions do have significant influence (chi-square = 6.13,  $p < .05$ ) for women on ease of transition.

Table 12. Logistic regression for possessions and their effect on transition, for women.

Variable	Score	df	Sig.
Furniture	.0645	1	.6116
Appliances	3.1901	1	.2736
Clothing	.6049	1	.5373
Computer	.4514	1	.8453
Collections	4.1295	1	.0616
Photographs	6.1160	1	.0183
Plants	.0023	1	.7736
Stuffed Animals	.4222	1	.7154
Stereo, TV	.0837	1	.3480
Other	.3899	1	.2201
-2 Log Likelihood	151.85 (Total Variance)		
-2 Log Likelihood	145.71 (Unexplained Variance)		
Model Chi-Square	6.13 (Explained Variance) $p = .0133$		

In addition, results show that photographs make a significant contribution above and beyond all other possessions that contribute to ease of transition for women (chi-square = 6.13,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 13 provides classification tables for a reduced logistic regression model predicting ease of transition as a function of collections from home, for men. Classification tables are used to differentiate predicted versus observed outcomes, in this case, for men's ease of transition due to collections. This table reports several statistics that reinforce the role of collections as a possession that helps ease the transition from home to college. In this table B represents the log odds ratio. This ratio compares results for those who brought collections to college and who stated that the collections helped ease their transition against men who brought collections to college but stated that the collection did not help ease their transition. The standard error (S. E.) for this particular model was .4176. The Wald statistic is used with maximum likelihood estimators, as a counterpart to the partial F statistic in least squares linear models. The Wald statistic represents a chi-square statistic calculated by  $(B/S.E.)^2$ . The model in Table 13 suggests a significant relationship between collections brought to college and ease of transition ( $p < .05$ ), for men. Results show that approximately 30% of the men who stated that a collection helped ease their transition from home to college were correctly classified by the model as having a collection that helped ease transition from home to college. This table also shows that approximately 85% of those who stated that a collection did not help ease their transition from home to college were also correctly classified.

Table 13. Results of the classification variable for ease of transition by collections, for men.

Observed	Predicted		Percent Correct		
	Eased Transition	Didn't Ease Transition			
<b>Men</b>					
Eased Transition	21	50	29.58%		
Didn't Ease Transition	11	63	85.14%		
% Total correct for men			57.93%		
Variable	B	S. E.	Wald	df	Sig.
Collections	-.8777	.4176	4.4169	1	.0356

Table 14 provides classification tables for a reduced logistic regression model predicting ease of transition as a function of photographs brought from home for women. This classification table was used to differentiate predicted versus observed outcomes for women's ease of transition due to photographs.

Table 14. Results of the classification variable for ease of transition by photographs, for women.

Observed	Predicted		Percent Correct		
	Eased Transition	Didn't Ease Transition			
<b>Women</b>					
Eased Transition	58	5	92.06%		
Didn't Ease Transition	36	12	25.00%		
% Total correct for women			63.06%		
Variable	B	S. E.	Wald	df	Sig.
Photographs	-1.3519	..5730	5.5667	1	.0183

This table shows that approximately 92% of the women who stated that photographs helped ease their transition from home to college were correctly classified by the model. This table also suggests that 25% of those who stated that photographs did not help ease their transition from home to college were correctly classified by the model. While the results for Tables 11 and 13 show that possessions, and specifically collections, were strong predictors of ease of transition for men, Tables 12 and 14 show an even stronger relationship between possessions, specifically photographs, and of ease of transition for women. The stronger relationship between possessions and ease of transition coupled with the tendency for women to be more attached to places may suggest that women are more likely than men to feel possessions and places are an extension of themselves.

#### Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis states that if a student brings possessions to college and feels that those possessions helped ease his or her transition, he or she is more likely to be attached to his or her dorm room than a student who states that possessions did not help ease his or her transition. Although the results from Table 15 do not show support for the hypothesis, there is a slight trend in the predicted direction.

In retrospect, results of the relationships in Table 15 may not seem so surprising. After all, these freshmen may have spent their entire lives with their own bedroom at their parents' home, and had spent only four weeks in their dorm room at the time of data collection.

Table 15. Cross-tabulation of ease of transition with level of attachment to dorm room. <sup>a,b</sup>

	Not very or not not at all attached	Neutral	Somewhat or very attached
Possession helped Ease Transition	18	46	69
Possession didn't help Ease Transition	20	44	58

<sup>a</sup> Likelihood Ratio = .629,  $p = .730$

<sup>b</sup> Somer's  $d = -.046$ ,  $p = .507$

As was noted previously, the atmosphere in the residence halls clearly is different than one's own bedroom. Therefore, attachment to dorm room may be difficult for many new students, and may take some time to adjust.

The presence of a roommate may be another reason why students do not feel as attached to their dorm room. Nearly 90% of the students in this sample stated that they currently share their dorm room with a roommate. However, only 19% of them shared a bedroom at home with a sibling. Lack of place attachment may be due to the room not belonging to just one person. Lack of place attachment also may be due to more space restrictions when living with a roommate, which limits the number or size of possessions allowed in the dorm room.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of possessions on place attachment. Results reported for the research included frequencies and percentages for each variable, cross-tabulations, likelihood ratios, and logistic regression analyses.

Frequencies and percentages were assessed for each of the variables included in the survey. Results were provided for each of the four areas: demographics, independent variables, transition variables, and dependent variables. After the frequencies and percentages were assessed, the results from the hypotheses were provided.

The demographics from this study show interesting similarities between men and women. Men and women were equally likely to choose their residence hall or have Iowa State choose it for them, rather than having their parents choose for them. Most of the men and women were in-state residents. Most were from intact families and from smaller school district areas in the year prior to coming to Iowa State.

Based on past research, it was predicted that men and women would differ on choice of most cherished possession. This hypothesis was supported, with nearly one-half of the women (46%) selecting photographs as their most cherished possession, compared to 12% for men, while one-third of the men (30%) selected entertainment possessions as their most cherished possession compared to 10% of women. The results from the current study showed very similar results to the Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton study (1981) and Sherman and Newman (1977-78), in which most-cherished possessions by women were also photographs, while most-cherished possessions by men were entertainment items.



It also was predicted that men would differ from women on whether or not the cherished possession would be brought to college. This hypothesis was also supported, the results showing that females are more likely than males to bring their most cherished possession with them to college. Research by Bryce and Olney (1991) and Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) may assist in understanding these differences. These studies show that women's possessions allow for nurturing and emotional expression and that these items represent the women's connection to women, while men's possessions such as sports equipment symbolized instrumental values such as competition. It is possible from these results that the women's possessions are deemed more personal than men's possessions and therefore are more likely to be brought to college.

In addition, results showed that differences exist between men's and women's possessions that are most frequently brought to college. Clothing and items of entertainment were listed most often by men and women as items brought to college. Much like the past research on possessions, men (34%) were more likely than women (26%) to list computers as a possession brought to college. However, women were much more likely to list stuffed animals (58%) and photographs (83%) as possessions brought to college than were men (16% and 54%, respectively).

The third hypothesis predicted that personal possessions brought with the student from home to college would help ease the student's transition. This hypothesis was supported. Results show that taken together, possessions do have a significant influence for men on ease of transition, and that collections are the possession that makes the most

significant contribution. Results also show that taken together, possessions have a significant influence for women as well on ease of transition, and that photographs make the most significant contribution. These results concur with Myers' (1988) findings that special possessions tend to gain or have significance for individuals at points of change in their lives.

Finally, it was predicted that those who stated that a possession helped ease their transition would be more attached to their dorm room than were those who stated that a possession did not help ease their transition. Although the results did not show support for the hypothesis, there was a slight trend in the predicted direction.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The last two decades have seen an increased interest in the meaning of personal possessions and place attachment. Findings have shown that individuals tend to convey a sense of connection to their possessions, which allows the individual to express himself or herself (McCracken, 1986). The sense of connection between the individual and his or her possessions may be especially strong during times of transition (Myers, 1988). In fact, an individual's cherished possessions actually may ease a transition from an old to a new environment (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Findings also have shown that individuals develop strong attachments to specific places that promote and reflect stability, such as bedrooms or one's home (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Therefore, an individual experiencing a transition from an old to a new environment may feel most comfortable in a room or home filled with the possessions that are most important to the individual (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

It was the goal of this research to learn more about the possessions of incoming college students during the time of transition, and the relationship of possessions and place attachment in individuals. It was predicted first that men and women would differ on the possessions selected as most cherished. Second, it was predicted that men and women would differ on whether their most cherished possession was brought to college. Next, it was predicted that possessions such as collections, computers, photographs, stuffed animals, and

entertainment items would help ease the students' transition from home to college. Last, it was predicted that those who stated that a possession helped ease their transition from home to college were more likely to be attached to their dorm room than were those who stated that a possession did not help ease their transition.

The sample for the study consisted of 263 first-semester freshmen college students residing in Iowa State University residence halls. An area sampling procedure was followed for this study. After three residential halls were selected randomly, the researcher went door to door on each floor, asking only first-semester freshmen to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire included four sections: 1) demographics, 2) personal and cherished possessions, 3) transition from home to college, and 4) level of place attachment to home and college.

The first hypothesis, that men and women would differ on choice of most cherished possession, was supported. Nearly one-half of the women (46%) selected photographs as their most cherished possession, compared to only 12% for men. On the other hand, one-third of the men (30%) selected entertainment possessions as their most cherished possession, compared to 10% for women.

The second hypothesis, that men would differ from women on whether or not the cherished possession would be brought to college, was also supported. Females were more likely than males to bring their most cherished possession with them to college. In addition, results showed that differences exist between men's and women's possessions that are most frequently brought to college. Men (34%) were more likely than women (26%) to list

computers as a possession brought to college. Women were much more likely to list stuffed animals (58%) and photographs (83%) as possessions brought to college than were men (16% and 54%, respectively).

The third hypothesis, that personal possessions brought with the student from home to college would help ease the student's transition, was supported as well. Possessions were related significantly to ease of transition for men, and collections made the most significant contribution among the possessions for men. Possessions were also significantly related to ease of transition for women and photographs were the possession that made the most significant contribution for women.

The fourth hypothesis, that those who that stated a possession did help ease their transition would be more attached to their dorm room than those who stated that a possession did not help ease their transition, was not supported. However, there was a slight trend in the predicted direction.

#### Limitations

The first limitation is that the design of the current study was cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether possessions affect place attachment during different stages of a student's college career. It is possible that the relationship between possessions and place attachment will alter for individuals who move during their college career. Longitudinal studies may provide information as well on differences in individuals who transition from an institutional form of housing such as the residence halls to an off campus apartment or married housing.

Another limitation involves the sample which was used for the current study. Future research should include samples from both universities and community colleges. If a variety of universities and colleges are assessed, results may be more generalizable than the results from the current study. These studies may also show if there are differences in the relationship between individuals and place attachment for individuals from rural or smaller cities entering universities versus community colleges compared to individuals from metropolis areas entering universities versus community colleges.

Yet another limitation, this one due to the lack of research about possessions and their effect on place attachment, is the lack of appropriate measures. This made it very difficult to develop a measure that applied to first-semester freshmen making the transition from home to college.

Also, with respect to measures, only portable possessions were assessed. Some students may have wanted to bring other possessions but were unable to because of space limitations. It is also possible that the student's most cherished possession is a car or motorcycle. Since only household items were assessed, the results to some of the questions may have been different if choices included all possessions.

Other variables besides gender could have been included in the analyses. The relationship between possessions and ease of transition may have been stronger if such variables as high school senior class size or whether the student shared a room with a sibling had been controlled.

Another limitation is the possibility that students were assessed before the transition process had had enough time to be completed. Students had lived in the dorms for approximately one month at the time of the survey. They may have been still going through the transition phase. Many of the students still may have been getting used to a roommate and the space restrictions.

A final limitation is that the current study provides only objective, quantitative results. A follow-up study could include open-ended questions or personal interviews. These two methods would provide a more in-depth understanding of how possessions may affect place attachment in students making the transition from home to college. Such a study could also be expanded to provide further information about other factors, in addition to possessions, that may affect the students' place attachment to their new environment. These factors could include whether the student lives on or off campus, the significance of peers on level of place attachment, the services provided for students such as food service and transportation, and the support from the university's administration.

In addition to the current measure, two additional questions may provide significant results when assessing the relationship between possessions and place attachment. One question should ask whether students feel more attached to place when their possessions are present. A second question should assess the student's expectations of college success, completing a two-year or four-year degree versus non-completion.

### Implications

The results of this study indicate that men and women differ on choice of most cherished possessions, and on whether they bring their most cherished possessions with them to college. The results also indicate that possessions tend to ease the transition from home to college in first-semester freshmen. Photographs had the strongest association between possessions brought to college and ease of transition for women, while collections had the strongest association between possessions brought to college and ease of transition for men. More research is needed to corroborate the results of this study.

The importance of possessions when transitioning from one living structure to another in determining the attachment to place is information that should be helpful to university administrators and residence hall directors. For instance, the presence of possessions which promote an easier transition from the student's home to college could be encouraged. The results from this study suggest that resident hall directors may encourage women to bring photographs from home to college in order to ease their transition. On the other hand, hall directors may encourage men to bring any special collections with them in order to ease their transition. These possessions also may promote a higher level of attachment to the new college environment.

Resident assistants or hall directors could distribute the survey from this study to all dormitory residents two times each school year, preferably once in the first semester and once in the second semester. The results from the survey may allow resident assistants to direct



attention to those students who may be having problems attaching or adjusting to the college environment.

Resident assistants may be able to give students advice on which possessions may help with their transition from home to college, or suggestions on room arrangement to allow for more possessions to be brought from home. In addition, residence halls may be able to offer a storage room or garage that would allow students to bring more possessions from home to college. Storage rooms or garages may also provide space for cherished possessions such as bicycles or motorcycles, which may assist in the student's transition.

In addition, it may be possible that some students may be leaving the university because they were not able to attach to the college living arrangement. Administrators could take an active part in making sure that the needs of students are being met. One option is for the administrators and hall directors to attend workshops to sensitize them to problems students may incur in their transition from home to college. Such workshops may include advice that hall directors can give to students to promote a positive transition, as well as information about warning signs of attachment problems.

Unfortunately, there is a limited scope of literature on the relationship between possessions and place attachment, especially with adolescents and young adults. Adolescents and young adults are seldom studied and researchers have failed to acknowledge the potential effects of possessions on place attachment during the significant transition from home to college. It should be noted that this is one of the first studies that has assessed the relationship between possessions and place attachment in college students making the

transition from home to college. It is important that future researchers direct more attention to college students and the significance of possessions in their transition from home to college.

In addition, some aspects of the data gathering portion of this study worked well, and researchers may want to consider them for future studies. The researcher was professionally dressed and close in age to the freshmen sample. Because each respondent was personally contacted, the response rate was extremely high (99.2%). The response rate may be due in part to the length of the survey (it took only 10 minutes to complete). However, students were quite willing to respond and high response rates using personal contact by the researcher should occur even with longer instruments.

APPENDIX  
SURVEY INSTRUMENT  
Residence Hall Questionnaire  
Fall, 1996

September 11, 1996

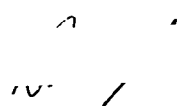
Dear Student:


We would like to invite you to participate in a study of freshman and the transition from home to college, including cherished possessions brought from home to college. Findings from this study may allow some insight into the student's transition from home to college. Your answers are completely confidential and you are under no obligation to complete the survey. However, your participation would be greatly appreciated.


This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers are confidential and information will be summarized and reported in group terms only. Please do not write your name anywhere in the survey or on the answer sheet.

Again, we encourage you to participate in this study. Your answers are very important! Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

  
Donald F. Whalen, Ph.D.  
Coordinator of Student Research  
Department of Residence  
Studies

  
Angela L. Smith  
Master of Science Graduate Student  
Human Development and Family

  
Craig M. Allen, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Human Development and Family Studies

**Instructions:** Please choose the most accurate answer for each of the following questions.

1. What residence hall do you currently live in?
  1. Richardson Court Halls (Barton-Lyon-Freeman)
  2. Towers Residence Halls (Wallace Hall)
  3. Union Drive Residence (Friley Hall)
  
2. Who chose this residence hall for you?
  1. self
  2. parents
  3. ISU
  4. other
  
3. Where did you live in the year prior to coming to Iowa State?
  1. in state
  2. out of state
  3. out of the country
  
4. What is your gender?
  1. male
  2. female
  
5. What was the marital status of your mother during your senior year in high school?
  1. married
  2. widowed
  3. separated/divorced
  4. remarried
  5. other
  
6. What was the marital status of your father during your senior year in high school?
  1. married
  2. widowed
  3. separated/divorced
  4. remarried
  5. other
  
7. What was the size of your graduating high school senior class?
  1. <50 students
  2. 51-150 students
  3. 151-300 students
  4. 301-500 students
  5. 501-1000 students
  6. 1000+ students

**Instructions:** Please choose one answer to each of the following questions.

8. What is your most cherished household possession?

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. furniture   | 6. photographs           |
| 2. appliances  | 7. plants                |
| 3. clothing    | 8. stuffed animals       |
| 4. computer    | 9. stereo, tv, cd player |
| 5. collections | 10. other                |

9. What makes this possession so cherished?

1. it reminds you of someone
2. it reminds you of an event
3. it is a hobby
4. it provides physical comfort
5. other

10. Did you bring this possession with you to college?

1. yes
2. no

11. Did you leave any favorite possessions at your parents' home due to lack of dorm space?

1. yes
2. no (if no, please skip to question #13)

12. If yes, choose one favorite possession left at your parents' home, due to lack of dorm space.

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. furniture   | 6. photographs           |
| 2. appliances  | 7. plants                |
| 3. clothing    | 8. stuffed animals       |
| 4. computer    | 9. stereo, tv, cd player |
| 5. collections | 10. other                |

13. Did you leave any favorite possessions at your parents' home because a roommate brought a similar possession, such as a stereo or tv?

1. yes
2. no (if no, please skip to question #15)

14. If yes, choose one favorite possession that was substituted by a roommate's possession.

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. furniture   | 6. photographs           |
| 2. appliances  | 7. plants                |
| 3. clothing    | 8. stuffed animals       |
| 4. computer    | 9. stereo, tv, cd player |
| 5. collections | 10. other                |

**Instructions:** Please choose one answer to each of the following questions.

15. Are there any possessions that you wish, now, that you would have brought to college?

- 1. yes
- 2. no (if no, please skip to question #17)

16. If yes, what one possession do you wish that you would have brought to college?

- 1. furniture
- 2. appliances
- 3. clothing
- 4. computer
- 5. collections
- 6. photographs
- 7. plants
- 8. stuffed animals
- 9. stereo, tv, cd player
- 10. other

17. Did any one possession help ease your transition from home to college?

- 1. yes
- 2. no (if no, please skip to question #20)

18. If yes, what was this possession?

- 1. furniture
- 2. appliances
- 3. clothing
- 4. computer
- 5. collections
- 6. photographs
- 7. plants
- 8. stuffed animals
- 9. stereo, tv, cd player
- 10. other

19. If yes, why do you think this possession helped ease your transition from home to college?

- 1. it reminds you of someone
- 2. it reminds you of an event
- 3. it is a hobby
- 4. it provides physical comfort
- 5. other

**Instructions:** Please choose one answer to each of the following questions.

	very attached	somewhat attached	neutral	not very attached	not at all attached
20. In your senior year of high school, how attached were you to your bedroom?	1	2	3	4	5
21. How attached do you feel to your bedroom at your parents' home, now?	1	2	3	4	5
22. In your senior year of high school, how attached were you to your parents' home?	1	2	3	4	5

**Instructions:** Please choose one answer to each of the following questions.

	very attached	somewhat attached	neutral	not very attached	not at all attached
23. How attached do you feel to your parents' home, now?	1	2	3	4	5
24. How attached do you feel to your dorm room?	1	2	3	4	5
25. How attached do you feel to your residence hall?	1	2	3	4	5
26. Did you share a bedroom with a sibling during your senior year in high school? 1. yes 2. no (if no, please skip to question #28)					
27. If yes, did you like sharing a room with your sibling? 1. yes 2. no					
28. Do you currently share a dorm room with at least one other person? 1. yes 2. no (if no, please skip to question #30)					
29. If yes, do you like sharing your dorm room with another person? 1. yes 2. no					
30. Please choose <u>any</u> of the following household possessions that were brought with you to college. (You may choose more than one answer for this question)					
1. furniture (beds, carpets, lamps, chairs)					6. photographs
2. appliances ( refrigerator, microwave, coffee pot)					7. plants
3. clothes (jewelry, attire, shoes)					8. stuffed animals
4. computer					9. stereo, tv, cd player
5. collections (coins, figurines, stamps)					10. other

**Thank you so much for your participation! If you are interested in the results from this survey please leave your name and address with the research assistant.**

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