

**GETTING IN IS THE EASY PART:
FOCUSING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS COUNSELING ON
COLLEGE SUCCESS**

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INTRODUCTION

Most quality high schools boast that 70, 80, even 95% of their graduating seniors are college-bound.

Though impressive, few high schools keep records of how many of their students continue at the college of their choice into their sophomore year nor do they track how many of their students ultimately graduate from college. If they did, their statistics would be alarming.

In recent years, national statistics have shown that an average of 25 to 30% of students do NOT return to their first college for their sophomore year (Mortenson, 2003). And, six years later, less than 50% of college-bound students will have graduated from college (Branch, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2000; Ashby, 2003). (State by state statistics can be found at: www.highereducation.org/reports/pipeline/pipeline.pdf)

Clearly, a large number of students are not “succeeding,” which for this paper is being defined as graduating from college. Often it seems that college admissions counselors (CACs), who are high school guidance counselors and independent college counselors, define their goal as facilitating a student’s acceptance and entrance into college. This paper proposes that the CAC can do more. The counselor can be part of a support system to help students “succeed” in (graduate from) college. The CAC is in a unique position of influencing a student before s/he even enters college and possesses the knowledge base to impact the personal/psychological aspects of a student’s life. By capitalizing on that unique opportunity, CACs can help position students for success in college.

This paper will review the literature on the general issue of college student persistence, viewing it from three levels: the policy level, the institutional level and the individual level. The paper will then focus at the individual level – the place where CACs have the greatest opportunity for impact. A new way to approach college admissions counseling will be proposed, viewing the process from a “success” perspective by taking a closer look at college readiness in students: how to assess where an individual is in his or her personal development and how intervention at the time of college search and application can increase the chances of a student succeeding (i.e., graduating from college).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS

Governmental Policy Level

Educational policy made at the state and/or national level has traditionally viewed education in two pieces: K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) and higher education. Historically this point of view was logical because so few students went on to higher

education, and the type of students who did was limited by socioeconomic class, race and often gender. But in the late 1940s and 1950s, the GI Bill opened higher education to a broader population. “Even before the first baby boomers attained college age, postsecondary enrollments doubled in the decade ending in 1950... The system of American postsecondary education had no choice but to expand to accommodate a host of postwar changes” (Aronowitz, 2000). In the last 30 years, with economic shifts in the United States to more of a service and technological workforce, the perceived need for a college education in order to remain competitive in the job market has increased.

The policy level separation between K-12 and higher education has remained constant even through all the changes in numbers and diversity of students as well as the changes these students caused on the nation’s college campuses. There is little crossover in discussions between the two camps, which has resulted in problems for individual students as well as colleges and universities (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Boswell, 2000; Venezia, et al, 2003). “...College stakeholders must be brought to the table when K-12 standards are developed. Likewise, K-12 educators must be engaged as postsecondary education admission and placement policies are under review. Reforms across the two education systems will be difficult if not impossible to implement without meaningful communication and policymaking between the levels” (Venezia, et al, 2003).

A major problem is a lack of continuity between curricula in the high schools and in colleges. “It is assumed that K-12 teachers’ responsibility ends with college admissions, not *college success*, and that higher education’s responsibility begins with the admission process rather than any significant involvement in the preparation of students up to that point” (Boswell, 2000). The skills and knowledge base being taught in the high schools do not always correspond with the skills and knowledge base colleges require to achieve at a higher education level. Most colleges have been forced to provide remedial classes (primarily in writing and math) to bring some students up to par with the required skill level for college work, which is costly for the college as well as for the students.

Institutional Level

In the second half of the 20th century, colleges were forced to respond first to the greater number of students attending college, then to the greater diversity of students who came to campuses across the nation. The first wave, with the GI Bill and then the Baby Boom generation swelling the enrollment numbers, sent colleges scrambling to employ more instructors, to build more housing and to expand services. With the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s – civil rights and the women’s movement – a more diverse student population challenged the traditions and policies on college campuses as they sought more democratic opportunities.

In what could be considered a third wave of change, there has been a cultural shift in attitude toward a belief that everyone should aspire to go to college. This belief may

have risen out of a perception of a more level playing field, and therefore more opportunities, as a greater diversity of students have attended college. It may be in response to a changing economy that clearly shows that more education results in higher potential earning power in the job market. It may be due to the political efforts over the years to increase funding to allow lower-income students to attend college (although in the current economy much governmental funding has been frozen if not cut).

These three major social changes, numbers, diversity and aspirations, have forced changes on college campuses. The expansion of campus buildings and services has resulted in increasing costs to maintain what the colleges have created. An additional cost in the last 25 years or so has been ever-changing computer and Internet technology, which is now crucial to a college education. The diversity issue has been turned into a positive for colleges as they now recognize the educational value of bringing all voices to the table. Colleges began actively recruiting a diverse student population (including geographic diversity) in an effort to enlarge the pool of prospective students as well as to provide greater opportunities for students to interact with people from differing backgrounds. These recruitment efforts have played a part in the increased aspirations of a wider population expressing interest in college, but the aspirations are not always accompanied by a realistic understanding of the requirements and the costs of a college education. Colleges have had to respond to the greater variety of expectations, goals and cultural backgrounds students now bring to campus, as well as differing levels of preparedness for the college's academic and social environment.

Freshman orientation programs held in the summer and during the week before classes start are the most common ways to begin to provide students a structure for finding their way in a new environment. The activities of orientation programs provide intentional opportunities to become familiar with college personnel, other students, the physical campus, and the structure of the academic program. Since research has shown that social integration is an important factor in student retention, efforts are made to set up opportunities for a lot of student-to-student interaction as well as student-to-faculty and student-to-staff interaction.

In the past 15 to 20 years, with a more focused concern on attrition after the freshman year, the idea of the freshman seminar course has become popular. For some schools, these courses take the form of an extended orientation program. For other schools, the course is much more academically rigorous, introducing students right away to the expectations of the college. Most of these courses fall somewhere in between, providing school-specific orientation information while at the same time providing academic substance.

More recently, colleges have explored "living-learning" environments where students with similar academic interests live together on one dorm floor and take some of the required general education classes together, have more personal contact with faculty in their area of interest and work together with a few or even one particular advisor.

While this approach has shown some promise, it is complicated to coordinate all the pieces necessary to bring it together.

Colleges want to retain the students they have admitted and continually research what factors contribute to students dropping out and transferring, with the goal of finding the most effective, proactive ways to intervene before students move on. A recent report surveyed colleges about the costs of recruiting first-year students (Hawkins, 2004). It was found that 45% of the colleges surveyed spent \$100 to \$1,000 per student and 48% of the colleges spent over \$1,000 per student. Overall, private colleges tended to spend more than public universities. Two national centers have been created – the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience (www.sc.edu/fye/) and the Policy Center on the First Year of College (www.brevard.edu/fyc/) – to research ways to engage and assist particularly vulnerable freshman college students.

Why students leave college

Although the reasons for “student departure” have been studied for more than 70 years (Braxton, 2002), “student retention” as an administrative specialty and a topic of inquiry has been a focus on most campuses for only the past 15 to 20 years. Most of the research on student success has come from the viewpoint of colleges as they seek to understand the best ways to engage a much more diverse group of students, help them adjust academically and socially and help them find “a home” on their campuses.

The issue has been researched from many perspectives. It is generally believed that there is a complex “puzzle” of reasons leading to why some students stay in college and why some students leave. (John Braxton’s 2002 book is appropriately titled *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle*.)

Vincent Tinto is the most frequently quoted researcher on the topic of student attrition and retention (1975, 1987). “Tinto states that students enter college with various individual characteristics that play roles in the college student departure process. These student entry characteristics include family background factors, individual attributes, and precollege schooling experiences....Such student entry characteristics directly influence the student’s initial commitment to an institution and to the goal of college graduation” (Braxton, 2002).

“Tinto developed an explanatory, predictive model, which is longitudinal and regards persistence as a function of the quality of a student’s interactions with the college environment.... The two primary factors related to a student’s persistence are the personal characteristics of the student, which include commitment to the institution and educational goals, and the nature of the student’s interaction with the college” (Witte, et al.).

Braxton (2002) stated that “Research testing Tinto’s...theory has yielded robust empirical support for four logically interconnected propositions”:

1. Students enter college with various characteristics – such as family background, individual attributes and precollege schooling experiences – that affect their initial levels of commitment to the institutions in which they are enrolled.
2. Initial levels of commitment also affect levels of subsequent commitment to their institutions that form as a consequence of attendance.
3. Subsequent institutional commitment is also positively influenced by the degree of integration into the social communities of the college or university.
4. The greater the degree of subsequent institutional commitment, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.

In another study, Johnson and Richardson (1986) defined five variables they found to have a direct or indirect effect on persistence: Practical value, Academic integration, Academic satisfaction, Academic performance and Intent. Townsend, McNerny and Arnold (1993), in their research concerning transfer and degree completion, found three areas of explanation for success, or lack thereof: Student-centered explanations (academic and personal characteristics), Institutional-centered explanations (academic cultural practices and cooperation) and Societal analyses (economic and political factors).

Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) described three basic areas influencing college attrition: Academic adjustment, Social adjustment and Personal or Emotional adjustment. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), published by Western Psychological Services and used by many colleges for intervention with at-risk students as well for research purposes, includes four subscales that include Gerdes and Mallinckrodt’s three areas of adjustment along with Psychological Attachment as the fourth factor.

Newman & Newman’s (1999) study of the Young Scholars Program in Ohio provides the most detailed description of factors. The Young Scholars Program was designed to “expand the pool of African-American and other underrepresented minority youth who aspire to attend college, and to help them meet entrance requirements and successfully obtain a college degree.” Their perception of student retention describes an interaction between three classes of factors:

Factors related to personal development:

- Level of identity resolution
- Academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy
- Feelings of alienation or social isolation
- Degree of homesickness
- Ability to balance various demands (time management)

- Ability to seek out and obtain social and academic support

Factors that precede college enrollment:

- The intention to attend college
- Parents' educational background
- Family's educational values and goals
- Attendance at a college-oriented high school
- High school coursework and grades
- Clarity of career goals

Factors related to the college or university:

- Acceptance to a degree-granting program
- Availability of financial aid / financial support
- Housing and roommate arrangements
- Academic climate
- Student orientation of the faculty
- Availability of required courses
- Availability of tutoring
- Access to a mentor and/or academic advisor

In Braxton (2002), Bean and Eaton propose “A Psychological Model of College Student Retention” that can be summarized as follows: “Students enter college with a complex array of personal characteristics. As they interact within the institutional environment several psychological processes take place that, for the successful student, result in positive self-efficacy, reduced stress, increased efficacy and internal locus of control. Each of these processes increases a student’s scholarly motivation. These internal processes are reciprocal and iterative with continuous feedback and adjustment.... These processes in turn lead to academic and social integration, institutional fit and loyalty, intent to persist, and to the behavior in question, persistence itself.”

Individual Level

From the students' perspective, the current culture encourages most, if not all students to try to go to college. Savvy students are expanding their college searches – many applying to a much larger number of schools than students did in previous generations. Less knowledgeable students are sending off applications to colleges they have “heard of” or have visited with friends, with little understanding of how to select an appropriate college with a well-thought-out plan.

The raised expectations of college for *all* students – expectations coming from parents, teachers, counselors, peers and even from the students themselves – along with increased competitiveness for “name brand” colleges (which has come largely from

popular culture – the *Felicity* TV show at NYU, for example – or popular sports teams) have made college admissions a “game” to some people (consider Bernard Silger’s book *The College Admissions Game* or Richard Moll’s *Playing the Selective College Admissions Game*). To others, admission has become an end in itself (Katherine Cohen’s book *The Truth About Getting In* and *The Guide to Getting In: Winning the College Admissions Game without Losing Your Mind* by Danielle Charbonneau, et al).

This frenzy of high expectations, increased competitiveness and limited knowledge of what college is all about adds to many students’ difficulties when they arrive on campus. With so much focus on “getting in,” there’s often a letdown once the students arrive on campus. Along with the normal adjustments to a new place and being on their own for the first time in their lives, many students struggle with underlying questions of: “What am I doing here?” “How did I end up *here* (on this campus)?” and “Now what?”

The credentials an individual student supplies on an application are the factors the colleges take into consideration when accepting a student for admission. Those credentials usually include high school GPA, class rank, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities and special skills a student can bring to campus. Individual colleges will establish other criteria by which they will judge students as well. (A detailed accounting of admission factors can be found in *Admissions Decision-Making Models* published by The College Board, 2003). Once a student is accepted, it is assumed by everyone, including the student and his/her parents, that the student has every chance of eventually graduating. But as the statistics tell us and as colleges know very well by their retention efforts, graduation by every admitted student does not happen.

Research in the area of student retention has taught us that the reasons that students leave are often complex and individualized. There are students who are academically dismissed and there are students who cannot pay the bills. But most cases are not that clear cut. There are underlying factors that contribute to the decision to leave college or to stay. In our role as the psychological presence in the education of young people, counselors can evaluate a student’s potential from a personal growth perspective and intervene, if possible, to increase the chances of the student going on to succeed in college.

While there are many factors related to student success that are beyond the control of the CAC – for example, the student’s academic standing or the culture of the college – there are areas in which CACs can intervene proactively. Virtually all of the studies identify a personal/psychological factor that is crucial to student persistence. That factor is the entrée point for CACs to provide opportunities for student insight and growth.

Pritchard and Wilson’s (2003) review of the literature on student success research found “...that emotional variables exerted a strong influence on how well students adjusted to their first year of college, which is a strong predictor of academic success” and other studies “...have suggested that the major causes of attrition in first-year college

students are emotional rather than academic factors.” Pritchard and Wilson’s research “found that both emotional and social health factors related to student performance and retention” but also noted that “Results from this study indicate that there is no single factor or set of factors (e.g., demographic, academic, social, emotional) that predict individual student success or retention. Rather, it appears that there are a multitude of factors that influence the way students adjust to college. Given the number of social and emotional factors relating to GPA and retention, institutions might benefit by addressing some of these problems with the student populations.”

CACs are in a unique position of interacting with students prior to entering college, often a time of turmoil for the students as they explore and choose their post-secondary paths. Counselors should seize this opportunity to impact students in a more profound way than simply supplying information that students can find for themselves on the Internet or at a college fair. Counselors can focus on the personal growth and the general psychosocial college-readiness of students in order to help them increase their chances of being successful at whatever campus they choose to attend.

A “SUCCESS” COLLEGE ADMISSIONS COUNSELING APPROACH

The college search and selection process is a prime opportunity for personal reflection, exploration and decision-making. If given the opportunity to work with a student over an extended period of time, the CAC can assess how far the student is in his/her psychosocial development, “meet the student where he/she is” (a basic tenet of good counseling principles) and facilitate personal growth where needed, while finding an appropriate college “fit.”

It is difficult for a high school student, in any meaningful way, to identify attributes of the college they may be seeking when they cannot articulate their own strengths and weaknesses. Put simply, they can’t state what they *want* if they don’t know who they *are*. When forced to make choices they are unprepared for, students often start down a path that ends in disaster, or at a minimum, confusion, discouragement and lowered self-confidence. The noteworthy rate of transfers and dropouts after the college freshman year may have its roots in the number of students who make choices in this ill-prepared and ill-conceived manner.

In order to offset sometimes poor decision-making, the success model of college admissions counseling suggests that a conversation with a student should begin *not* with “Let’s talk about colleges,” but rather “Let’s talk about you.” It suggests that the counselor initiate a very purposeful step back before moving forward with the student.

With time at a premium for most busy high school juniors and seniors, it is an advantage to be able to gather valid and useful information quickly. The success model includes three brief assessments, a short background and credentials questionnaire and some open-ended counseling questions. The facts gathered and the factors assessed in

this model are those that have been shown in student retention research to contribute to college success. This package of information serves five main purposes, allowing the counselor to:

1. Quickly gain an understanding of the student
2. Identify optimum learning environments for the student
3. Increase the student's self-awareness and self-esteem
4. Increase the student's realistic self-appraisal
5. Educate the student on skills necessary for college success

Based on the unique characteristics of the student that can be discovered with the success model, the counselor can strategically work with those factors to help a student develop and mature as s/he goes through the critical thinking, decision-making and paperwork of applying to colleges.

Choice of Assessments

The three assessments used in this study were chosen because they supply a large amount of information in the briefest amount of time. College admissions counseling usually does not allow for the luxury of open-ended time; therefore, it is important to consider the most productive use of limited time. The three assessments are the Locus of Control, the Big 5 Personality Factors and the Identity Style Inventory.

The Locus of Control (LOC) assessment is very useful with late adolescents because of their developmental struggle with dependence and independence. Locus of Control measures how much a person sees his life choices and circumstances as under his control and how much of life for him is a matter of fate or luck or the control of other people. It is important for a counselor to understand how a student perceives the world around him and how he processes experiences. Additionally, studies have shown an *internal* locus of control to be an important feature of "psychological hardiness," along with commitment and challenge. Psychologically hardy people were shown to be "more resistant to stress because they see themselves as *choosing* their stress-producing situations" (Rathus and Nevid, 1995). This, of course, would be an advantage when adjusting to the college environment.

"The Big 5 (Personality Factors) represents a taxonomy (classification system) of traits that some personality psychologists suggest capture the essence of individual differences in personality. These traits were arrived at through factor analysis studies...(which) find relationships or natural connections where variables are maximally correlated with one another" (McCrae and Costa, 2002). The information derived from this assessment gives the counselor a basis from which to understand the student and to assist the student with areas that might be problematic in college. For example, a successful college student usually will have a higher level of Conscientiousness (organized, dependable, disciplined) and strong Adjustment capabilities (secure,

unflappable, rational). If there are some notable deficits in some of these areas, they can be addressed directly or explored further through a much more detailed assessment, like the 16PF Adolescent Personality Questionnaire (APQ) by Raymond Cattell. The APQ has five “Global Factors,” similar to the Big 5, but also provides a breakdown into 16 more specific Primary Factors.

Kroger (1989) wrote about the importance of Identity “...to understand how adolescents navigate through life, more or less successfully, developing a sense of who they are and how they can best find personal satisfaction in the adult worlds of love and work.” Erik Erikson first proposed the idea of Identity as one of the eight developmental stages of personality development throughout the lifespan (identity versus role confusion). He believed that “It is during this stage of development that a search for career, values and beliefs is initiated. Who am I? Where am I going? and What will I become? are questions that typify this experience” (White, et al, 1998). Identity development peaks in the adolescent to early adulthood years and is therefore quite an important feature of understanding how a student will traverse the complexities of the high school to college transition and beyond.

Erikson, when he first theorized the developmental stages, saw them as more static, i.e., that identity is “achieved.” But subsequent theorists have conceptualized things a little differently. James Marcia provided a useful description of Identity (in Adelson, Joseph, ed., 1980). “Identity has been called a ‘sense,’ an ‘attitude,’ a ‘resolution,’ and so on. I would like to propose another way of construing identity: as a self-structure – an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history. The better developed this structure is, the more aware individuals appear to be of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world. The less developed this structure is, the more confused individuals seem about their own distinctiveness from others and *the more they have to rely on external sources to evaluate themselves. The identity structure is dynamic, not static. Elements are continually being added and discarded.*” (Emphasis was added on the last few lines to convey the connection between Identity and Locus of Control as well as the potential to impact an evolving student’s sense of himself in relation to the world.)

The Identity Style Inventory used in this study is based on the work of Michael Berzonsky (1992) who was concerned more with how late adolescents differed “...in the social-cognitive *processes* they use to form and maintain a sense of self-identity.” Berzonsky identified three “processing orientations:” informational, normative and diffuse/avoidant.

The *information orientation* describes people who “actively seek out, elaborate and utilize self-relevant information when making identity-relevant decisions and solving personal problems. When these efforts produce dissonant feedback, information-oriented individuals will need to revise and accommodate relevant self-constructions.”

The *normative orientation* applies to people whose “major concern is conforming to the prescriptions and expectations of significant others (e.g., parents) and reference groups. This orientation is expected to heighten efforts to conserve existing self-constructions. Normative individuals will defend against and distort information and experiences that may invalidate internalized prescriptions.”

People with a *diffuse/avoidant orientation* “characteristically avoid dealing directly with personal problems and basic identity questions. This orientation includes efforts to procrastinate and delay as long as possible. Eventually behavioral reactions will be determined by hedonic cues and situational consequences. A fragmented, loosely integrated self-identity structure” is associated with this orientation.

Scoring sheets for each of the assessments are then shared with the student. The counselor will explain what is being assessed, what the possible outcomes are and how the student scored. It should be done in such a way as to invite discussion: Does this score make sense to you? Why do you think you scored that way? How do you think that characteristic impacts on how you handle decisions or stress or other people? Copies of the Scoring sheets for each of the case studies can be found in Appendix A.

Questionnaire and Interview

The items included on the questionnaire and in the interview are derived from the retention factors discussed by Newman and Newman (1999). Since the CAC has no direct connection to the “Factors related to the college or university,” the questions were based on the other two areas: “Factors that precede college enrollment” and “Factors related to personal development.” Although for this paper the focus is on personal development, it is important to keep in mind that it is only one piece of the puzzle that will help us understand how likely a student is to succeed in college. The questionnaire covers some of the other relevant factors such as family background, parental expectations and support as well as academic credentials. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

The open-ended interview questions include the following:

1. Why are you going to college?
2. Do you have any specific career goals at this time? If so, what are the steps you need to take to achieve those goals?
3. Have you ever spent an extended period of time (more than an overnight) away from home and your parents?
4. How would you describe a typical day at college (in terms of how your time would be spent)?

The reasoning behind question #1 was to ascertain a student's intention in attending college – is the student self-motivated, is s/he carrying out someone else's plan. Commitment to a college plan and self-motivation is crucial to success. Question #2 also focuses on commitment and motivation in terms of career, how college relates to that career and possible future plans. Asking for "steps" to achieve those goals delineates the dreaming from reality. Questions 3 and 4 highlight some of the "Factors related to personal development" such as degree of homesickness, feelings of alienation or social isolation and ability to balance various demands (time management).

Case study process

Five students volunteered to participate in this study using the success model. The whole process – the assessments, questionnaire and the interview – took less than an hour in most cases. If the student wanted to supply more detail or expand the conversation, it took longer.

A "Summary Sheet" was developed to combine all the information from 10 pages onto only one, allowing for ease in relating factors and drawing conclusions. Summary Sheets for each of the five participants are included in Appendix C. Some descriptive factors and explanations were included on the summary sheets for this study that might not be included in a real counseling situation.

Several abbreviations have been used, most of which are self-explanatory. There are a couple worth noting for clarification. In the "Family and personal background" box, after Dad and Mom, the "Exp" refers to Dad's and Mom's *expectations* for the student's education level, as taken from the information on the questionnaire. In the "Expectations and goals" box, the student's "Current goals" (also taken from the questionnaire) are indicated by the words "short" or "long" or a combination of the two. Since college and career plans are discussed elsewhere, the point of this question is to get a more generalized view of how the student is thinking – Short-term? Long-term? No goals at all? One would hope for a combination of short- and long-term goals that are easily articulated.

A brief explanation of what the assessment scores mean can be found on the scoring sheets in Appendix A. The Locus of Control scores range from 0 to 40, with 0-8 considered in the "Internal" range, 9-16 in the "Average" range and 17-40 in the "External" range. The Identity scores range from 1 to 5 for each factor. The higher the score, the stronger the respondent fit that factor's descriptors. For the Big 5 Personality Factors, a score was computed and recorded on the scoring sheet but for the Summary Sheet, I translated the scores into descriptive terms that are easier to quickly grasp.

Discussion of case studies

In this discussion, two of the cases will be described in some detail, starting with a successful college graduate and then describing a high school graduate with an uncertain future. For the remaining three cases, brief descriptions and discussions of the assessment results are provided and can be supplemented by the Summary Sheets in Appendix C. The Summary Sheets include demographic information, the results of the assessments, questionnaire and interview as well as a “success” analysis.

A 2004 college graduate

Brian’s profile provides an interesting perspective since he has just graduated from college after the traditional four years. Brian is the older of two boys (the younger will be entering college in the fall), who grew up in a middle-class suburb of Chicago. Neither of his parents is a college graduate, although his mother has taken some college coursework. He reports that both of his parents wanted him to go to college and assisted in the process. His parents got divorced during his transition time from high school to college. His father has remarried and Brian remains close to both of his parents.

His religious faith played a strong role in his choice of colleges, a faith that he found and developed on his own during high school (it was not part of his family upbringing). He was involved in mission work with his church in the United States and in Costa Rica – which continued during college as well – and has career plans that are closely tied to religion.

Unfortunately, we do not have assessment results from when he was just beginning college, which would be interesting to compare with the results we have now at the end of his college career. Nevertheless, his scores on all three assessments are where one would hope to see them at this point in his life. He has a very strong Commitment score in the Identity factors, which are closely divided between Informational and Normative. That split indicates to me the conservativeness of his religious faith (Normative) and his taking full advantage of the learning opportunities at college (Informational). His ability to adapt to the college environment and succeed may be indicated by personality factors showing strong Adjustment, very high Conscientiousness, very high Openness (an indicator, along with his interview comments, that he took full advantage of the opportunities at college) and high Sociability (which if not in the very high range – indicating a tendency to value a social life over other responsibilities – is an indication of the ability and the skills to reach out to others when help is needed).

Brian’s Locus of Control score is in the Internal range, which is a positive, but it also is a bit extreme. A person at this end of the Locus of Control continuum believes that they have much control over their lives based on their skills and initiative. But

events in life do not always turn out as we plan or hope for a variety of reasons, so there are ups and downs. A person who views his control ability at the extreme end of the continuum may be very hard on himself if things do not go according to plan. Taking responsibility is a good characteristic, but “beating oneself up” internally for a perceived mistake can have negative psychological and general health consequences. I will be focusing on this point when I go over the results of these assessments with Brian.

In summary, a quick look at the credentials Brian brings to the table in the form of family background – no college experience and little financial backing – and academics – average test score and GPA – one might question whether he would succeed in college. Yet he did succeed and based on his responses in the interview, he thrived. He took advantage of the whole college experience, inside and outside of the classroom. What made the difference for Brian were his personal attributes as well as his commitment to defined goals and to success.

A 2004 high school graduate

Andy is the oldest of three boys living with both biological parents. The suburban Chicago town the family lives in is solidly middle class with a population of 24,000. The high school is a “comprehensive” school from which 89% of the senior class went on to college in the most recent year of available statistics (63% of which went on to 4-year colleges). The mean ACT composite score for the school was 22.1.

Although Andy’s GPA was 3.125, he completed a couple of honors and AP courses and scored a 26 on the ACT. He clearly has the academic credentials to do well at many colleges. For years he has pursued his interest in photography in a variety of ways, including an internship on a local newspaper as well as work on the school paper. His parents, both college graduates themselves, want him to go to college and he “expects” to earn a BA with the knowledge that his career goals require a degree.

Evaluating Andy’s situation based on these factors – all of which are positively correlated with college success (college prep curriculum, good test score, parents are college grads and encourage his college pursuit, identified career interest and experience) – one would guess he is ready for college and capable of succeeding.

But, looking closer at his situation, most specifically his personal development factors and his specific college plans – plans that he had in place at the time of his high school graduation (he completed this assessment a week before graduation), there is much to be concerned about. If he gets to college, what are the odds of him ever graduating?

His Locus of Control score is solidly in the External range, which says that he sees life generally more as a game of chance than as one where his skills make a difference. It shows to some extent a feeling of helplessness in controlling his life, which

can result in problems with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and poor physical health. His Identity style is poorly defined and may indicate differing ways of handling situations based on the circumstances and the people involved (e.g., he is impotent when dealing with his parents). His Commitment to an Identity style is right in the middle, as are each of his scores in the three different styles. This indicates a boy who is floundering, trying to find his way. Andy's Big 5 scores show weak Adjustment and very low Conscientiousness, both of which should be much higher for a greater chance of successfully adapting to the college environment.

His very high Openness score, along with the highest Identity style score being Informational and his ACT score, all taken together, indicates strong potential for college success. The Openness and Informational score also may indicate some receptiveness to counseling intervention.

In the same way that his background factors seem to add up to success potential, his personal development and college plan factors add up to indicate potential problems. Andy does not have a thought-out plan and does not appear to have the developmental maturity to formulate one on his own. He needs the opportunity to build his confidence in himself and in his decision-making abilities. He needs to find the motivation and commitment within himself by formulating specific goals. And he needs to iron out some specific issues with his parents in order for all of them to be on the same page. Right now, his parents' expectations for him and their support for his success are not correlating (as can be seen on his Summary Sheet by the times they have told him one thing but have not followed through with any financial support). Yet Andy does not possess the confidence and maturity to face them directly and work out a solution.

If I had Andy in a counseling relationship, I would want to work jointly with him and his parents first, then proceed with Andy alone. In the process of working together to create a plan for his future, I would focus on Identity development, decision-making skills and creating success opportunities to build his confidence. I believe Andy has the ability to grasp the assessment information if I presented it to him directly. In fact, I would venture to guess that he would relish the opportunity to talk freely about his own ideas, dreams and concerns away from the complicating factor of his family relationships. He has the ability to formulate some goals. He just needs the opportunity and nonjudgmental guidance.

Dave

A 2004 graduate of a suburban high school, Dave is the younger of two children whose parents have strongly encouraged his college attendance. His older sister is a very good student currently in college. Dave has played ice hockey, lacrosse and other sports most of his life and stays quite physically fit. His self-esteem is built largely on his physical fitness even though his sports career has not always been smooth or successful. He definitely wants to continue to play sports in college, a fact that guided his early

search for a college (“At what schools can I play hockey?”). His other motivation for college appears to be a desire to succeed in the business world beyond his father.

My biggest concern with Dave is the combination of a near-external Locus of Control (16 is the cut-off point of “average” and Dave’s score was a 16) and high Agreeableness on the personality factors (meaning that he is trusting, altruistic, a team player, conflict-averse). He is easily led in one direction or another by anyone who can convince him that they have credibility (whether in objective terms they do or not). He seems so eager to get out from under his parents’ dominant ways that he clings to anyone else who has a strong opinion.

The Identity styles he uses – Informational and Normative – are vehicles for seeking out other opinions to validate himself. He does not seem to have a strong internally-based sense of self. His identity comes from others and in reaction to his life experiences (i.e., he wants to do better professionally and financially than his father).

Unless he can focus on some serious personal growth and development in the coming months and years (counseling would be an asset), he will struggle in college. Living away from his parents, he will have a lot of Identity and Control issues to work out. In addition to that, the highest ACT he achieved was a 20, he took no honors or AP classes in high school and his Conscientiousness score in the Big 5 was low – all of which indicates that the actual coursework in college may be quite a challenge.

Dave may have to run into some difficulty before he would be open to psychological counseling. He does not have good self-awareness so it would be hard for him to appreciate what some of these assessment results are saying. It would be important in working with him to constantly keep a focus on separating what Dave truly feels and believes from what he is picking up from other people, without negating the importance of those people in his life, which he would find offensive.

I did work with Dave and his parents during his applications to college. There was as much work to be done with his parents as with him. I coached them on how to let go by giving him more opportunities to take responsibility and to not judge but let him evaluate situations on his own terms. They responded well.

During much of the time I worked with Dave, his mentor and the outside person whose opinions mattered most to him was a hockey coach. The coach was not giving him realistic information about his potential athletic and academic future. Having information about Dave’s personality, I did not confront the problems directly with what this coach was saying, which would offend Dave and turn him off to anything I said. Instead, I appealed to Dave’s own budding critical thinking skills by asking him about the context in which he was being told things, showing him ways to independently gather and confirm or dispute information and providing background information about the coach in order to better understand his motivations. Dave came around to realizing that

the coach was not working in his best interest, and on his own began distancing himself from the coach. Hopefully, it was a lesson learned.

Suzette

There are a lot of things that concern me about Suzette's potential for success. I was unable to get the facts of her academic background, which, in a counseling situation, would have to be one of the first things I would do. She went through six years in a military style boarding school in Africa, then came to this country just 2 ½ years ago. She was enrolled in a quite large community college less than six months after arriving. She has had to adjust to a lot of socio-cultural changes in the last several years. My impression is that her family is very tight-knit and she has much respect for her parents' ideas and aspirations for her. This may be a result of her Nigerian culture.

She's planning on transferring to Howard U or Arizona State U, both being a long distance from her current home in suburban Chicago. Considering the close ties to her family, it may be more realistic for her to transfer to a university closer to home. The fact that she scored low on Sociability (meaning that she's private, independent, reserved and hard to read) and low on Agreeableness (meaning she's skeptical, questioning, tough and aggressive), says to me that she may not seek out help or friendship from others on campus, which is another factor making her out-of-state college plans a concern. When asked about her career goals, she stated "lawyer, politician and interior designer," an interesting combination.

On the other hand, she believes strongly in higher education and has definite support in that regard from her family. She may succeed in college, more likely if she attends closer to home and develops more modest career goals.

If I were to work with her on her transfer plans, I would want to explore two main issues first: her academic credentials and her relationship with her family.

Sparkle

Sparkle is the oldest of five children from an intact, suburban family. She agreed to participate in the study through a contact with her father, but made no effort to contact me or make it easy for us to meet – when I told her I did not know the community college campus well (where we were supposed to meet), she made no effort to help me out and kept the location and time of our meeting rather vague. I was curious about her, so I made the effort (jumped through the hoops she set up for me?) and we sat down for a meeting. Once we got together, she was pleasant, forthcoming and cooperative. At the end, when I asked her if she wanted me to get back to her with the assessment results, she said, "I think I know myself pretty well."

Sparkle is not someone I would expect to see in my office. She is a very independent-minded person who is academically very capable. With a high school GPA of 3.7 and an ACT score of 28, she has not yet been in a challenging academic environment. With her second transfer this fall to a state university (which accepts an average ACT of 20-25), she may find more challenges in upper-level courses but should be able to handle them.

Sparkle has a strong Internal Locus of Control and strong Informational style of Identity. Both of these scores favorably correlate with college success. Most of her Big 5 Personality Factors show strengths that will serve her well in a college environment particularly an extremely strong Adjustment score, which indicates secure, unflappable and rational characteristics when dealing with stressful situations. Her only surprising score, considering her academic success so far, is low Conscientiousness. In the interview, she did say that she tends to procrastinate, and I believe that trait along with the fact that she has not yet been challenged in her classes may account for a somewhat casual approach to college, and to life, that may have shown up in the Conscientiousness score.

Sparkle has specific goals and enjoys learning for its own sake, so barring any financial problems or unusual life events, I am certain she will graduate. I believe her time at a community college was a stopgap in order to keep going to school while she switched her goal from a competitive professional photography career (pursued at a school devoted to the arts) to art education (at a state university strongly suited to teaching careers).

CONCLUSIONS

In our role as counselors, we cannot change students' grades nor can we give them the money they will need to pay for college. But we do have a valuable role in helping students be better prepared for college and be more likely to succeed in college. A lot of the emphasis is placed on academic readiness for college, but motivation, social-cognitive processing skills, developmental maturity and the student's level of confidence are crucial underlying factors for success. These are areas in which we can have an impact.

LIMITATIONS

Unfortunately, this study was not longitudinal in design. It would be useful to begin a study like this with students who are beginning their college search in their junior or early senior years of high school, assessing them then. A second assessment could be taken at the end of the freshman year in college, and then the students could be tracked to see whether they transferred, dropped out or ultimately graduated. The goal would be to try to identify which factors are most important in student success.

Self-report assessments also have some drawbacks because they are not a completely objective measure. But in a counseling situation, it is useful to get baseline information of how a student perceives him- or herself. Then, with an ongoing relationship, opportunities will arise to validate or debunk the information initially given.

Time and access are always factors, and an ongoing relationship is not always possible in the college admissions process. Public school counselors particularly may have less time to work with individual students. This model may be more appropriate for independent counselors who have more time to work with an individual and can take advantage of access to the student to facilitate personal growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

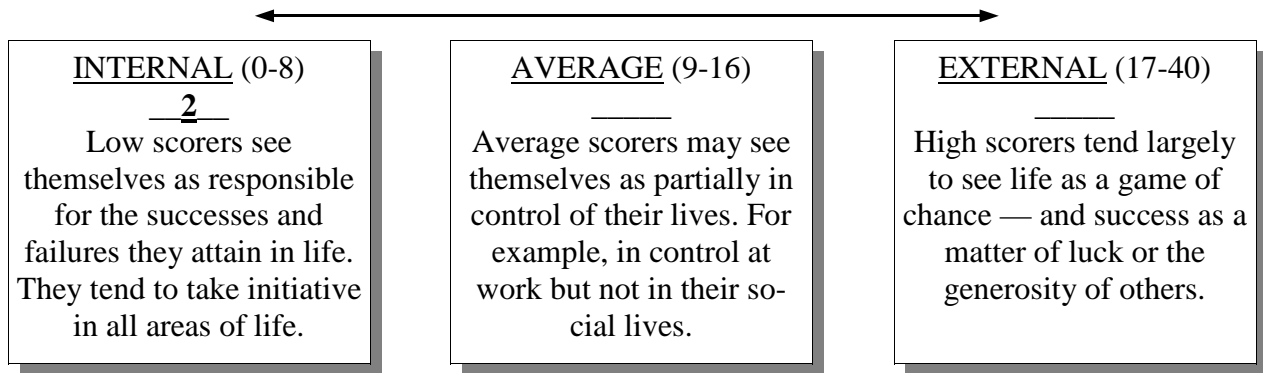
Regardless of the amount of time a counselor has with a student, it is necessary to consider college success and not just college acceptance as a goal. This paper has attempted to provide an alternative perspective on college admissions counseling that more pointedly addresses the psychological factors that contribute to success. An awareness of the many factors that the studies cited in this paper have found that contribute to college students' success can help a counselor work with the factors in mind, instead of just focusing on the factors that will get students accepted to a college.

Every student who seeks college admissions counseling needs validation and clarification of who s/he is as an individual in order to best engage in the college search and application process. It does not do a student justice to assume high self-knowledge and self-confidence. With the pressures of adolescence and the importance of "belonging" during the high school years, most students are more focused on social relationships than on introspection. Self-knowledge and personal development can help a student write a better application in the short term and can contribute to success in college and beyond in the long term.

APPENDICES

Name: **Brian**

Locus of Control

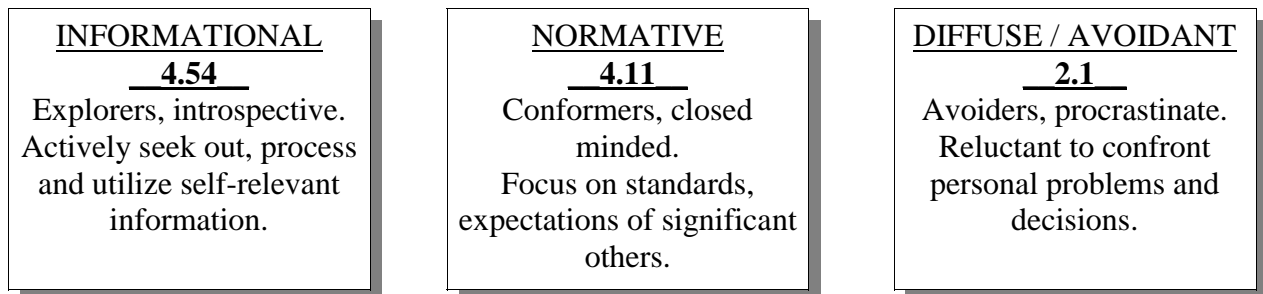


INTERNAL (0-8) — Scores from 0 to 8 represent the range for about one third of the people taking the test. As a low scorer, you probably see life as a game of skill rather than chance. You most likely believe that you have a lot of control over what happens to you, both good and bad. With that view, internal locus of control people tend to take the initiative in everything from job-related activities to relationships.

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Identity



COMMITMENT 4.9

INFORMATIONAL — This style tends to use problem-focused coping strategies. They seek out, evaluate and then utilize problem-relevant information and alternatives when confronting and dealing with stressors.

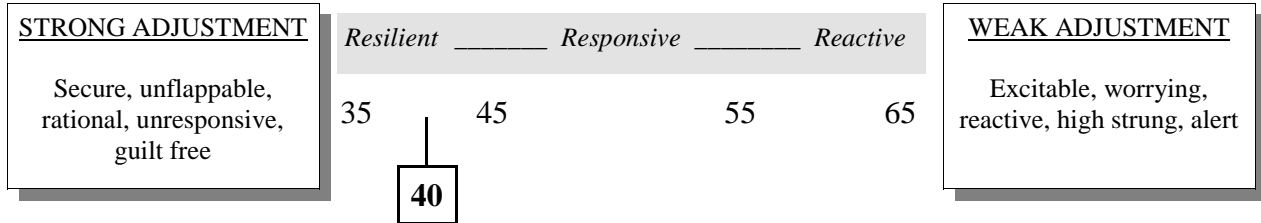
NORMATIVE — This style tends to turn to authorities and significant others for advice and direction when encountering self-relevant stressors. The main concern is the source of information being provided, not its quality.

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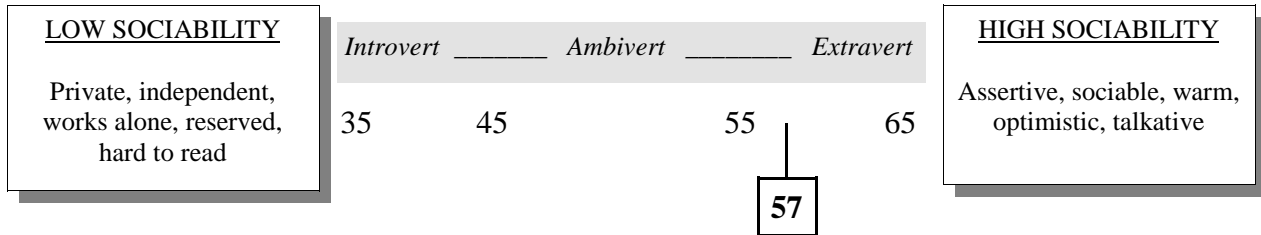
Name: **Brian**

Big 5 Personality Factors

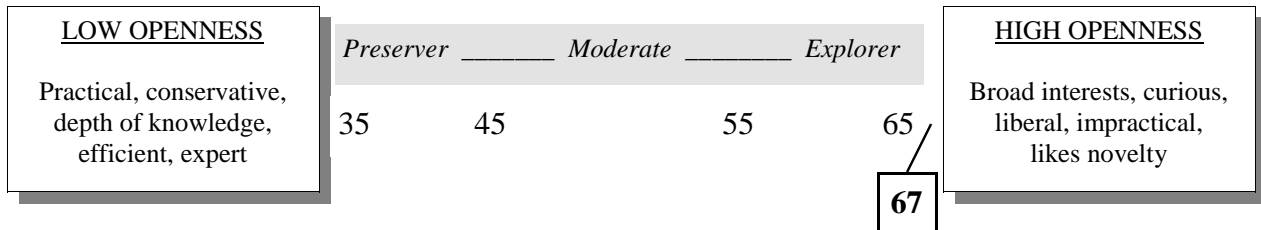
ADJUSTMENT — Measures the different ways people have of reacting emotionally to pressure and stressful circumstances.



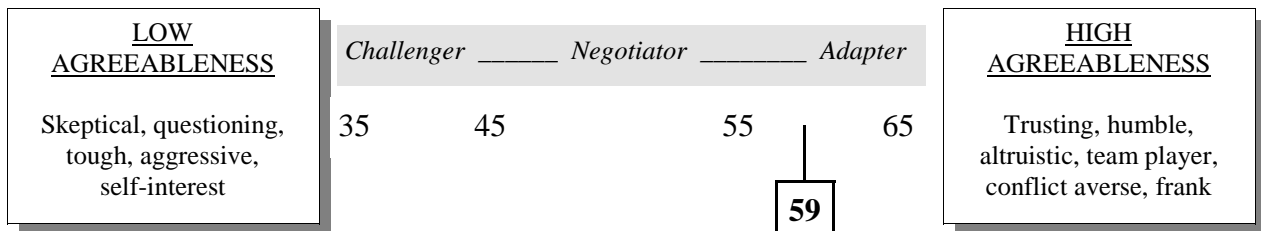
SOCIABILITY— Describes how energetic and enthusiastic a person is — especially when dealing with people.



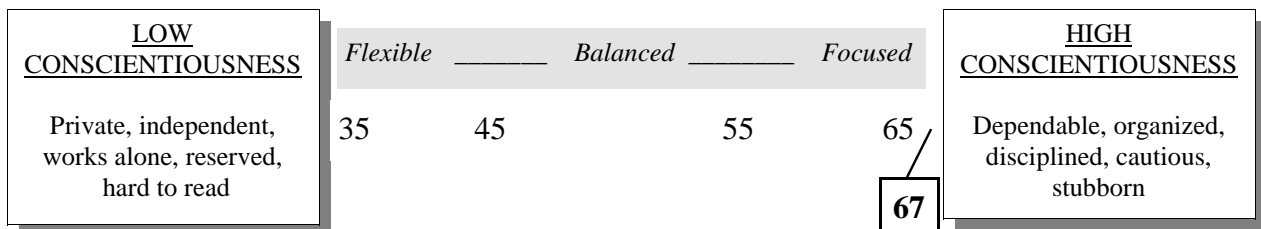
OPENNESS — Describes an individual’s pro-active seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake.



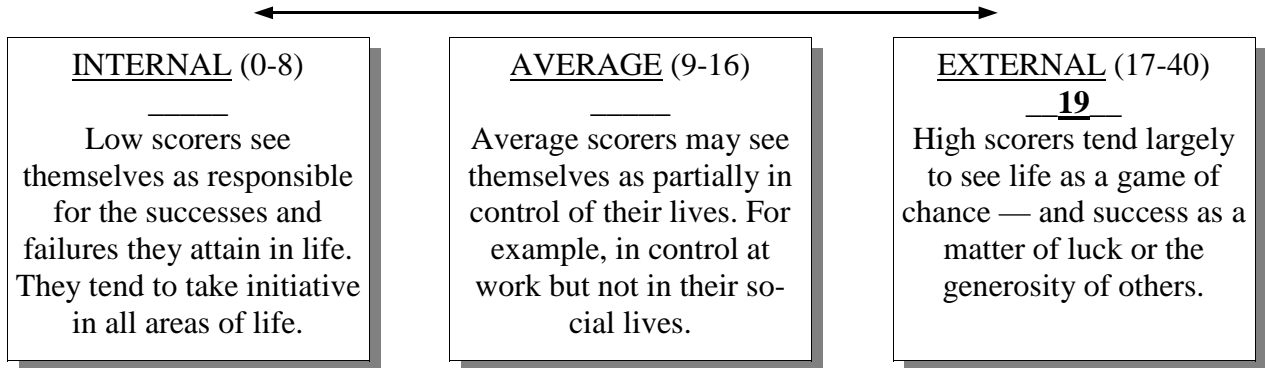
AGREEABLENESS — Describes a person’s attitudes towards other people.



CONSCIENTIOUSNESS — Describes how organized, motivated and thorough an individual is in life and in pursuing goals.



Locus of Control

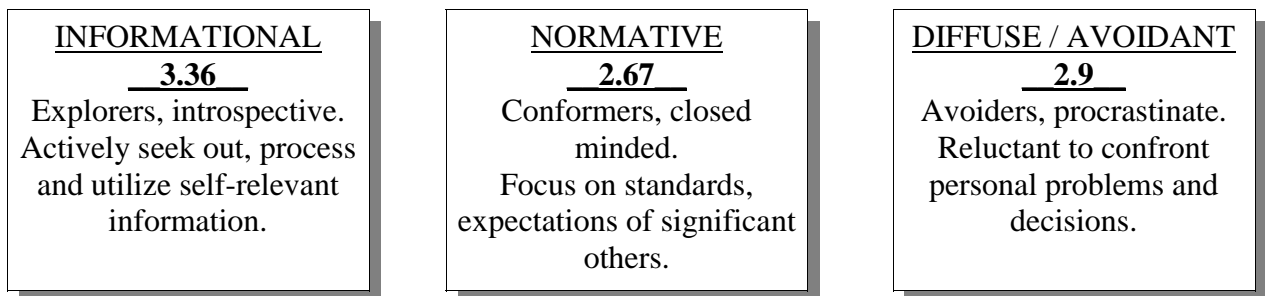


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Identity



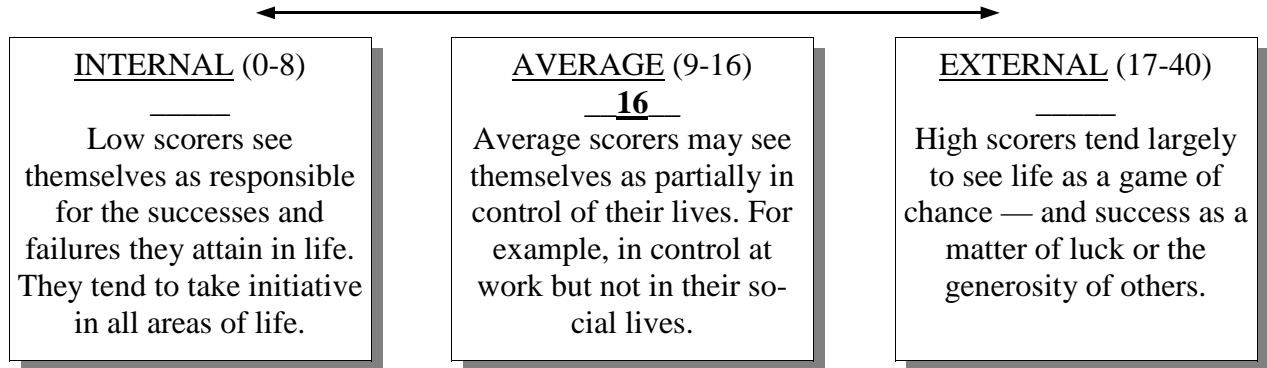
COMMITMENT 3.4

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Locus of Control

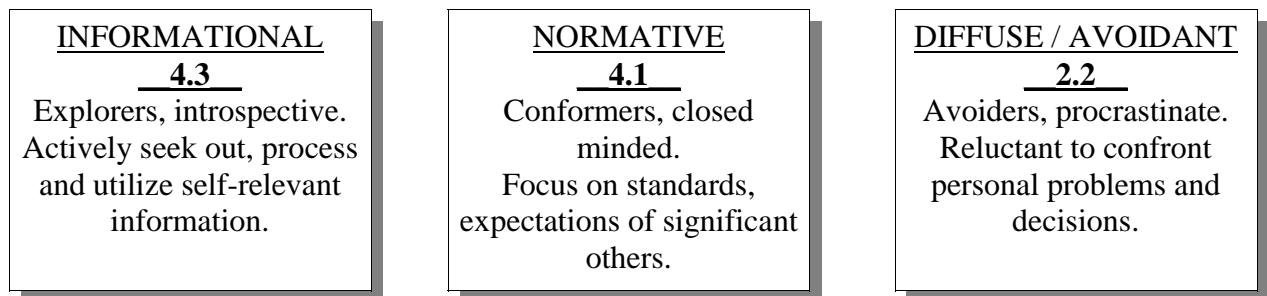


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Identity



COMMITMENT — **4.6** —

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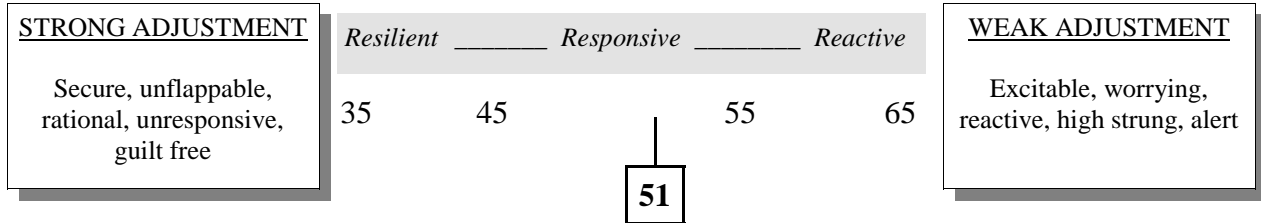
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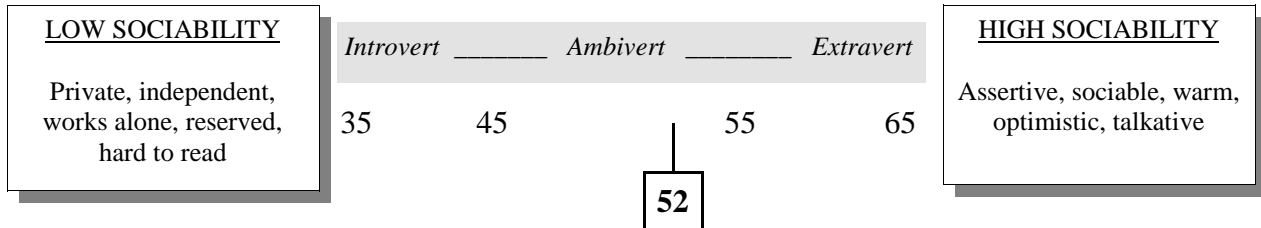
Name: Dave

Big 5 Personality Factors

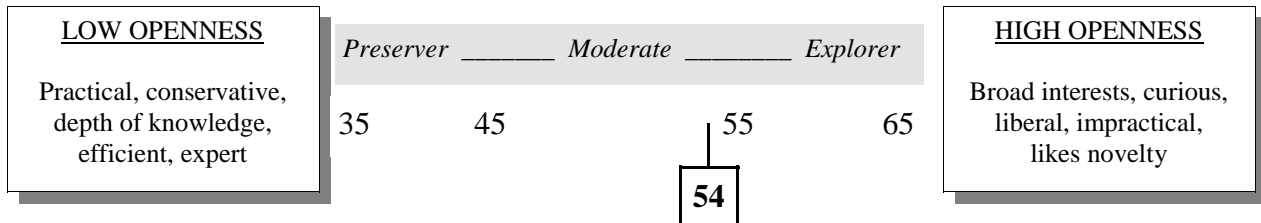
ADJUSTMENT — Measures the different ways people have of reacting emotionally to pressure and stressful circumstances.



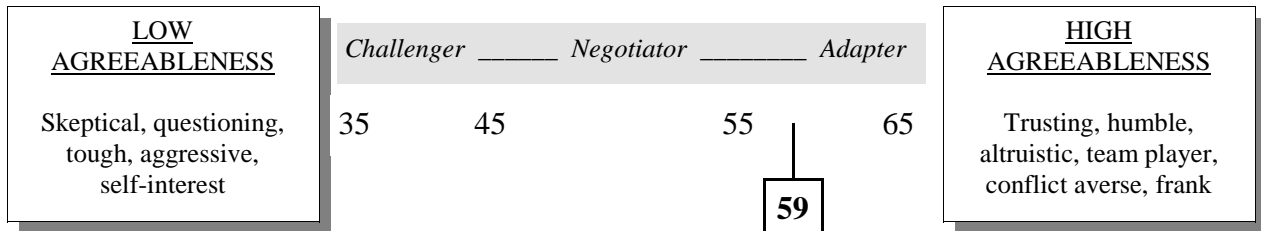
SOCIABILITY— Describes how energetic and enthusiastic a person is — especially when dealing with people.



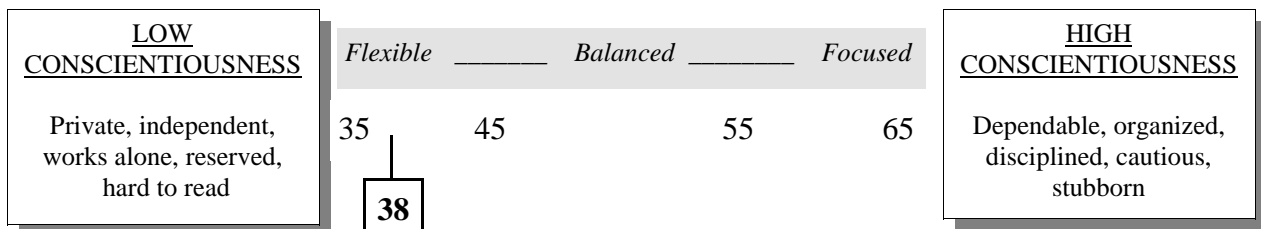
OPENNESS — Describes an individual's pro-active seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake.

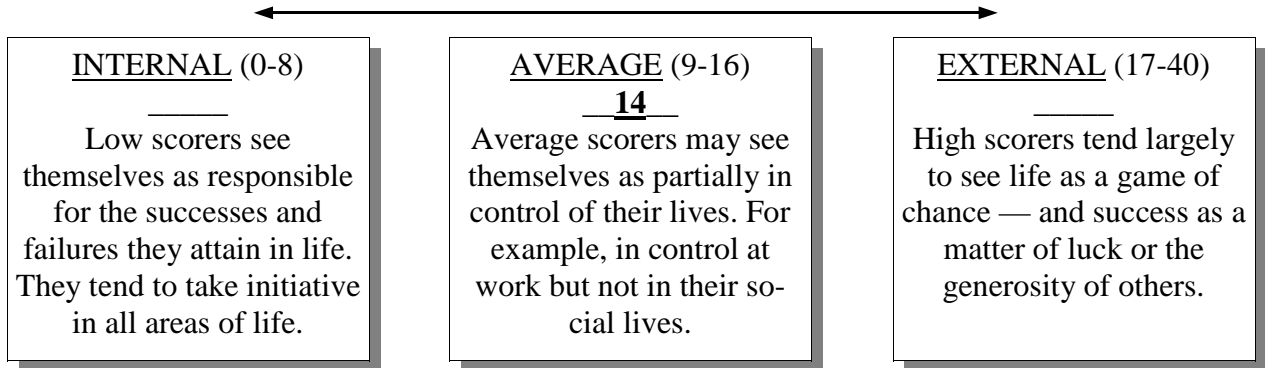


AGREEABLENESS — Describes a person's attitudes towards other people.



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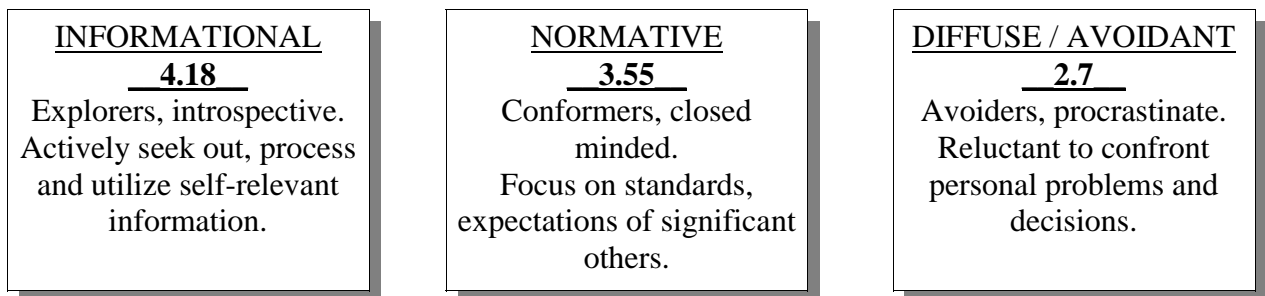


Locus of Control

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Identity**COMMITMENT** — **3.3**

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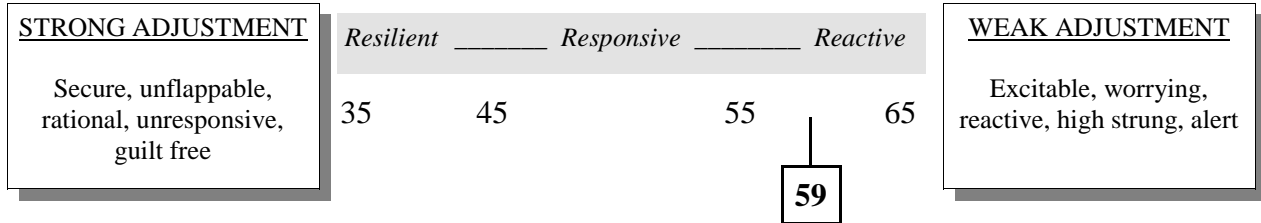
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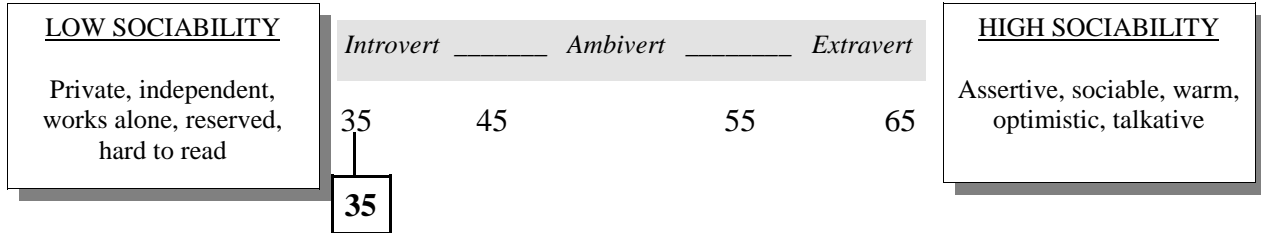
Name: Suzette

Big 5 Personality Factors

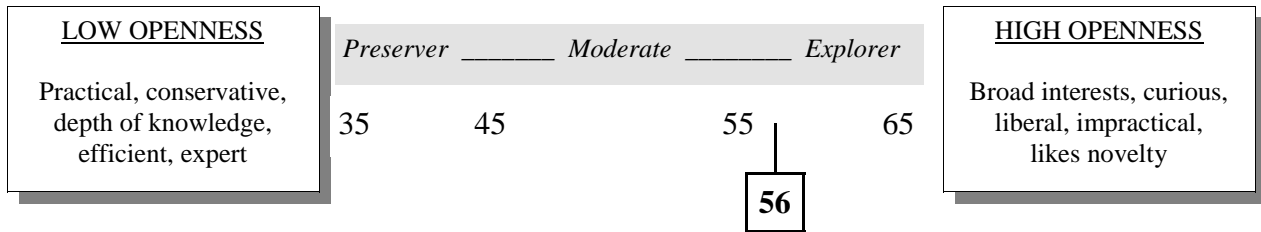
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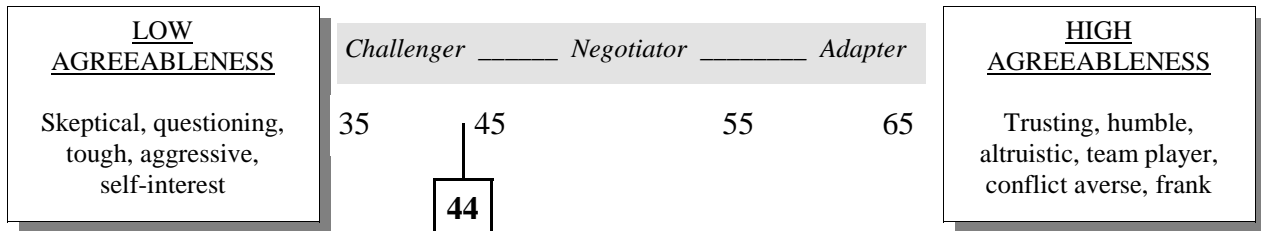
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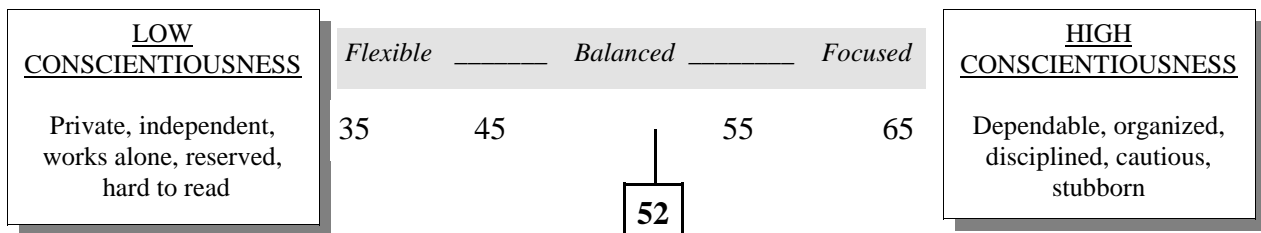
OPENNESS — Describes an individual's pro-active seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake.



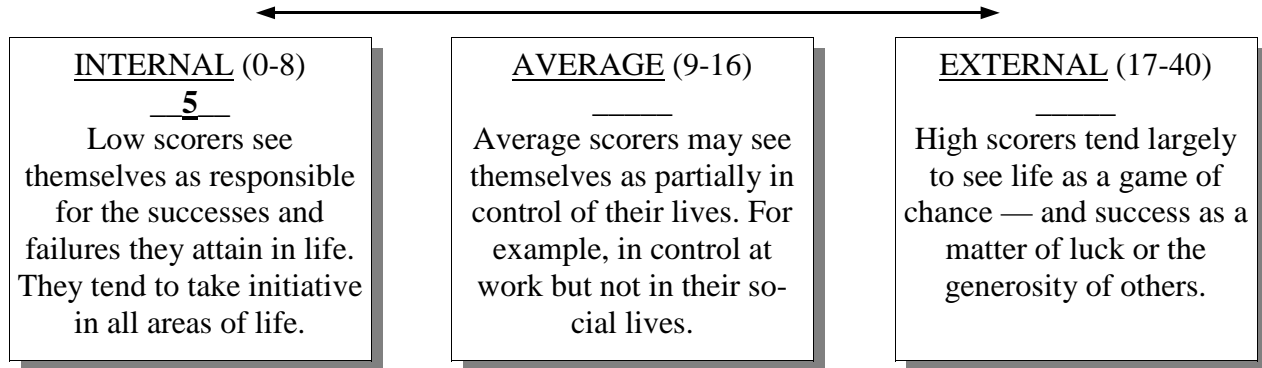
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Locus of Control

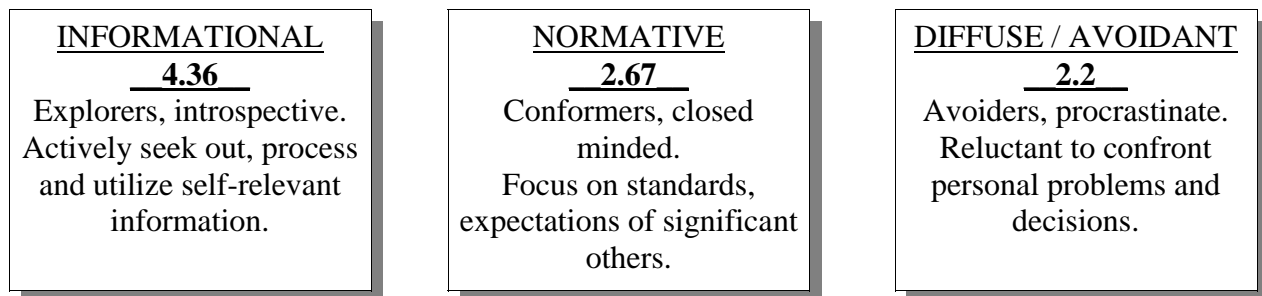


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Identity



COMMITMENT 4.0

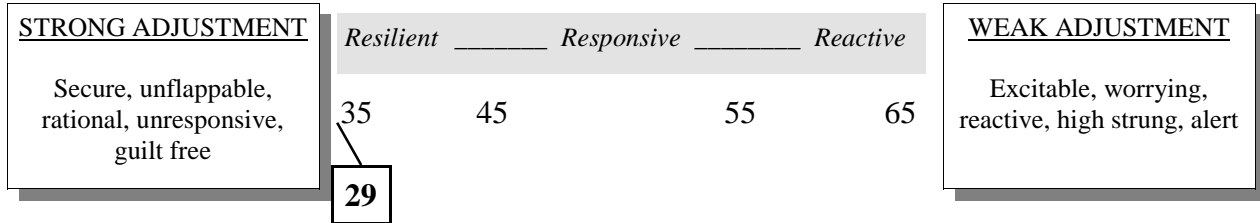
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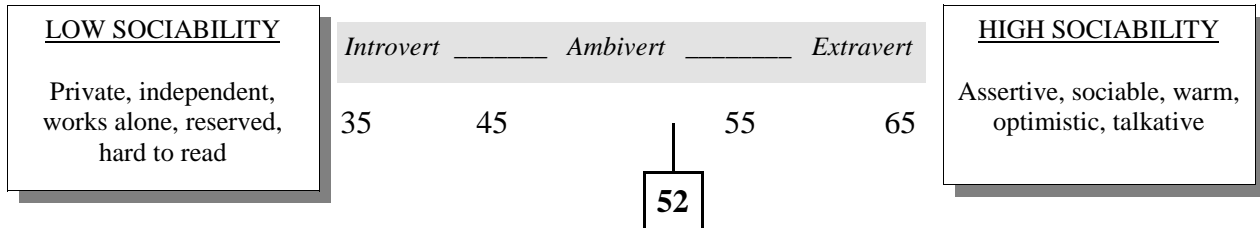
DIFFUSE / AVOIDANT — This style involves procrastination and avoidance, responding to potential self-relevant stressors with emotion-focused coping. Efforts to reduce, deny or escape from the immediate emotional distress minimize the need to make structural revisions in their self-structure.

Big 5 Personality Factors

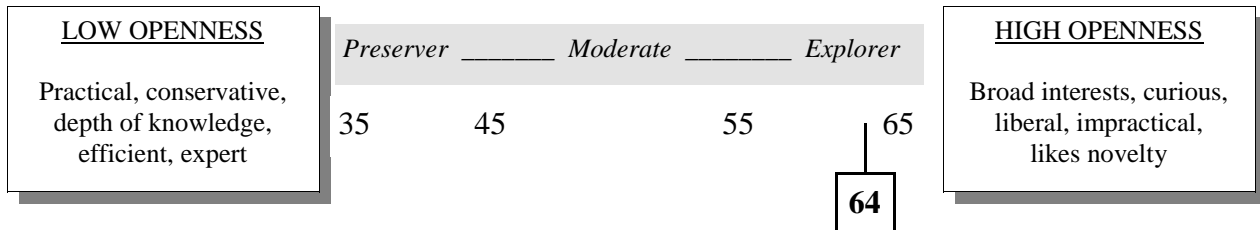
ADJUSTMENT — Measures the different ways people have of reacting emotionally to pressure and stressful circumstances.



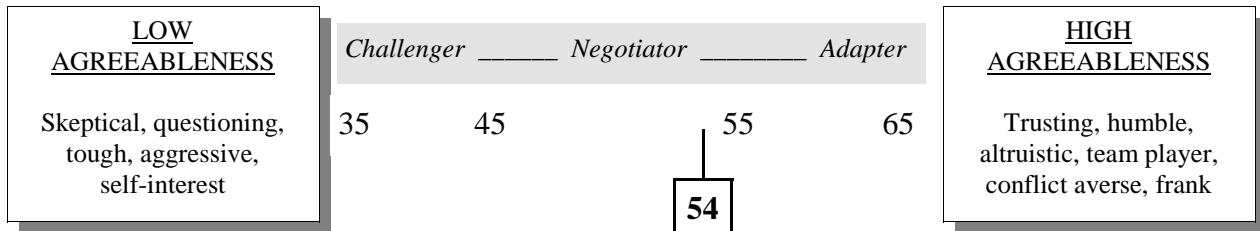
SOCIABILITY— Describes how energetic and enthusiastic a person is — especially when dealing with people.



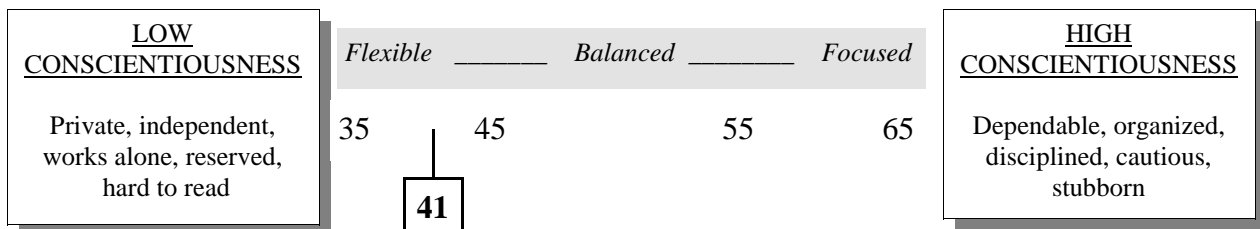
OPENNESS — Describes an individual’s pro-active seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake.



AGREEABLENESS — Describes a person’s attitudes towards other people.



CONSCIENTIOUSNESS — Describes how organized, motivated and thorough an individual is in life and in pursuing goals.



What is the name of the high school you attended?

What was your high school GPA _____

What was your best ACT composite score _____

How many honors courses did you take in high school?

___ 0 ___ 1-2 ___ 3 or more

How many AP classes did you take in high school?

___ 0 ___ 1-2 ___ 3 or more

What college will you be attending in the fall?

Please list 3 goals that you have for yourself right now:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How much formal education do you expect to get during your lifetime?

___ College, but less than a bachelor's degree

___ A Bachelor's degree

___ 1 or 2 years of graduate or professional study (Masters degree)

___ Doctoral degree such as M.D., Ph.D., etc.

About 50% of university students typically leave before receiving a degree. If this should happen to you, what would be the most likely cause?

- I'm absolutely certain that I will obtain a degree
- To accept a good job
- To enter military service
- College would cost more than my family could afford
- Marriage / supporting a family
- Disinterest in study
- Limited academic ability / academically dismissed ("flunk out")
- Lack of motivation or goals
- Insufficient reading or study skills
- Other _____

FAMILY

What is your father's occupation? _____

What is the highest level of education your father completed?

___ Less than a high school diploma

___ Graduated from high school

___ Some college

___ Associates degree

___ Bachelors degree

___ Masters degree or higher

What is your mother's occupation? _____

What is the highest level of education your mother completed?

___ Less than a high school diploma

___ Graduated from high school

___ Some college

___ Associates degree

___ Bachelors degree

___ Masters degree or higher

What do you believe are your parents' expectations of the highest level for your education?

Mom's

Dad's

_____ That I graduate from high school

_____ That I go to college

_____ That I earn a bachelors degree

_____ That I earn a Masters degree

_____ That I earn a doctoral degree such as M.D., Ph.D., etc.

In what ways have your parents helped or supported you in your college plans? (please check all that apply)

Mom

Dad

_____ Over the years, has talked with me about attending college

_____ Has saved money in a college fund

_____ Helped me formulate goals or career plans

_____ Helped me research colleges (on the web, contact admissions, etc.)

_____ Accompanied me to visit college campuses

_____ Assisted me with admissions applications

_____ Assisted me with financial aid forms, scholarships, etc.

Summary sheet:

Name: Brian **Age:** 22 **Gender:** male **Year:** 2004 COLLEGE graduate

Factors that precede college enrollment:

Family and personal background:

White, older of 2 boys (younger is 18, college-bound)

Dad: Railroad Conductor, HS grad; Exp: Bachelors
Mom: Insurance Co. researcher, some college; Exp: Bachelors

Both parents talked about college, helped formulate goals, assisted with forms.

Had traveled from home to an out-of-state camp and on a church mission trip to Costa Rica.

Academic background:

Suburban public H.S.

HS GPA: 3.1

ACT: 22

Honors classes: 1-2; AP courses: none

Expectations and goals:

Why did you go to college? "It was the right thing for me to do....It was so much more than classes - a world unto itself. I feel like I really know who I am. I learned a lot about relationships and using wisdom and tact in dealing with people."

Expected to earn a BA and would only have left if "I found a better route to accomplish my goals."

Current goals: short, short/long, long

Career goals: Has short-term plans to earn money to pay off debts while working toward long-term goal of starting new churches. Has specific steps to goals.

Factors related to personal development:

Locus of Control: 2 (rather extreme internal)

Identity:

(Commitment 4.9)

Information 4.54

Normative 4.11

Diff/Avoidant 2.1

Big 5 personality:

Adjust.: Strong

Sociability: High

Openness: Very High

Agreeableness: High

Conscientious: Very High

Factors about college:

Graduated from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 4 years. Has a strong religious calling so found a definite home in this environment. During breaks in school he participated in mission trips with other students.

"Success" analysis:

Brian's personal attributes are where one would hope them to be at college graduation (though he's a little extreme with the Locus of Control scale and Openness and Conscientiousness on the Big 5).

He did not have the strongest of family backgrounds that traditionally contribute to success in college nor did he have a particularly strong academic background. But I believe his personal attributes, his commitment to his goals and probably a very supportive community in his choice of schools all contributed to his success.

Summary sheet:

Name: Sparkle Age: 20 Gender: female Year: 2nd semester sophomore in college

Factors that precede college enrollment:

Family and personal background:

White, oldest of 5 ranging from 20 to 11.

Dad: Graphic Artist, BA; Exp: Bachelors
Mom: Vet. Tech., some college; Exp: Bachelors

Both parents have talked about college, helped formulate goals and gone on college visits. Dad also has helped with college forms.

Was away from home on a student trip in 7th grade, visiting Australia and New Zealand.

Academic background:

Suburban public H.S.
HS GPA: 3.7
ACT: 28
Honors classes: 3 or more; AP courses: 1-2.

Expectations and goals:

Why college? Wants to teach so needs the credential but also likes to learn and will probably continue to do so for years to come.
Expects to get a Masters.
Is certain.
Current goals: short/long, short/long, long.
Career goals: Art education; explained a realistic path to her goals.

Knowledge of college: "Not much of a change from high school," material not difficult, has lived at home so far.

Factors related to personal development:

Locus of Control: 5 (Internal)

Identity:

(Commitment 4.0)
Information 4.36
Normative 2.67
Diff/Avoidant 2.2

Big 5 personality:

Adjust: High Strong
Sociability: Hi Average
Openness: High
Agreeable: Hi Average
Conscientious: Low

Factors about college:

Will be attending Northern Illinois U in the fall (Recent mid-50% ACTs: 20-25.) and living on campus.

Commuted to Columbia College (an arts-oriented college in Chicago) for one semester; has attended a community college for three semesters.

"Success" analysis:

She has a strong academic background and family history as well as a commitment to learning. Her goals have always been within the arts field and she has fine-tuned them as she progressed through classes and school environments.

As for her personal factors, her strongly internally locus of control as well as a highly committed information style identity speaks highly for her chances of success (particularly when combined with her strong academics).

Her Big 5 characteristics are all at good levels except for the Low on the Conscientiousness subscale. She states that she hasn't been challenged by college academics yet and when she is challenged at the university she may have to make some adjustments in her study and time management skills, but I believe she'll rise to the challenge.

Summary Sheet:

Name: Suzette Age: 20 Gender: female Year: 2nd yr. at COD; graduate in Dec.; applying to 4 yrs.

Factors that precede college enrollment:

Family and personal background:

Moved from Nigeria 2 1/2 yrs. ago; older sister also at COD
Lives w/ mom & step-dad & extended family

Dad: Lab technician, BS; Exp: highest degree
Mom: Nurse, BS; Exp: highest degree

Both parents helped w/ college plans in all categories except research and college visits.

Prior to college, spent 6 yrs. in military-style boarding school (in Africa).

Academic background:

Has not taken the ACT and was not able to translate secondary ed grading scale.

Expectations and goals:

Why college? "To be successful" which she defined as being able to provide for herself and her family.

Expects to get a law degree or PhD.
Is certain.

Current goals: short, long, long
Career goals: "Lawyer, politician and interior designer"

Factors related to personal development:

Locus of Control: 14 (Average ... Ext.)

Identity:

(Commitment 3.3)

Information 4.18

Normative 3.55

Diff/Avoidant 2.7

Big 5 personality:

Adjust.: Weak

Sociability: Low

Openness: High

Agreeableness: Low

Conscientious: Average

Factors about college:

Currently, she is at a community college, living at home.

She plans to go to Howard U or Arizona State U to complete a degree in political science. Then on to law school.

When asked how she chose those schools, she said that she wanted to see a different part of the U.S.

"Success" analysis:

With her high college/career aspirations, would hope she has the academic credentials. If she were a client, I would need to nail down that information.

I am concerned about some gaps between her longer-term goals and some of her statements as well as her developmental levels as indicated by the assessment results. For example, she and her parents have very high aspirations for her education yet she states she is choosing colleges based primarily on their locations in the country. In the assessments, there may be some conflict between her family loyalties and professional goals — her locus of control, though average, is tending toward the external; her commitment to an identity style is average and scored pretty closely between Information and Normative (maybe indicating her intellectual curiosity while concerned with following family expectations). Her Big 5 scores show weak adjustment characteristics (worrying, reactive, high strung) yet with low sociability (which may prevent her from seeking out help when she needs it).

In her favor may be her military boarding school experience — she has been out on her own (though in a highly structured environment) and there is strong generalized commitment to higher education by her and her family.

Summary sheet:

Name: Andy Age: 18 Gender: Male Year: 2004 H.S. grad

Factors that precede college enrollment:

Family and personal background:

White, oldest of three boys (15, 7 y.o.)

Dad: Sales manager, BA; Exp: Bachelors

Mom: Nurse, BS; Exp: Bachelors

Both parents saved money for college and accompanied to college visits; mom also helped in research and assisted with forms.

Has been away from home camping, but wasn't able to go on school's France trip because he couldn't earn enough money for it — a requirement of his parents'.

Academic background:

Suburban public H.S.

HS GPA: 3.125

ACT: 26

Honors classes: 1-2; AP courses: 1-2

Expectations and goals:

Why college? "My parents are making me go." Further explanation: that his cousins "aren't doing much" so mom wants him to do more (professionally). Also he understands that he needs a degree to reach his career goal.

Expects to get a BA

If not, because "college would cost more than my family could afford"

Current goals: short, short, long

Career goals: Wants to be a photojournalist; did an internship during high school and worked on the school paper; has general idea of steps but lacking specifics.

Factors related to personal development:

Locus of Control: 19 (External)

Identity:

(Commitment 3.4)

Information 3.36

Normative 2.67

Diff/Avoidant 2.9

Big 5 personality:

Adjust.: Weak

Sociabil.: Low Average

Openness: Very High

Agreeableness: Average

Conscientious: Very Low

Factors about college:

Applied to & was accepted to an arts college but parents pulled the plug due to cost.

Plans to go to a community college and work toward the arts college, but hasn't yet sent in an application.

(Money has been mentioned in several aspects of this interview but from all outside indications, this family is solidly middle class.)

"Success" analysis:

Andy has the academic credentials to do fine at many colleges; his parents want him to go to college, he "expects" to earn a BA with the knowledge that his career goals require a degree. But, his personal factors and specific college plans do not bode well for success.

His locus of control score is solidly in the External range, his identity style is poorly defined and may indicate differing ways of handling situations based on the circumstances and the people involved (i.e., he's impotent when dealing with his parents); his Big 5 scores show weak Adjustment and very low Conscientiousness, both of which would be important for adaptation to college. His very high Openness score, along with the highest Identity style score being Information and his ACT score, all taken together, indicates strong potential for college success. But he needs a plan, he needs to iron out specifics with his parents and he needs opportunities to build his confidence in himself and his decision-making abilities.

Andy and his parents are not on the same page at all with college plans. I would want to work jointly with the three of them before working with Andy alone.

Summary sheet:

Name: Dave Age: 18 Gender: male Year: 2004 H.S. grad

Factors that precede college enrollment:

Family and personal background:

White, younger of 2 -sister is a college junior in good standing.

Dad: Environmental Eng. (unemployed 2 yrs.), Masters;
Exp: Masters

Mom: Secretary, Associates; Exp: Masters

Both parents assisted in all ways except "Helped me formulate goals or career plans."

Has been away numerous times with scout camps and hockey tournaments.

Academic background:

Suburban public H.S.

HS GPA: 4.3 (out of 5)

ACT: 20

No honors or AP classes

Expectations and goals:

Why college? "It sounds bad but to attain a better degree than my dad." Added that he wants to be able to provide for his family and has "always heard 'We don't have the money for'"

Expects to get an MBA

Is certain.

Current goals: short, long, long

Career goals: Corporate sales; has some understanding of steps needed to obtain goals.

Also has some knowledge of college time management.

Factors related to personal development:

Locus of Control: 16 (Average ... Ext.)

Identity:

(Commitment 4.6)

Information 4.3

Normative 4.1

Diff/Avoidant 2.2

Big 5 personality:

Adjust: Average

Sociability: Average

Openness: High Average

Agreeableness: High

Conscientious: Low

Factors about college:

Bradley U
(Recent mid-50% ACTs: 23-28)

Applied to 6 colleges, appropriate for his academic level, was accepted by all. Narrowed choices by visits, strength of major and availability of hockey.

(Money was mentioned often in this interview but outside appearances indicate solidly middle class, though dad's recent unemployment forced some financial adjustments for the family.)

"Success" analysis:

His background is strong, particularly with dad's education and sister's college progress, and all have high expectations. His academic skills appear slightly above average.

The locus of control score nearing the External range and the Low Conscientiousness in the Big 5 concerns me, but his highly-committed Identity scores are good - he has a pretty strong sense of who he is.

Knowing the family dynamics and the personalities in this case, though, I would be somewhat concerned about how his personal factors might shift when he's at college on his own. His parents, with all good intentions, are quite domineering in his life.

In his favor, he states a strong commitment to his goals and he also has a strong athletic training mindset that may help him with self discipline.

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